

**HIKING
THROUGH
THE BIBLE**

TRAIL III

THE SETTLEMENT AND JUDGES ERA

[DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA, JUDGES,
RUTH & 1 SAMUEL 1-12]

IN

49 SECTIONS

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THE SETTLEMENT AND JUDGES ERA

DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH AND 1 SAMUEL 1-12

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION

According to the biblical records of this era, what ways does Yahweh use to guide, bless, judge and reform individuals and communities? Which of these ways have you personally experienced or witnessed God still employing today?

INTRODUCTION TO DEUTERONOMY

The name of the book in English comes via the Latin Vulgate translation [ca. 400 A.D.] from its title in the Septuagint [LXX] Greek translation of 3rd century B.C., meaning "second law", for here the Mosaic law is reissued and updated. The book of Deuteronomy finds the people of Israel again on the threshold of the land of promise after their forty years of wandering in the wilderness (Nu 33:38). Moses who is about to turn over the leadership of the people to his long-time associate, Joshua, addresses them before his death. The book consists largely of his address. Naturally there is much material summarized from earlier accounts. Just as naturally, it is generally presented from a later perspective and in a rather different form. Laws that were given in the wilderness to suit nomads now are adapted for settled life in the promised land. New matters, such as a central sanctuary and the setting up of a kingdom, are introduced. This is all presented in a formal literary structure similar to that of the common secular covenant form between a sovereign and a subservient nation in the Ancient Near East of the Late Bronze Age [ca. 1400-1200 B.C.]. Here it is the renewal of the covenant between the Great Sovereign, Yahweh, and his covenant people, Israel. Moses also instructs and commissions his successor, offers solemn warnings to the people and then ascends Mt. Nebo to meet Yahweh for the last time. This, or part of it, is thought to be the "Book of the Law" which was rediscovered in the 18th year of Josiah's reign in the 7th century B.C., while the temple was being cleaned out (1 K 22:10ff; 2 Ch 34:15ff).

ANALYSIS OF DEUTERONOMY

- 1:1-5 Preamble to the renewed covenant.
- 1:6-3:29 Historical prologue to the covenant
- 4-26 Stipulations of the covenant:
 - 4-11 Basic stipulations.
 - 12-26 Detailed stipulations:
 - 12:1-16:17 Religious ones.
 - 16:18-18:22 Civil ones.
 - 19:1-26:19 Social ones.
- 27;1-10 Oath sworn by Israel as the vassal to Yahweh as their sovereign.
- 27:11-28:68 Blessings and curses of the covenant.
- 29-30 General summary of the covenant.
- 31-34 Conclusion of Moses' ministry and life:
 - 31 Instructions to Joshua as his successor.
 - 32:1-47 Moses' great song of witness to Israel of Yahweh's greatness.
 - 32:48-52 Moses instructed about his impending death.
 - 33 Moses' blessing of the tribes of Israel.
 - 34 Moses' death and burial.

1. What similarities and differences can you discern between Moses' account here (1:9-18) and the earlier account (Ex 18:14-27) of his institution of leadership sharing in Israel almost 40 years before? How do you account for the differences? Why do we often forget the sources of our best ideas? Why do many congregations also forget over the years even very important aspects of their own history? How could that memory loss be reduced? Should it be? Why? What do you wish you knew about your congregation's development that you fear is now lost in the dust of history? How might you find that out?
2. How serious were the sins of Israel described in 1:26, 32, 41, & 43? What was there about the context of their relationship with Yahweh that made these sins so serious? How does this illustrate the threefold gospel pattern of grace — faith — loving obedience (Ep 2:8-10) that permeates the entire Bible? What can Christians learn from this?
3. When have you experienced God's silence (1:40-45; Is 29:1-12; Jr 11:14; He 12:17)? How did you feel then? What helped you then (Ro 8:14-39)?
4. What lessons could this review of the Israelites' history teach us (Ps 44:1-8; 78:1-8; 1 Co 10:6-13)? What have you learned about trusting in God through prayerful reflection upon the past successes and failures of (a) yourself, (b) your family, (c) your congregation (d) your nation and (e) humanity?
5. In what ways is Yahweh sovereign over all the nations (Dt 32:8; Ac 17:26-28; Ep 3:14f)? Why were Edom, Moab and Ammon to be spared judgement in the time of the Exodus [15th or 13th century B.C.] but not later in the 8th century (Am 1:11-2:3)? Why were the Amorites [Westerners] to be exterminated? What do you think about Yahweh's justice for nations? What instances of it have you witnessed in your time?

1. Why were the Israelites now victorious against the Amorite kingdoms of Trans-Jordan [beyond the Jordan River, i.e., on its east side] (2:32-3:11), when 38 years earlier about the same number of their parents' generation had been defeated by the Amorites of the hill country west of the Jordan (1:41-45)? How did other peoples (Js 2:10f 9:9f) and later generations of Israelites remember these great victories (Js 12:1-6; 13:7-32; 1 K 4:19; Ne 9:22; Ps 135:10-14; 136:18-22)? How did Moses use these memories to encourage Joshua in preparation for his great mission (1:38; 3:21f)? What victories of the past could encourage you and/or your congregation today? How so?
2. What might the parenthetical comments, such as those of 2:10-12, 20-23, 3:9, 11, 14, imply about the development of the final text of Deuteronomy? Does this support the 19th century theory that it was not written until "rediscovered" in Josiah's time? Also, does this have any implications about the final text's reliability? Why might that be?
3. What was Moses' intense desire in 3:24? Who does Moses blame for God's continuing to reject of his request (1:37; 3:26; 4:21f Ps 106:32)? In light of the account in Nu 20:2-13, how much do you think that Moses' feelings controlled his actions, words and judgments when the incident happened and his memory of it all later? How influential are your feelings in your life and even in your walk with God? Why might that be?
4. To what extent must servants of God, like Moses (3:26-28), be content to complete only part of their assigned mission and leave its continuation and completion to other servants of Yahweh (Jn 1:17; 1 Co 3:5-15)? How have you personally experienced and observed such a division of labour in God's economy? How did you feel about it? How did you cope with it then and later? Can you understand why? Can you even celebrate God's decision now? How so?
5. What can leaders of God's people today learn from Yahweh's advice to Moses on how to prepare the next generation of leaders to continue his great enterprise (3:27f Mt 28:18-20; Nu 20:21-23; Ep 4:11f; 2 Ti 2:11)? How are the leaders of your congregation preparing the next generation of your leaders to continue God's work in your community?

1. What aspects of Yahweh's nature and character revealed here? What does each of the relevant metaphors mean for his people? How are Yahweh's characteristics related? In what several senses is Yahweh said to be unique? How do you respond to such a God? Why might that be?
2. What are the many reasons that Moses offers here for heeding and obeying all of the statutes of God's law? Which reasons do you think would still impress observant Jews today? Which reasons are most relevant to you as a Christian today? What other reasons might also be persuasive to you?
3. How great a distinction is made here between seeing and hearing Yahweh? Why is idolatry in all of its forms prohibited so vehemently? What about the gods of other nations (4:19; Ps 8:3)? If humans are made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26f), why are even human-like images of Yahweh prohibited? Is there any reason to believe that being made in/ as God's image in any way involves humans actually looking like Yahweh (Gn 5:1, 3; Ps 8:4-6)? What do you think being God's image does involve? Why would you say that? What implications might it have for your life?
4. What encouragement and hope do you find in 4:29-31 for yourself and your congregation (30:1-3; 2 Ch 7:13f; Mt 7:7f)? Do you deserve this any more than the Israelites did? Yet, can you really believe it? How so?
5. How does the special and unusual evidence given to the Israelites indicating that Yahweh really is God, help you also know that Yahweh exists and he alone is God? What other evidence of God's existence and uniqueness is relevant to you (Ac14:17; Ro 1:19f)? What further evidence would you like? How cogent would it be? Why? Might it be good that more cogent evidence is not made available? Could it be that here it is essential to leave a cognitive gap for faith to leap? Is the trusting leap of faith really primarily a cognitive one? How so?

1. Exactly what is Moses trying to say so emphatically to the Israelites in 5:2f? Why is it so important that the relationship be contemporary and personal? But, does Moses really mean that no covenant was really made about 40 years earlier at Mt. Sinai with their parents (Ex 24:7f) or that they were not beneficiaries of the much earlier covenant with their great ancestor Abraham (7:8)? How can the same covenant relationship with Yahweh be at the same time both inherited and contemporary? Which aspect is more important? Why? How does this also apply to each Christian's relationship to God, the Father, through Jesus, his Messiah (Jn 1:11-13; Ac 2:38f)? Is your relationship to the Father contemporary and personal? How is it also related to other believers' relationship to Yahweh, past, present and future (He 10:23-25; 11:39-12:2; 1 Jn 1:3)?
2. What new light does Moses' reminiscences here throw upon the events recorded in Ex 19:7-20:21?
3. On what grounds are the people of Israel called to obey these commandments of Yahweh? How do these reasons relate to you and your fellow Christians today?
4. What is the significance of the few changes made here to the ten commandments as originally given (Ex 20:1-17)? Can you adduce any good reasons to amend them today (5:22)? What amendments? Why so? In what senses are they meant to be absolute? Are they as absolute as God himself? What might be the implications of that?
5. What were and should be the responses of God's people to hearing Yahweh speak his will (5:23-29; Ro 7:9; Ga 3:24)? What are your own responses? Would Yahweh commend your responses (5:28)? Why? How do the ten commandments help guide (a) your life, (b) your church's life and (c) your society's life?

1. What was the stated purpose in giving the law (10:13)? How relevant is that purpose to you for living as a Christian (Lk 10:27f)?
2. How is it possible both to love and to fear Yahweh? Why are both equally necessary responses to who Yahweh really is (13:3f)? How are worship and swearing related to fearing Yahweh (6:13)? What implications might this have for you?
3. Why do you think that the Shama ["Hear. ..." (6: 4f)] is often called "the basic Jewish creed" (10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16,20)? What are the life implications for confessing such a creed? To what extent is it also an appropriate, even if incomplete, creed for Christians? How did Jesus join many Jewish leaders of his day in sometimes amplifying this creed (Mt 22:37; Mk 12:29-33; Lk 10:27)? Why do you think they did that? What does this amplification imply for you and your loving of God? How might your participation in this biblical hike help you to love God that way? How might this common creed relate (a) to the basic credo of Ex 34:6f and (b) to the threefold gospel pattern of grace, faith, loving obedience (6:22-25; Ep 2:8-10)?
4. What insight is given here into the necessity and methodology of family religion? How does this relate to your family? How do you teach and talk about Yahweh together? Could you or your family members ever forget Yahweh who saves you? What things might make you do so? How so?
5. How is the righteousness for Israelites referred to in 6:25, simply a result of keeping Yahweh's commandments (24:13)? Is that really possible (Ro 3:19f; 9:30-10:3), without reverent faith/ trust in Yahweh's prior grace [active love] (6:20-24; Ep 2:8-10; 1 Jn 4:19)?

1. How do the four ways that the Israelites were to deal with the idolatrous inhabitants of Canaan (7:1-5), illustrate the Christian's duty to separate from sin and the world that opposes God (2 Co 6:14-18; Ep 5:11f; 1 Jn 5:21)? Why, according to 7:6-11, is such a radical approach so necessary for God's chosen people then and now (1 P 1:15f; 2:9-12)?
2. How much do we need to be reminded from time to time of the basic grounds of our special relationship to God as his chosen people? How are the grounds for Christians being God's chosen people similar to those specified for the Israelites in 7:7-10 (Jn 15:16, 19; 1 Co 1:26-29; 1 P 2:9f)? How different is the basis for Yahweh's choice of weak human beings to be his sovereign associates (Gn 1:26f; Ps 8:4f; He 2:5-11)?
3. How does the common Old Testament credo (Ex 34:6f) repeated yet again in 7:9f, relate to the common Jewish creed of 6:4 and its practical implications (6:5ff; 1 Jn 4:10, 19)?
4. What parallels can you see between the blessings Yahweh promised to Israelites who would follow his policy of exclusive allegiance (7:12-16) and (a) the blessings promised later in the Old Testament/ Covenant (Ho 1:10; Is 43:6; 52:11) and (b) even later in the New Testament/ Covenant to Christians, Gentile as well as Jewish ones (1 Co 10:13; 2 Co 6:17f; 1 Jn 2:15-17)?
5. How does Yahweh make it possible for his people to deal with powerful opposition (7:18-26)? What are the resources God gives to Christians to help us live unreservedly for him even in difficult circumstances (Mt 18:20; 28:18, 20; Jn 16:33; Ro 5:3-5, 10; 15:4; 2 Ti 1:7; 3:16f; 1 Jn 5:4-7)? Which is the most important resource for you? How so? Which do you most tend to neglect drawing upon? Why so?

1. Why was it important for Israel to be careful actually to keep on doing what Yahweh commanded? How relevant should that be to Christians too (Mt 7:24-27; Jn 14:23; 15:9-12, 14, 17)? How relevant is it to you personally?
2. What purposes did God have in leading Israel to the promised land through such difficulties? How similar are his common ways of bringing Christians to maturity (Ro 5:3-5; Ja 1:2-4; 1 P 1:6f; He 5:8; 12:4-13)? How have you experienced this?
3. How significant is 8:8 that Jesus would quote it to the devil in his wilderness temptation (Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4)? Why do we as humans need to hear and heed whatever comes from Yahweh's mouth (8:20)? How can this Bible study help you to do so?
4. Is your own conception of the fatherhood of God big enough and realistic enough to include 8:5 and 16 (He 12:7, 11)? What should determine how we think and feel about God being our Father? What sometimes distorts our thinking and feeling on this front? How can such distortions be corrected (Mt 11:27; 23:9; Lk 10:22; Jn 8:19; 14:7; Ro 8:14-16)? How can a right conception of Yahweh's Fatherhood, become the primary reason for keeping his commandments, walking in his ways and fearing/ revering him (6:24; 8:5; 10:13; He 12:10; 1 Jn 4:19f)?
5. What special temptations are inherent in ease and prosperity, even when it is Yahweh who provides them (8:2f, 11, 14, 16-18)? Is your spiritual growth prompted more by ease or by difficulty? Why? How does God deal with those who succumb to these subtle temptations? How does he prepare his people to deal with them? What theology of adversity and prosperity might this suggest to you?

1. How does Moses try to prepare the Israelites for the dangers that will probably follow on the heels of their great victory? How do his words compare with those of Jesus in Lk 18:9-14? What can we learn as individuals and as a church from this?
2. What significance is there in the fact that God's words of commandment were spoken and heard before they were written down and read (9:10f)? Why were both modes of communication important? Which is most important to us today?
3. What can be learned from Moses' example about the power, the costs and the grounds of intercessory prayer (Ja 5:16)? How may fasting be related to prayer? Is it for you? How so?
4. Does Moses' retrospective characterization of the Israelites in 9:24, 27 apply in some ways to your congregation as you know it? How so? In spite of this behaviour, why did Moses remain committed to Yahweh's people? Should you too?
5. How does Yahweh's gracious dealing with his people illustrate the following aspects of his saving grace [active love] as revealed further in the New Testament: (a) the relationship of grace and justice (Ro 3:24-26; 1 Co 13:6), (b) the triumph of grace over sin (Ep 2:5; Ro 5:20f; Ja 2:13), (c) the necessity of a mediator of grace (1 Ti 2:5; He 8:6; 9:15) and (d) the New Covenant (1 Co 11:25)?
6. How can it be that Israel, including the tribe of Levi, is Yahweh's inheritance (9: 26, 29) and that Yahweh is Levi's inheritance (10:9)? How is this true for Christians as well (Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Cl 1:12; Ac 20:32)? What does that mean to you?

1. How do the arguments used in 10:12-11:12 to persuade the people to love and obey God, compare to those employed in 11:13-32? Which of these arguments are most persuasive for you? What other ones would be even more persuasive for you? Why do you think that might be so?
2. In your own words, how is Yahweh characterized in 10:12-22? Why is it appropriate both to love and fear/ revere him? What does loving him involve (10:12; 11:1) and how does this relate to fearing, obeying and serving him? How does this apply to your Christian relationship to him (Jn 15:9f 14; 1 Jn 4:19f)?
3. What role should parents play in the spiritual education of their children (11:1-7, 19; 4:9f)? What have your children learned spiritually from you? How much more could they still learn from you? When?
4. What is Moses' theology of God's relationship to the cosmos (10:14; 4:39) and to the land he is in the process of giving to them (11:10-17)? What light might recent scientific discoveries about the relationship between humans and nature, throw upon some of the results of disobeying God's commands here (Jr 9:10-14)? How can we Christians speak intelligibly about these same matters in our scientific age?
5. How much of the New Testament's spiritual understanding of circumcision (Ro 2:25-29; 1 Co 7:19; Ep 2:11; Cl 2:11-14) is already revealed in Dt 10:16 and 30:6? How can that help Christians appreciate the spiritual depth of the Old Testament? What should circumcision mean for Christians today? Is Christian baptism really its equivalent?

1. How does the whole of these chapters relate to the first of the ten commandments (Ex 20:3; Dt 5:7)? What other god [Luther = that in which you place your ultimate trust] does your society worship/ serve before or along side of Yahweh? Is such dual worship really possible (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13f)?
2. What happened from the 10th century on in the northern Kingdom of Israel when the central sanctuary safeguard there (12:14, 21) was disregarded (2K 17:7-18)? Would, however, a central sanctuary have been sufficient in and of itself to guard against the worship of other gods (2 K 17:19)? Would it be today? Why?
3. What brings rejoicing into you worship (12:7, 12, 18; 14:26)? What should? How could your congregation's worship be more joyful? Could eating together oftener be helpful (12:7; Ac 2:42,46; 1Co 11:20-34)?
4. Where should God's people get their ideas about how they should worship Yahweh? Why? What does this say about the worth of the human religious imagination, and the practical value of comparative religion for liturgical and spiritual renewal?
5. What are the only reliable tests of the truth of a prophet's message (13:1-5; 18:15-22)? What value are such popular criteria as miracles (Mk 13:22; 2 Th 2:9), results, blood relationships or even the number of their followers, in evaluating the truth of someone's claims to be speaking for Yahweh? How is this still applicable today?

1. What do we learn here about some of God's holy peoples distinctive approaches (a) to death and bereavement (14:1f Th 4:13f), (b) to food and bodily indulgence (14:3-21; 1 Co 6:12f; 10:23, 31) and (c) to money and possessions (14:22-28; 1 Co 16:2)? How does your present society's views compare with theirs in these spheres of life? What is your own approach to these issues?
2. What are the three purposes for the tithe in 14:22-29? How does this go well beyond the tithing law of Nu 18:21-29? How could Christians today apply the same basic principles about tithing to accomplish similar divine purposes with their God-given financial and other resources?
3. How did Yahweh intend his people to deal with poverty that developed amongst themselves? How can Christians apply the same basic principles of God's economy today to help the poor amongst us (Ac 2:43f; 4:34f; 2 Co 8:12, 14)? Should we also care for the poor beyond our Christian fellowship? Why? How best?
4. How were some of the perennial evils of human slavery to be mitigated against in ancient Israel? Could Christians justify reintroducing any form of slavery today, even the modified form that the Israelites were permitted to practice? Why? Is human slavery practiced today? In what forms? What are people doing to deal with the evils of such slavery forms? How involved should contemporary Christians be in fighting human slavery of any sort? Why?
5. What new aspect of the law of consecration of the first-born comes to light in 15:19f (Ex 13:2, 12f, 15; 22:29)? What do you make of it? What, if any of this, could have some relevance to Christians today? Why?

1. How do both the consecration of the first-born (15:19-23) and the three annual pilgrim festivals all involve everyone rejoicing at the central sanctuary? What are the festive times for Christian families and congregations? How could they all become more joyful for everyone, even relatively marginalized people? How could you help to make them more joyful? How important is joy and rejoicing for people? How important should it be for Christians individually and corporately (Jn 15:11; 16:24; 17:13; Ac 13:52; 15:3; Ro 14:17; 15:13, 32; 2 Co 2:3; 8:1f; Ga 5:22; Ph 1:3-5, 25; 2:1f; 2:17f; 3:1; 4:4-7; 1 Th 1:6; He 10:34; 13:17; Ja 1:2ff; 1 P 1:8; 4:12f; 1 Jn 1:4; Jd 24f) Should non-Christians be “surprised by our joy”? How important is it for you? How so?
2. By what principle is the amount of freewill offerings to be determined(16:17)? How does this accord with (a) what was to happen in the earliest Christian churches (Ac 2:44f; 4:32-37; 1 Co 16:2; 2 Co 8:7, 12) and (b) with what happens in your church?
3. Why should we give only our very best to God (Lv 22:20-25; Dt 15:21)? What is your very best? What would it involve for you to give it to God for his service [worship, ministry, and mission]?
4. Why is justice so important (10:17; 16:18-20; 1 Co 13:6a)? What aspects of justice are singled out for special attention here? Why? Do these same areas of justice still need to be addressed in your society? How do churches assure justice is done, and seen to be done, to their members and adherents? How should congregations be pursuing justice in their communities not only for themselves but for others too?
5. How would the guidelines for kingship here apply to great king Solomon (1 K 4:26; 10:14-29; 11:3-8; Ne 13:26)? How might we apply the same guidelines for leadership to choosing and evaluating congregational, denominational and political leaders today? How might this be an improvement over our present approaches in these spheres?

1. Could 18:8 imply that all clergy should be paid the same stipend? Why (1 Pt 5:1-3)? Who practices this today? How well does it work out for everyone concerned?
2. In a theocracy [government by God and His servants/ ministers] what important roles do prophets and priests play (18:16-18; 19:17)? Is it possible for them to play significant roles in non-theocracies? How so? How important is this?
3. What guidelines, beyond those given in 13:1-5, are given in 18:20-22 to distinguish between true and false prophets? How is prophecy related to occult divination (18:10-14)? Why is the latter but not the former prohibited among God's people? Should all this apply to Christians too?
4. What does it mean to you that the New Testament (Mt 5:21ff; Ac 3:22f; 7:37) sees Jesus as the prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15, 18; 34:10)? How relevant is God's personal special public endorsement of Jesus in Mk 1:11 and 9:7? Why is it so important to listen especially well to Jesus (Mt 7:24-27)? Do you? Why?
5. How do many of the laws of ch. 19 apply the spirit as well as the letter of the last six of the ten commandments (Ex 20:13-17; Dt 5:17-21)? How is justice served in each case? Which of these laws are most relevant to you? How so?

1. What could 21st century nations learn from ch 20 about how to wage war? What lessons can be drawn for our Christian spiritual warfare (Lu 14:25-33)?
2. How are both Yahweh's compassion and severity illustrated here (Ex 34:6f; Dt 4:24,31)? How do you account for each, and relate to each of them yourself?
3. Why do you think Yahweh prohibited the cutting down of fruit trees in conquered areas? How important are trees in your society today? Why is that?
4. What values are stressed in ch. 21? Would it be helpful to try to pursue them today? Why? How was 21:23 applied to Jesus in Jn 19:31 and Gal 3:13?
5. How would the patriarch Jacob's family have been evaluated by the regulation of 21:15-17 (Gn 25:29-34; 48:2-22)? Could this law have become a necessary corrective to the problems created in later generations by Jacob's irregular handling of the birthright in his immediate family? How can we better take into account the possible future consequences for others of our own irregular actions? Why should we try?

1. How do the laws of 22:1-21 apply the 6th of the ten commandments (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17), especially its spirit of "loving our neighbour as ourselves" (Lv 18:19)? How does that relate to the common "finders keepers" principle applied by children and many others today? Are all our neighbours to be treated in exactly the same way (23:1-8)? Why? Why do you think runaway slaves are to be treated very differently (23:15f; Lv 19:34; Dt 5:14f; 10:19; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18)? How might that be applied today (Phm)?
2. How relevant is 22:5 today? Why? Does this apply even to hair styles? Should the relative differences and styles of one's contemporary culture be fully adopted by God's people (Ro 12:2; 1 Jn 2:15)? Why? How far? Should we try to stand out by a distinctive style? Which ones? Why? What if our Christian lifestyle or badge of distinctive identity happens to become a community fad? What should be our response (Mk 9:38-41; Ph 1:15-18)?
3. How do the laws of 22:13-30 uphold the 7th of the ten commandment's (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18) norms of chastity and truth/ faithfulness? Do you find gender equality or a double standard here? Why? Are our contemporary secular laws and customs more equitable? How could we improve them? What about equalizing our Christian laws and customs?
4. How strictly was 23:3-6 followed from at least the 12th century B.C. onwards (Ru 1:4, 22; 4:5, 10, 13, 17; Mt 1:5)? How did Ezra and Nehemiah rediscover and apply this rule in the 5th century B.C. (Ne 13:1-9)? What does this mean for theories about the passing on of the covenant and messianic expectations only through completely pure Jewish blood lines (Mt 1:5f)?
5. How might Christians today try to apply the spirit of the laws of 23:9, 18-20 and 24f? How helpful would that be? Why? What other laws in these two chapters are particularly meaningful to you? How so?

1. How is the basic principle of the 7th of the ten commandments (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18) applied in the laws of 24:1-5? What light does 24:5 throw upon God's view (a) of marriage generally and (b) of one of the basic purposes of marital sexual relations (1 Co 7:1-5)?
2. How and why should we Christians care for poor, oppressed and marginalized people as much as Yahweh seems to intend that his people should do (24:10-22; Mt 19:21; Ac 2:45; 4:34f; 6:1f)? How is everyone blessed by God when this happens? How have you experienced this?
3. In light of the apostle Paul's applications of 25:4 in 1Co 9:9-14 and 1 Ti 5:17f, how might we Christians apply the basic principles of justice in some of these regulations today?
4. How do the statements about the first fruits and tithe offerings here (26:1-15) make it clear that such acts are a thankful response to Yahweh's graciousness rather than an appeal for God to be gracious in response to meritorious human acts of obedience? Why do religious people often tend to reverse this proper relationship between grace and obedience? With what dire consequences (Ro 9:30-10:4; Ga 2:21)? What is your understanding of bringing your own "tithes and offerings" in your congregation's worship? How is this activity a matter of thanksgiving? How could your congregation's giving ceremony make it perfectly clear that you were responding to God's graciousness? What other types of offerings could be included (Ac 2:44f; 3:6; 4:32-35)?
5. Much as Moses describes in ch. 26, in what ways has Yahweh been faithful to you thus far? How do your personal faithfulness in keeping God's commandments and your walking in his ways, relate to your being part of a holy people in covenant with a holy God (26:16-19; 27:9f)?

1. What do you make of the liturgical ceremony of covenant renewal proscribed here for Israel when they enter the good land Yahweh promised to give them? What does their "Amen" signify here? What does "Amen" signify when you use it? Does your congregation have a covenant articulating its understanding of its members' relationships to God, to each other and to its divine mission? Is there a regular time and ceremony for its renewal or reaffirmation? When and what? What impact does this have on your and your congregation's behaviour?
2. Which of these conditional blessings (28:1-14) do you find most appealing? Why? Which of these conditional curses (28:15-68) do you find most abhorrent? Why? Can members of God's people ever claim any of these blessings without following the requisite preconditions or reckoning with the consequent curses (28:2, 15)? Why do people so often try to do so? What might this common behaviour have to do with an incomplete view of God's graciousness (Ep 2:8-10)?
3. What might be the response of the surrounding nations to the blessing (28:7, 10) and to the cursing (28:25) of Israel? How do you respond to the blessing and judgement of others? What might this reveal about yourself?
4. In light of Moses' forty years of experience with the Israelites, how might he himself have felt as he articulated the blessings and curses (ch. 28) associated with the formal covenant Yahweh was then renewing with his people, Israel (chs. 29-30)?
5. Do you "serve Yahweh your God with joy and with glad heart for all your blessings" (28:47 NEB)? What difference to your life might it make if, indeed, you did so rejoice regularly? How would it be possible? How honoured and awesome for you is the personal name of God, "Yahweh" (28:58)? How often to you use that name? In what contexts? Why?

1. When comparing the general summary here of the covenant renewal with the original covenant made at Mt. Sinai/ Horeb (Ex 19:5f; 24:6-11), (a) who is included, (b) who are the witnesses, (c) what is the purpose, (d) what are the contents, (e) what are the promises, (f) what are the warnings and (g) what are the commitments?
2. In spite of all the strong reasons the Israelites had to be loyal to Yahweh, what reasons had Moses to fear that some, perhaps even many, of them might not prove steadfast then or in the future, and thus have to suffer the consequences for their disobedience? Even with much greater reasons for trusting God, are we Christians any more faithful today? Why? What consequences might we have to suffer too?
3. What light does 29:29 throw upon the extent, nature, purpose and appropriate response to Yahweh's revelation (Dn 8:26; 12:4, 9; Mt 7: 24-29; 24:36; Mk 13:32; Jn 21:25; Ac 1:7; 1 Co 13:12f; Ja 1:22-27; Rv 10:4; 22:10)?
4. What hope is given in 30:1-6 to those who fail to follow God's way and are suffering the consequences? What does this reveal about the basic character of Yahweh (Jl 2:32; Ac 2:21; Ro 10:12f; 1 Ti 2:4; 2 P 3:9)?
5. Comparing 30:11-14 and 19f with Ro 10:6-9 how similar and different are the gospels [good news] of the Old and New Testaments [Covenants] (Ro 9:30-10:13)?

1. What made it possible for Israel to "be strong and of good courage" and not to "fear or tremble" even when great human leaders departed? What makes the same attitudes possible for Christians too (Mt 18:20; 28:18, 20; Jn 14:27; Ac 18:10; Ro 8:14-17; 2 Ti 1:7)?
2. In what respects does Moses' charge to his successor, Joshua, (31:7f) differ from the charge he gives to the people (31:2-6)? Why is there so little difference? How might what Yahweh adds himself (31:23) reassure Joshua?
3. How many different ways did Yahweh, through Moses, seek to safeguard Israel against the backsliding which he knew, nevertheless, would occur? How does God help fortify Christians against backsliding? What responsibilities do Christian congregations have here?
4. Why is the Festival of Booths (v1)/ Tabernacles (Lv 23:42f)/ Ingathering (Ex 23:16) in the sabbatical year of release, singled out as the occasion for rereading the Deuteronomic covenant (31:10)? Can you think of a better time for it? When might Christian congregations regularly reaffirm the terms and commitments of their group and individual membership in God's covenant people today? When should we reaffirm our baptismal vows? What impact does doing so have on you?
5. Why is it so important that Moses wrote down the renewed covenant and its regulations and stored them with the Ark of the Covenant (29:20f, 27; 30:10; 31:9, 11-13, 24, 26)? Why, then, was it such a surprise to King Josiah and his people to rediscover the covenant and its provisions in 622 B.C. (2K 22:8-10; 2 Ch 34:8-18)? How might similar great lapses of memory have occurred during the long history of the Christian church? What has happened to your congregation's covenant? Why? If you don't have one, why not?

1. What would be an appropriate outline for Moses' song (32:1-43)? How do its many metaphors help develop its main point section by section? Which of these metaphors are most familiar to you? Which are quite new for your thinking? What might these new metaphors mean to you?
2. How does this song express the main message of the whole book of Deuteronomy? Does the song add anything new? What role do hymns and songs play in the life and worship of God's people today (Cl 3:16f; Ep 5:19f) in tandem with the reading (31:9:11-13, 19f; Cl 3:16) and interpretation (Ne 8:1-7) of the written record of God's self-revelation?
3. In what ways are Yahweh's and his people's [Israel's / Jeshurun's] attributes quite different? What were Israel's vices? Are Christians any better today? How so?
4. How dangerous can prosperity [Hebrew = "shalom"] be for God's people (31:20; 32:15)? When have you experienced its dangers? How have you coped with them?
5. What is Yahweh's purpose in judgement of his people (He 12:4-13)? What outcome does he seek? What does this imply for an authentically Christian theology of punishment?
6. Why do you think Moses when presenting this lengthy song to the people, urged them to take in and its contents to heart for themselves and their descendants (32:44-47)? What device might your congregation have that could perform a similar role? How important might it be to find appropriate ways to accomplish this?

TRAIL III -- SECTION 21: Deuteronomy 32:48-34:12.

1. How could Moses still be called "the man of God" (33:1; Js 14:6) and "the servant [minister] of Yahweh" (Nu 12:7; Dt 34:5; Js 1:1) even right after God's judgement of him (32:48-52; 34:1-5)? What hope might that give to sinners like us? Even for our wounded Christian leaders?
2. How does Moses' blessing of the tribes of Israel (ch. 33) compare with the blessing of Jacob/ Israel (Gn 49)? What equivalent blessings are there for Christians through Jesus, God's Messiah [Christ](Ep 1:3-14, 17-19; Ph 1:6; Cl 1:9-14)?
3. How is Yahweh characterized throughout Moses' blessing? What metaphors convey his character? Which of these metaphors mean the most to you? Why?
4. In reflecting on the character and work of Moses, how and why did he change from his first encounter with Yahweh (Ex 3:1-4:20) to his last encounter (34:4)? What changes have occurred in your life with God? What may we learn from the timing and manner of Moses' death and burial? What might you hope that people will learn from your death and burial?
5. Try to put the main theme(s) of the book of Deuteronomy in your own words? How meaningful are they to you in your life with God? How so?

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

The book itself tells us nothing about its authorship, but 15:63 may well indicate that its text was finalized before David's capture of Jerusalem about 1003 B.C. (Ju 1:21; 2 S 5:6ff). It tells the story of the crossing of the Jordan River, the conquest of the promised land and its division among the tribes, ending with the death of Joshua. The apparently universal conquest of Canaan (ch 9-11) refers to Israel's united army's crushing of organized resistance. After the division of the land, however, the united army broke up into its component tribal forces. Then each tribe tried to possess its own allotment but met with stubborn resistance from those natives who had fled from the united army's attacks or who had not even come into its narrow path. Other factors that may have delayed the occupation of the land included the spiritual decline of the Israelites and the very varied geography of the country. The coastal plains and some of the hill country's fortresses remained unconquered until David's kingship, about two hundred years later.

ANALYSIS OF JOSHUA

- 1 Introduction.
- 2-5 Preparations for the conquest.
- 6-8 The first victories.
- 9 The Gibeonites make peace.
- 10-11 The crushing of organized resistance, first in the north then in the south.
- 12 A list of the conquered kings.
- 13-19 The division of the land and attempts of the tribes to take their allotments.
- 20-21 The cities of refuge and the Levitical cities.
- 22 The alter of witness by the Jordan River.
- 23-24 Closing scenes in the life of Joshua.

1. To what extent are the divine promises made to Joshua here (1:3-9) more than just reaffirmations of Yahweh's promises through Moses to Joshua when he was commissioned as the new leader of Israel (Dt 31:7f; 34:9)? How are the personal promises to the leader also relevant to the people? How applicable are these promises (a) to your congregation's leaders and (b) to you for your daily walk with Christ (Mt 18:20; 28:18-20; Jn 14:16f)?
2. What are the conditions for Joshua's success and prosperity? How relevant are these same conditions to your Christian life and ministry/ service (Mt 7:24-27; Jn 14:21; Ro 15:4; 1 Ti 3:16f)?
3. How does Joshua immediately act upon Yahweh's renewed commission? How are you acting upon your own calling to serve Yahweh in a particular way and setting? What biblical promises accompany your divine calling? How do they help you?
4. Should the two conditions of obedience set by the eastern Israelites apply in principle to our response to our Christian leaders today (1:16-18)? Why?
5. How concerned were both Rahab and the Israelite spies about completely being faithful/ truthful to each other (2:12, 14)? Yet, how did their mutual commitments involve both of them being unfaithful/ untruthful to the people of Jericho? Have you ever been caught in a similar truth bind? When? With what consequences? Does Rahab's very helpful and deliberate deception here set a precedent that justifies Christians' lying in a good cause? How so? What about other similar biblical cases of deception (Gn 31:35; 1 S 18:11-17; 20:28f)?

1. Having waited for 40 years to enter the promised land, how would you feel about waiting 3 more days (1:11) to find out how they all could cross the flooded Jordan River (3:15; 4:18)? How does these Israelites' attitude (v 23) compare with that of their parents when camped on the shore of the Red [Reed] Sea [Ex 14:10-16]? What accounts for the difference? Would that make the same difference for you?
2. How do you imagine the crossing of the Jordan River? What did each group of people do? How would you have felt in each of these roles? Have you had any amazing experiences? What have they meant to you as a Christian?
3. What was the impact of the miraculous crossing of the river upon: (a) the common Israelites, (b) Joshua's reputation (6:27), (c) the land's inhabitants, (d) later generations of God's people (Ps 66:6; 74:15; 114:3, 5) and (e) the people's view of Yahweh? What is your response to miracles? Why?
4. What difference would it make for you to discover that the damming of the Jordan River by a landslide 30 Km north at Adam (3:16), tended to happen from time to time in recorded history [e.g., in 1927]? How could the crossing still be considered miraculous? Why (3:10f)? Can God use nature to accomplish his good purposes (Ex 14:2, 21f)? How does God also use his perfect timing to transform what look like a mere coincidences into a miracle?
5. What reminds you of God's past unusual activities in your and your ancestors' lives? How much does remembering God's past activities impact your present faith and hope? How does your congregation facilitate such remembrance?

1. What is the significance of renewing circumcision and Passover just after entering the promised land, and just before the first siege of a Canaanite city? What parallels can you discern between these two Jewish "sacraments" and Christian Baptism and The Lord's Supper/ Holy Communion/ Eucharist?
2. How do you imagine the people felt about the cessation of manna after so many years of a predictable regular divine supply of food? How do you cope with changes in the divine economy of your life?
3. Would you have responded as Joshua did, if, just when you were about to lead God's people into an important new venture, a strange self-proclaimed leader were suddenly to turn up and insist upon taking over the leadership of the whole enterprise (5:13-15)? What accounts for Joshua's response? How might you have responded then? Why? How does Joshua's experience here parallel Moses' experience at the burning bush (Ex 3)?
4. What do you think the soldiers of Israel and of Jericho thought of the rather unusual battle tactics? What might such unusual means of laying siege teach us about God's ways of operating and about the conditions he sometimes sets for obedient faith (Gn 22; Is 55:8f)?
5. What might the recurring phrase "to this day" in the Book of Joshua (4:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 15:63; 16:10) indicate about when the account of these event was first written, or at least when the account's text was finalized in its present form (2 S 1:18-27; 5:6f)? Does this have any implications for the reliability of the canonical biblical record? How so?

1. Why were the Israelite spies so overconfident when they saw their new targeted city, Ai? Has that ever happened to you? When? With what consequences? Could you see God's hand in it then? How so? What does that mean to you now? What accounts for Joshua's and the people's loss of faith and courage (7:5, 7-9)? How much does your faith and confidence depend upon continuing success? What is a better basis of faith and confidence?
2. Have you ever prayed a prayer like Joshua's (7:7-9)? In what circumstances? How would you describe Yahweh's response to Joshua's prayer? What was unexpected about God's answer? Have you ever had a similar response to one of your prayers? Why? How did that make you feel and think? Why?
3. What is there about human nature that often causes an individual's sins to affect (a) his whole family (7:24), (b) his possessions (7:24) and (c) sometimes even his whole people/ nation (7:10f; 22:20)? How can this same human interconnection work positively (2:12f; 6:25; Mk 2:5)? What is the much wider and deeper application of the same basic connection both negatively and positively spelled out by Paul in Ro 5:12-19? How does this corporate solidarity affect you? Where would Christians be without this basic fact of humans all being persons-in-community? What does it mean to you to be included "in Christ"?
4. How do you reconstruct the second battle of Ai? What really made the difference in the second attack? Where did the new strategy come from?
5. Why was the immediate aftermath of the destruction of Ai a very appropriate time to hold the great communal ceremony in the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim that Moses had earlier mandated (Dt 27:11-26)? How might Israel's most recent experience have brought home the reality of the curses and blessings here reviewed liturgically? Why do you think that their whole families and even the strangers amongst them were also included (8:33)? Does your congregation ever review liturgically or otherwise God's general promised blessings and judgments? Why? How could this be done more effectively in your congregation? How might this rite be associated with your congregation's covenant and mission statements? What might this mean (a) for you, (b) for your family members and (c) your congregation's members and (d) its adherents?

1. How can you account for the behaviour of Joshua and the leaders of Israel in their disobeying Yahweh's commands about how to deal with the corrupt inhabitants of Canaan (Dt. 7:1-5) in the case of the Gibeonites [Horites]? Have you made mistakes for similar reasons? What can be learned from how Joshua and his fellow leaders handled their mistake? What ultimately, however, did it take for the complaints of the Israelite people to be silenced (9:18, 26; 10:21)? Would that have been true for you as well? Why?
2. Can even deception justify breaking your word or promises? What could? How can you avoid regretting the promises you make? Do you remember your promises and their implications even when they become quite inconvenient (10:6f)? What can be learned from Joshua here?
3. What do you think of the bargain that the Gibeonites eventually got? Was it really worth it? Why? What bargains of your ancestors have you and your family had to live with? Have they been worth it? How so? What about the treaties that some indigenous peoples made in the 19th century A.D. with the colonizers? Where does justice lie over a century later? How should Christians be involved in reconciliation and reparation?
4. What lessons did Joshua and his fellow leaders learn from their dealings with the Gibeonites that would stand them in good stead in the many future encounters with the Amorites and others in the land's south (10:1-42) and north (11:1-15)? What similar lessons have you learned and acted upon in later years? To what extent have you noticed God's hand in this learning? Do you think that he would approve of how much you have learned here and how you have applied it later in other situations?
5. According to the poetic Book of Jashar, what were the miracles of the great battle of Gibeon? What do you think really happened? To facilitate the battle, what was lengthened, the day or the night? Why do you think that? Why was it most astounding that Yahweh should listen to the voice of a mere human being (10:14)? What seems to have been the nature of the Book of Jashar [Hebrew = "upright"] quoted in 10:12f and also in 2 S 1:18-27, and possibly in 1 K 8:12?

TRAIL III – SECTION 27: -- JOSHUA 11:16-13:33

1. How could both 11:23 and 13:1 be true? (1:3)? Try plotting on a map the land remaining to be conquered (13:2-6, 13; 15:14-19, 63; 16:10, 12-18, Ju 1:27-36) and compare it with the land occupied so far (11:16; 12:7-24). How do the two areas compare? What still remains to be conquered for God in your life?
2. What giants [Anakim, Nephilim, Rephaim] (Gn 6:4; Nu 13:33; Dt 2:21; Js 12:21f; 14:12,15, 17:15; 1 S 15:4; 2 S 21:16, 18, 20, 22; 1 Ch 20:6) have been defeated in your life? What still remain? Where? How are they being coped with now?
3. Why do you think that Yahweh wanted Joshua to distribute the land to the various tribes at this point even though quite a lot of it was not yet fully conquered (13:6f)? When in your life has God seemed to say, "It's now your turn to take more responsibility for conquering evil forces in your life"? What has been your response? Does that mean God leaves the rest of the conquest totally up to you (Ph 2:12f)? What resources does he continue to provide (Mt 28:18, 20; Ro 5:3-5; 6:12-24, 17-19, 22; 8:9-17, 28-39; 1 Co 10:13; Ga 2:20; 4:6; 5:22-25; Ph 1:6; 2:13; Ep 3:16-19; 4:11-16; 6:13-18; 2 Ti 3:16f; He 10:19-25; 1 Jn 1:3, 9-2:1; 4:10, 13, 16, 19; Rv 3:20)? With such, could your Christian life be described as a partnership with God? How so?
4. How would you respond to a statement like the one made to the aged Joshua in 13:1? How do you evaluate your progress in pursuing your God-given life goals? How can you handle not having yet achieved all you have hoped for? How best can you employ the remaining time, strength and resources that God continues to provide? How might you cope with having achieved all your life goals?
5. What was the inheritance of the tribe of Levi (13:14, 33; 14:4; 18:7)? Would you like to have received such an inheritance? Who has a somewhat comparable allotment today? Are they to be envied? Why? Can you pray the prayer of Ps 16:5f? How so? What might help you be able to do so?

Skim read through this whole section, then review the portions associated with the questions as you try to answer them.

1. After five years of conquest, what is the basic method by which the land is divided (Nu 33:54; Js 14:2; 16:1; 18:1f, 10f; 19:1, 9f; JS 19:1, 9f, 17, 24, 32, 40, 51)? Would you be able with the psalmist (Ps 16: 5f) to rejoice in such a method of allotting inheritances? Why? What might have been a fairer method? Why do you think so? Does this biblical method of divine discernment (Lv 16:8f; 1 S 14:42; 1 Ch 24:31; 25:8; 26:12ff; Ne 10:34; 11:1; Ac 1:26), warrant Christians expecting that God might use lotteries to direct or fund his church's enterprises?
2. How does the attitude of the members of the tribes of Joseph [Ephraim and Manasseh (17:14-18) compare with that of Caleb from Judah (14:6-15; 15:13-15; Nu 14:24)? Why did Joshua respond to them quite differently? Why were concessions, nevertheless, still in order (17:3-5; Nu 33:54)? Can you identify with any of the parties in the dispute? Which? Why? Would you have been satisfied with the outcomes? How so?
3. Have you ever met a Christian octogenarian quite like Caleb [Hebrew = "dog"] (14:6-15)? How do you and your congregation's leaders cope with such elder's seemingly indefatigable enthusiasm, optimism and vitality? Did these qualities make Caleb too self-reliant or presumptuous (14:9, 12)? Why?
4. In light of Moses' warning (Nu 33:55f) and his own experience so far (15:63; 16:10; 17:12f), what was Joshua's great concern for the future (18:3)? How much of the full realization of the fulfillment of God's good promises is up to us (Ph 1:6f; 2:12; He 4:1-11; 6:11f; 10:19-31; 2 P 1:4-11)? How does this play out in your own Christian life?
5. How significant is it that the strategic hill site of Jerusalem remained completely in the hands of the Jebusites until well into David's reign ca 1003 B.C. (2 S 5:5), in spite of it being just within the territory allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (18:16, 28; Ju 1:21) and their king having been defeated and killed by Joshua's army during their 13th century military conquest of the entire land (Js 10:22-27; 12:8, 10)? How common does it seem to have been for various tribes to fail to occupy fully strategic areas within their allotted territories (13:1f, 13; 16:10; 17:12f)? How true is such a dragged-out process of occupation of inheritances in your own Christian life (Ro 12:2)?

1. Why were the cities of refuge so important to early Israel (Nu 35:9-28; Dt 4:41-43; 19:1-13)? What does God's command to set them up imply about Yahweh's character and purposes? Who were to inhabit them (Nu 35:6; Js 21:13, 21, 32, 38; 1 Ch 6:57, 67)? Who would be responsible for their operation (20:4)? Why do you think that was (18:7)? How did this tradition for justice continue in the feudal system of medieval Europe? How does it continue today amongst Christians?
2. What type of property did the Levites get? Where was it? How did they get it? What principles here might be relevant for providing for the basic material needs of Christian clergy? Why is an exception made for Hebron (14:13f; 21:12, 41f; 1 Ch 6:57)?
3. To what extent are the general summaries in 14:15, 21:43-45 and 23:14 fair description of the situation in Canaan to date [See TRAIL III SESSION 27: QUESTION 1]? How might it also apply to your Christian life and practice? What still remains to be accomplished for complete peace in the land (23:5)? How can it be realized (23:5-13)? How true is this in a Christian's life (Ro 12:1f)?
4. What was the nature of the misunderstanding that arose because of the new altar built on the western side of the Jordan River by the army of the two and one-half tribes of Israelites while returning east to their inheritances (22:9-34)? Why do you think that Phinehas, the priest, was chosen to head up the investigation of the situation (Nu 25:1-15)? How was the misunderstanding resolved? How might the special features of the new altar (Js 4:19-24; 22:10ff, 34) have helped to confirm the builders' interpretation of the altar's unique purpose (22:21-29)?
5. When investigated, how orthodox do the departing tribes turn out to be (Dt 6:4; Js 22:5, 22, 29, 34)? Why, then, were their acts at first interpreted by other Israelites as rebellion, unfaithful turning away from Yahweh (22:16-19)? What can we Christians learn today about how to approach some of the differences of opinion between groups of Christians and even the greater ones between different religions? Do you think all religious and theological differences could be resolved through mutual dialogue? Why?

1. What does 8:33, 23:2, and 24:1 indicate about the variety of leadership roles that existed even in the tribal confederacy of Israel near the end of Joshua's life? Why does God always seem to be working with quite a variety of leaders?
2. In comparing the two farewell speeches of Joshua to the Israelites (23:3-16 & 24:2- 27): (a) how formal are they (b) what sorts of language are used (c) what characteristics of Yahweh are highlighted, (d) what advice do they give for future living (e) what symbolic acts are employed, (f) how does Joshua make his case and (g) how well does he move the people? Which speech would you rather have as a model for Christian farewells? Why?
3. How easy is it for you to make the same commitment that Joshua made for his household (24:15b)? Why? Why was Joshua so skeptical when the people in general also were so quick and adamant in affirming repeatedly their own loyalty to Yahweh (24:2, 14f, 19, 23; Ju 2:7-15)? Was Joshua simply being realistic about factors like the people's still lingering disposition to the polytheism from their pre-Abrahamic heritage (Gn 31:19-35; 35:2) and their long Egyptian sojourn, as well of the great religious dangers of intermingling with their new pagan neighbours? What similar factors impact your carrying out your commitments to live as a Christian family exclusively for Yahweh (Ro 12:1f)?
4. Why was Shechem, in the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, so important to the Israelites (Gn 12:6f; 33:18-34:31; Js 8:30-35; 24:32)? Do you, too, have special places that are important to your spirituality? How so?
5. What do you consider the strongest and the weakest aspects of Joshua's leadership as a "servant of Yahweh" (24:29)? What might you want to emulate? How can you do so in your particular ministry/ service role as a Christian?

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

The book opens with an introductory section, in two parts: first, extracts from a history of the conquest, stressing the failure of many of the tribes to possess their full allotment; second, an account of the general falling away from Yahweh after Joshua's death and a characterization of the main features of this early period. The main body of the book, however, presents historical vignettes of the deliverers/ judges that Yahweh raised up from their midst. Some of them may well have been contemporaries who served in different tribal areas. Only six of them receive extended treatment. The final section of the book narrates in some detail two instances of the general moral and religious decline of the period between Joshua and the institution of the monarchy [1050 B.C.], wherein "every one did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25). The second incident probably happened soon after Joshua's death when the tribal confederacy was still functioning fairly well. The first incident reflects a later period when the confederacy had broken down completely.

The author is unknown. The favourable attitude to the monarchy here and there (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) may well point to the final completion of the book during the popular reign of David or early in Solomon's reign. The mixed view of monarchy in 8:22, and ch. 9 may further indicate a date early in David's reign in Hebron before he conquered Jerusalem (Ju 1:21) or late in Solomon's reign when there was growing discontent with his rule. However, 18:30 may point to a final editing of the material after the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. The interpretive comments throughout the book, express a prophetic perspective informed by the Book of Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, the book clearly contains much material that is more ancient and even contemporary with the events reported.

In spite of its mixed character, the book bears testimony to the faithfulness of Yahweh by exhibiting his righteousness and his enduring mercy and providence. It witnesses to the great variety of imperfect human partners through whom Yahweh accomplishes his greater purposes among and for his people. It also presents some of the most memorable examples of both human faith and human depravity.

ANALYSIS-OF JUDGES

- 1:1-2:5 The incomplete conquest of Canaan:
 - 1:1-71 The conquest of southern Canaan.
 - 1:22-26 The capture of Bethel.
 - 1:27-36 A catalogue of unoccupied territory.
 - 2:1-5 The general effect of the broken covenant
- 2:6-16:31 Israel in the period of the judges:
 - 2:6-3:6 General introduction,
 - 3:7-11 Othniel from Judah versus the Mesopotamians.
 - 3:12-30 Ehud from Benjamin versus the Moabites.
 - 3:31 Shamgar [a Canaanite mercenary?] versus the Philistines [Sea Peoples].
 - 4:1-5:31 Deborah from Issachar and Barak from Naphtali versus the Canaanites.
 - 6:1-8:3 Gideon from Manasseh versus the Midianites and Amalekites.
 - 9:1-57 Abimelech from Manasseh, the usurper king of Shechem
 - 10:1-5 Tola from Issachar and Jair from Gilead.
 - 10:6-12:7 Jephthah from Manasseh in Gilead versus the Ammonites.
 - 12:8-15 Ibzan from Judah, Elon from Zebulun and Abdon from Ephraim.
 - 13:1-16:31 Sampson from Dan versus the Philistines.
- 17:1-21:25 Appendices:
 - 17:1-18:31 Micah's household and the Danite migration north.
 - 19:1-21:25 The outrage at Gibeah and the revenge on the Benjamites.

1. How well did the tribe of Judah do in following the directions of Yahweh through Joshua (Js 23:4-13)? Why were chariots of iron able to inhibit the advance of the very people to whom Yahweh had promised deliverance from peoples with horses and chariots (Dt 20:1)? What has advanced technology [e.g., iron age culture versus bronze age culture] to do with Yahweh's power to save (Js 17:16, 18; Ju 4:3, 13-15)? How is this relevant in our day of escalating technological change? What might economic exploitation also have to do with the Israelites' decisions (1:28, 30, 33, 35) and with ours?
2. From a map, what direction is the movement recorded in ch 1? How does the conquest gradually weaken as they move in that direction? What consequences do you think they would eventually experience because of this failure to completely possess their land (2:3)? Have you ever witnessed the consequences of similar spiritual compromises by Christians? When? With what consequences?
3. Why were the Kenite families living in friendly relations amongst the Israelites not considered a religious threat (Ex 2:16-22; 3:1; 18:10-12; Nu 10:29-32; Ju 1:16; 4:11, 17-24; 5:24-27; 1 S 15:6; 27:10; 30:29-31; 1 Ch 2:55; Ne 3:14)? Could the fact that Kenite means "smith" also suggest significant economic reasons for welcoming permanent friendly relations with Kenites? Should such economic motivations prevail for God's people, even if religious incompatibility makes close relationships seem inadvisable (2 Co 6:14-18)? Why? What might this have to do with Christians' close relationships with others today? Does this justify ghetto living for Christians (Jn 17:11-20; 1 Co 5:10f)?
4. What was the basic charge brought against Israel by Yahweh's messenger [angel in Hebrew = messenger]? What characterized the Israelite's response to his message? How deep was their repentance (2:6-15)? What response would Yahweh have preferred? What can we Christians learn from this about responding to God's words of judgement? Does Yahweh break his covenant when he punishes his people for their unfaithfulness (2:1-3)? Why (Nu 33:51-56; He 12:7-111; Ro 11:29)?
5. From the brief vignette in 1:11-15, what insight do you get (a) into the life of daughters and their rights in that culture generally and (b) into Achsah's character in particular? Should she be emulated? Why?

1. How does the summary statement of 2:6-12 illustrate the old adage, "clogs to clogs in three generations"? Has your family experienced that spiritually or otherwise? How might following the guidelines and heeding the warnings of Dt 6:6-25 have helped to break the common human cycle? Have you witnessed this? When?
2. What are the stages of the general history cycle for this period outlined in 2:11-19? What sorts of spiritual life of individual Christians and congregations correspond to this pattern today (Rv 2:4f; 3:1-3)? What can you learn from this for your Christian life?
3. What variety of purposes did Yahweh have for leaving some of the descendants of the earlier pagan inhabitants in the land of Canaan (Dt 7:21-23; Ju 2:3, 20-3:4)? How does this help Christians understand some of God's purposes for leaving the real possibility of sinning in their regenerate life (Ro 12:2; Ph 1:6)? Wouldn't it be wiser for God to simply make it impossible for anyone who became a Christian to sin again? Will anyone in the new heavens and earth be able to sin? Could Jesus himself really have been able to sin (He 2:18; 4:15; 7:26; 2 Co 5:21; Ro 8:3)?
4. What can Christians learn from this passage about: (a) being an example, (b) teaching our children and (c) mixed marriages?
5. With respect to the first three minor judges: (a) what tribal group(s) was/ were involved (b) what enemy was involved (c) what parts of the land were involved [check a map] (d) how many years were Israelites oppressed and free (e) what sort of person did Yahweh employ as his deliverer / saviour (f) what resource(s) did Yahweh provide them and (g) why did God keep forgiving his people (1 Ti 2:4; Ro 11:28f)? What can we learn from this about Christian living, ministry and leadership?

1. How do Deborah and Barak compare with each other as leaders of God's people? How did their relationships and leadership skills and styles complement one another? Where is team leadership most appropriate in Christian churches? What is your experience of it and how it functions? How well? Why?
2. How could Deborah, the woman, wife, mother, prophetess and judge, be an inspiration to modern Christian women? In light of Deborah's evaluation in 5:24, why don't we Christians name our daughters "Jael" as often as "Deborah", or even almost as often as "Mary" (Lk 1:42)? What other "liberated" women in the Bible can modern Christian women claim as models for their daughters to emulate? Which ones do you prefer? Why?
3. What significance do you see in the fact that it is a Kenites's wife, Jael, who becomes the immediate agent of the final defeat of the leader of Israel's enemy? How did Yahweh use the peaceful relationship between a king, whose army had many iron chariots, and a local smith who worked with iron, to accomplish his good purposes for the king's enemy, Israel? What might this teach us about how God can work through economic, political and other seemingly secular relationships to serve his people's welfare?
4. With respect to Deborah's and Barak's ancient poetic song of victory: (a) what would be an appropriate outline, (b) what are its literary devices, (c) how does it exhibit some of the general characteristics of Hebrew poetry [e.g. parallelism of ideas, little or n, rhyme, lots of metaphors] (d) whom does it celebrate, and why, (e) whom does it condemn, and why? and (f) what does it add that we might miss in ch. 4's [probably later] prose account?
5. What does 5:6 suggest about the possibility that there were two judges functioning in Israel at the same time in different areas of the country (3:31; 4:5f)? What implications might such possible instances of simultaneity have for calculating the total length of the judges' era simply by summing up the total of the time periods specified for each judge and the intervals of oppression?

1. How is the prophet's message of 6:8-10: (a) an appropriate response to the people's prayers (6:7), and (b) a summary of the perennial prophetic or angelic message to Israel (Js 24:1-15; Ju 2:1-3; Ps 81:8-12; Ho 11:1-7)? What was Yahweh's final answer to their prayers (6:11-16)? How is that answer also relevant to the Christian church today?
2. What do you make of the apparent identification of the angel/ messenger of Yahweh (6:8, 11) with Yahweh himself (6:14, 23; 13:22)? Could 5:8's poetic use of the term "gods" [Hebrew = Elohim] also be a further case of the same general wide usage of the term "gods" to signify a very close partnership between God and his chosen agents, whether they be angels, priests, judges, etc. (e.g., Ex 21:6; 22:8f, 28; Ps 8:5; 82:6; Jn 10:34f; He 2:7)?
3. What are the stages of Gideon's character development as an effective leader of God's people? How does this correspond to the development of his relationship with Yahweh? What accounts for each of the changes? Where can you identify with Gideon? Have you ever asked Yahweh, "Why then has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our fathers told us about?" (6:13)? Have you ever asked for clear signs that it was God who was speaking to you (6:17, 36-41)? How so? How did he respond? What have you felt you had to do stealthily at night because of fear (Jn 3:11)? Has a dream ever helped you trust Yahweh better (7:15)? When? What can you learn from Gideon about how to handle complaints about your leadership (8:1-37) or the lack of cooperation by other leaders (8:5-9)? Is Gideon, therefore, a perfect model for Christian leaders? How so?
4. How does the story of Gideon show that God often works through human weakness (6:14-16; 7:2-9; 2 Co 12:9f)? Why (7:2)? How does it also illustrate the partnership between God and his chosen agents (6:14, 16, 34; 7:18, 20; 1 Co 3:9)?
5. How did Gideon prove to be a better leader in times of communal crisis than in times of peace (8:24-27)? In what sort of times, ones of crises or of wellbeing, do you most rely upon God? Why? How often do you seek Yahweh's guidance in each of these types of times? Which sort of times really presents the greater challenges to the continuity and development of your trusting and following God? Why? Should we Christians, therefore, thank God for difficult circumstances (Ro 5:3-5; He 5:7f; Ja 1:2-4)?

1. How does the principle in Nu 32:23b apply to this story at several levels (9:56f)? What could this teach you?
2. What contrast can you see between Gideon's/ Jerubbaal's attitude to assuming kingship (8:22f) and that of his son, Abimelech [Hebrew = "My father is king" or "Father of a king", a common Palestinian hereditary royal title (Gn 20; 26; Ps 34:Title)]? How does Abimelech's life indicate that one can all too easily become a victim of one's own method or lifestyle (Hb 2:4-20)? Have you ever witnessed this? When? What have you learned from the experience? What can you learn from this sordid story?
3. How do the communication methods of Abimelech and Jotham compare? Which was more effective with the citizens of Shechem? Why? Which ultimately proved the truest? Why? Why do you think Jesus adopted the use of parables? Should new and creative parables be used more frequently today in Christian sermons? Why?
4. What might the abundance of detail in the stories of Israel's first king (9:22), Abimelech indicate about their antiquity? How would you characterize his brief reign? How successful was Abimelech's assisted suicide (9:53-56; 2 S 11:21)?
5. What general religious trend might be indicated (a) by the name change of the heretical Shechemites' god from Baalberith [Lord of the Covenant] (8:33; 9:4) to Elberith [God of the Covenant] (9:46) and (b) by the change of Gideon's honorary name from Jerubbaal (Ju 6:31f, 29; 9:57 [Hebrew = "let Baal contend"]) to Jerubbesheth by David's time (2 S 11:21 [Hebrew "sheth" = "shame"])? What might the inclusion of divine names, such as "Baal" [Hebrew "Ba'al" = "lord, master, possessor, husband"], "El[ohim]" and "Ya[weh]", in personal names and place names indicate the people's religious commitment?

1. Why do you think Yahweh heard the Israelites' second plea for help (10:15) but not their first one (10:10-14)? Have you ever had a similar experience? When? How was their second plea different from the first one? What might this teach you about true repentance?
2. Why were Jephthah's background, character and piety suitable characteristics for leadership of God's people in this situation? How would you evaluate Jephthah's handling of the Manassehites of Gilead (ch 11), the Ammonites (11:12-28) and the Ephraimites (12:1-6)? What might Christian leaders learn from him?
3. Would it be correct to say that Jephthah viewed his relationship to Yahweh in his fighting against the Ammonites (11:9, 24, 30-32; 12:3) as a partnership? Who as the senior partner in charge deserved the major credit for victory? Should this senior-junior partnership be the model for Christian leadership and service today?
4. How does Jephthah's claim that Israelites had already dwelt on the east bank of the Jordan for 300 years (11:26) affect the scholarly debate today on whether the exodus from Egypt occurred in the 13th or the 15th century B.C.? How also do the further biblical data from Gn 15:13; 1 K 6:1 and Ac 13:9 fit with the archeological evidence of a 13th rather than 15th century Israelite destructive invasion of Palestine plus with the first extant clear Egyptian reference to the presence of the people of Israel in Canaan as recorded in Pharaoh Merneptah's victory poem on his Syrian campaign stele for 1220 B.C.? Can Christians live with an open mind about such key historical dates, yet trust in the reliability and integrity of the Scriptures? Why?
5. Have you ever gotten yourself into the type of bind that Jephthah did with his vow? How did you cope? In light of Lv 27:1-8 and Ec 5:2-6 how might Jephthah have saved his daughter's life? What might you have done?
6. Can you see how the Gileadites' password "shibboleth" of 12:6 might in later tradition become generally defined as "a verbal or other test used to identify a particular group of people"? How did it identify Ephraimites? What sorts of shibboleths are used in your society today? Do Christians use them? Should we? Might basic creedal statements, like the very early one of 1 Co 12:3, function this way for Christians? Why?

1. What significance do you see in two apparently contradictory facts here: the angel of Yahweh seeks out the wife rather than the husband to speak to, but only the name of the husband is recorded by the biblical author? Which spouse has the more mature faith and theology, the husband or the wife? How so? How might you have dealt with an angel of Yahweh in similar circumstances?
2. What can be learned about angels/ messengers of Yahweh from this account of Samson's parents' progressive understanding of their encounter with an angel of Yahweh (13:3, 13, 15-18, 20f), a man of God (13:6), an angel of God (13:6), a man (13:10f), God Himself (13:22), Yahweh (13:23)? Who here uses which terms? When? Why?
3. How does Samson differ from the previous judges? How did Samson's Nazirite vow differ from the standard rules for a Nazirite vow in Nu 6:2-21? How often did he seem to break this vow? How often does even the best practice differ from the ideal in special circumstances? Why?
4. Which aspects of Samson's conflicted character are most useful to Yahweh's Spirit in accomplishing through him his own good purposes (13:5; 14:4)? In what ways is Samson far from a good example for Christian boys and men to follow? Why do so many modern "Christian" men, nevertheless, tend to follow much of his example, even in spite of many New Testament warnings to the contrary (Mt 5:38-48; 7:12; Ro 12:17-21; 13:12-14; Cl 2:20-3:14)?
5. How might the references to the Spirit of Yahweh working in and through Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 16:20) help Christians understand the Holy Spirit's filling and empowering humans for God's ministry / service however unusual or regular that service may be? Can God's Spirit's filling and empowerment be operative without the fruit of appropriate moral and spiritual maturity (1 Co 13:1f; Ga 5:19-25)? Should Christians just write Samson's spirituality off as a curious example of an early stage of progressive revelation recorded in the Old Testament for our learning (Ro 15:4), but not our emulation? Does God sometimes really accomplish his good purposes, even today, in spite of his chosen agents' morality, spirituality or religious orientation (Is 44:28-45:1; 2 Ch 36:22f Ez 1:1-11)? How so?

1. Do you regularly pray in times of need, like Samson did (15:18f; 16:28)? Do you, like Samson, expect Yahweh to answer? Does he? For example?
2. What psychology does Delilah use to discover Samson's secret? Why hadn't Samson learned from his experience of similar methods of manipulating him (14:15f)? How could such a strong man be so weak? How could God's deliverer be tricked? What manipulative methods work on you? Have you learned to recognize and deal with them? How so? What methods do you use to manipulate others? Why do we Christians do similar things to each other, let alone to others, so often?
3. What motivated Delilah's treachery (16:5, 18)? Why are many people today similarly motivated (1 Ti 6:10)? What could motivate you to treachery?
4. How is Samson's final prayer related to (a) his major purpose in God's economy for his people in that time and place, (b) his own sense of justice (15:11) and (c) his faith in Yahweh's faithfulness, graciousness and righteousness?
5. What evidence is there that even Samson repented [Hebrew = "turned around"] in the end? Are you as open as Jesus was to death-bed repentances (Lk 23:39-43; Jr 18:1-11; 2 P 3:9)? Would you view his death as a suicide, a martyrdom, or what?
6. How well do you think Samson functioned as a good judge / deliverer in seeking the best interests of his people in his day? If someone like Samson could serve God's good purposes, what about even someone like you having some ministry / service role to play in God's economy? Have you dared to ask God about what his Spirit has in mind for you, especially in light of "all", "every" and "each" in Ro 12:3-8; 1 Co 12:4-7, 11; Ep 4:7, 16 and 1 P 4:1f)?

1. In light of what you already know about the norms of Mosaic Yahwehism from the Pentateuch, how would you evaluate the purity of the religion and ethics (a) of Micah, (b) of his mother, (c) of the Levite and (d) of the Danites? Why do you think the narrator of this story doesn't comment on the quality of their faith or behaviour, in spite of his evaluation of the Israelites' general behaviour during this whole judges era (2:11-19)? What might his repeated observation (17:6; 18:1; 19:1, 21:25) have to do with his restraint here? Would the later institution of the monarchy really insure the preservation of pure ethics and religion (1 K 21:1-16; 25:22-23)?
2. Why might Micah's mother bless her thieving son? Have you ever witnessed such maternal or paternal behaviour? When? Even in Christian families? How so?
3. Is the "father" language of 17:10 and 18:19 more than merely honorary (2K 6:21; 13:14)? To what extent is it proper to think of or call a priest or clergyman "father", even though he is young enough to be your son, and especially if he comes to live with your family as a son (17:11f)? Are there any other grounds in the Bible for so thinking of a priest or clergyperson (Mt 23:8-10; 1 Co 4:14ff; Ga 4:19; 1 Ti 5:17; Phm 10)?
4. How successful could the earlier deliverance by Samson have been for his own tribe, the Danites, to feel that they hadn't yet even been allotted an inheritance (18:1), because their assigned territory (Js 19:40-48) had been overrun for 40 years by the technologically superior [iron age] Philistines (13:1)? On what grounds do the Danites decide that Laish in the far north had been specially given to them by Yahweh? What better criteria do you have for discerning what Yahweh is giving to you? What about the rights of the people to whom it already belonged?
5. What might the statement "until the day of the captivity of the land" (18:30) imply about the time of writing, compiling, or editing of the Book of Judges (2 K 17:6 [722 B.C. with the fall of Samaria and Israel] or 2 K 25:1ff [587 B.C. with the fall of Jerusalem and Judah])?

1. What do you learn about the religious beliefs of ordinary Israelites in ch. 18 & 19? How did their beliefs affect their behaviour? Whom did they think they were worshiping? How faithful was that worship by Mosaic standards? What do you think about the priest's response to the Danite warriors in 18:6 and the resultant slaughter (18:27f)? Do you think Yahweh really approved, seeing the result (18:30f)? Why?
2. How do you trace the ups and downs in the relationship of the Levite from the rural hill country of Ephraim [a Josephite tribe in the central north] and his concubine from Bethlehem in Judah [Ephraim's traditional rival non-Josephite Israelite tribe in the south] as they travel north towards his home past Jebus/ Jerusalem [occupied still by pagan Jebusites] and then to Gibeah [in territory of the Benjamites who were closely related to the Josephites but later after Solomon's reign linked up with Judah]? What roles were played by (a) the Levite, (b) his concubine, (c) her father, (d) the servant, (e) the old man and (f) some of the men of Gibeah? Would the abundance of detail in this complicated story attest for you its authenticity as almost contemporary to the events and persons involved? How so?
3. Why did the Levite not stay overnight in Jebus, but continue another 5 km north on the main road to Gibeah? Why do you think the Levite didn't heed his servant's advice about where to seek hospitality? What can we learn about the reasons for and the consequences of our choices? How did the hospitality that he found amongst his fellow Israelites compare with that of the pagan Sodomites in Abraham's day (Gn 19:1-11)? Why did the Gibeahites' behaviour become an Israelite paradigm of depravity (Ho 9:9; 10:9)?
4. Why do you think that it took such a sordid affair to unite the Israelite tribes to see that justice was done here (ch. 20)? Did something good for Israel, therefore, come out of the great scandal? What parallel developments can you adduce in your lifetime? How did the Israelites (a) see that justice was done and (b) provide wives for the few remaining Benjamites? Would having a king in Israel have made any difference in this situation? How significant might it be that Israel's first elected king, Saul, came from Gibeah of the Benjamites (1 S 10:26) and even made the city his capital (1 S 15:34; 22:6; 23:19)?
5. With respect to 21:25b, how and why do our age's theoretical and practical values differ from those of the Israelites in the judges' era concerning (a) human life, (b) oaths, (c) family/ clan solidarity, (d) revenge, (e) homosexuality, (f) rape, (g) popular "justice" and (h) women? How similar are your practical values to those of your society? How similar should they be (Ro 12:2)? Why?
6. How does the fact that the Hebrew verb translated "miss" in 20:13 (Pr 19:2) is a secular use of the same word usually translated "sin" in the Old Testament, illuminate the basic meaning of human sinning (Pr 19:2)? What does such sinning miss (Ro 3:23)? Is such sinning as serious as transgressing God's revealed law or as willfully rebelling against Yahweh? Why?

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH.

The book was traditionally read by later Jews annually at the Festival of Pentecost or Weeks which marks the end of the wheat harvest, perhaps because this was the time of year when Ruth married Boaz, whom she had met in the barley harvest which began seven weeks earlier at Passover. Barley was the primary food of the poor and wheat of the rich. Although the book was not included by Jews among the Former Prophets along with Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings; but among the Writings with Esther, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, its Hebrew style suggests that it was written in its present form during the monarchy period, yet not too early, because it sees the necessity of explaining certain ancient customs (4:7). English Bibles follow the LXX [Septuagint] Greek translation of the 3rd century B.C., in placing the book just after Judges because it fits into the same general era. The general tone of the story and the genealogy (4:17-22) indicate that the setting is early in the time of the judges, not too long after the death of Joshua. It is the story of the common people of Israel caring for one another, and, thus, stands in stark contrast to many of the stories in the Book of Judges. Here Yahweh is seen as guiding the faithful in the details of their everyday life. He is also preparing for the birth of king David (4:17-22), and of great David's greater son (Mt 1:5).

The story turns upon two social customs of ancient Israel that have no western parallels today. The first, the Law of the Levirate [from the Latin for "brother-in-law"] stipulated that if a man died without a male heir, then his male next-of-kin was obliged to marry his widow and produce an heir for his dead brother, so that his brother's name would not be blotted out in Israel (Dt 25:5-10). The custom seems to go back into patriarchal times (Gn 38; Ru 4:12). Furthermore, in another ancient custom, the same closest male relative had the right and obligation of redeeming the dead man's property to keep it in the family (Lv 25:23-28; Jr 32:6-10). By Ruth's time the two customs seem to have been linked together. Naomi's husband's closest male relative, his kinsman redeemer, was willing to redeem the land of Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech, but balked at taking on the connected obligation of marrying Ruth, the widowed daughter-in-law, because that would jeopardize his own family obligations. This left open the way for the next closest male relative to take on both the inheritance and Ruth. Rich Bethlehem farmer, Boaz, was more than willing to legally take over the inheritance at the city-gate court, and soon thereafter to wed Ruth whom he had gotten to know and respect during the two harvests.

ANALYSIS OF RUTH.

- 1 Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi.
- 2 Ruth's first encounter with Boaz.
- 3 The execution of Naomi's plan to solicit Boaz as kinsman redeemer.
- 4:1-12 Boaz' arrangements to become the kinsman redeemer and marry Ruth.
- 4:13-17 Boaz' and Ruth's marriage and son, Obed.
- 4: 18-23 David's genealogy.

1. What do you imagine to be the social, economic and religious cost of Ruth's decision to follow Naomi into the land of Israel? What marriage prospect might a young, beautiful Moabite widow have in Israel compared to in Moab? Although Orpha, too, had been a good daughter-in-law, what differences were there between her attitude and Ruth's? What lessons might Ruth teach us about following Christ (Lk 9:23, 57-62; 14:25-33)?
2. Why does Naomi [Hebrew = "sweetie"] now prefer to be called Mara [Hebrew = "bitter"]? Have you ever felt like changing your name because of its meaning? When? Why? How is the story illuminated by knowing the Hebrew meaning of the names of the other characters in the story: Elimelech ["God is king"], Mahon ["weakness?"], Chilion ["pining", "failing", "alienation"], Orpha ["neck?"], Ruth ["friend", "companion", "satisfied"], Boaz ["quickness"], Obed ["worshiper"]? Could some interpreters, therefore, be correct in considering this story as more a parable of human relationships than a true historical account of David's family? Why?
3. How appropriate is Ruth's commitment in 1:16f, for a bride to repeat in a Christian wedding today? Why?
4. How did God use an apparently chance happening (2:3, 20) for everyone's good? Has that ever happened to you? When and with what consequences? How did Naomi, who knew Yahweh, help Ruth, possibly a stranger to Yahweh, recognize God's gracious hand in her life? Who has helped you in this respect? However, how aware was Naomi of how Yahweh was at work in her own life? Why do the patterns of other people's lives seem clearer than those of one's own life? In what ways can you identify with Naomi here?
5. How were the poor to be cared for in Israel's harvests (Lv 19:9f; 23:22; Dt 24:19-22)? How well did this work out for the poverty stricken Naomi and Ruth (2:14-18)? What are the customary and legal provisions for the poor in your society? How should they be improved? How should a Christian family be involved (1 Ti 5:8)? What responsibility does the Christian church have in caring for the poor (Mt 25:31-46; Ga 2:10; Ac 2:44f; 4:32-34; 11:27-30; 24:17; Ja 2:15f; 1 Jn 3:17)? Which poor? How have you helped, and/or been helped in your poverty? Who has shown you special care somewhat like Boaz did to Ruth?

1. In light of the kinsmen laws of Moses (Lv 25:23-28; Dt 25:5-10), what was Naomi advising Ruth to do? In spite of being startled awake by finding Ruth at his feet when he stirred in the middle of the night how does Boaz handle her abrupt, symbolic invitation for a marriage proposal (3:9; Ek 16:8)? What indicates that Boaz had already been motivated to look into his possible obligations and had weighed everyone's opinions carefully? What does all of this reveal about Boaz's character and his relationship with Yahweh?
2. How does Boaz deal very carefully with an attractive young woman coming to him with great emotional, social and economic needs? How do you respond to such direct or indirect appeals? Why? How does Boaz care for Ruth's best interests? To what extent do you ask other Christians to become personally involved in meeting your emotional, social or economic needs? Why? What special obligations do Christians have to one another here (Ga 2:10; 6:2, 5)?
3. What careful psychological and legal strategies does Boaz employ in dealing with the closer relative with respect to the land and to Ruth? Why is all of this strategy very wise, even if the ultimate arrangements are Yahweh's will? Might Jesus have had situations like this in mind in Mt 10:16?
4. How do both Naomi's and Ruth's life situations differ at the beginning and end of the story? How has Yahweh cared for a whole range of their needs? In what areas do you have needs? Do you tell God about them? Do you tell fellow Christians? Why? Why not? With what results? How has God cared for you already over the years? What about recently? What needs are you still praying about?
5. How did Boaz's new family connections with Moab through Ruth prove very helpful for their grandchildren, David's parents, much later on (1 S 22:3f)? Have you ever experienced a quite unexpected instance of divine providence? When? How thankful were you? Are you still? Why?

INTRODUCTION TO 1 & 2 SAMUEL.

The two books of Samuel together formed a single book of Samuel in the Former Prophets section of the Hebrew Scriptures, and were the first two of four Books of the Kingdoms, comprising 1 Samuel through 2 Kings, in the 3rd century Septuagint [LXX] Greek translation. The books of Samuel deal with the development of the nation of Israel from the disintegrated tribal confederacy under the judges to the established monarchy under David, plus an account of David's reign. The story seems to have been told from the perspective of the prophets of Yahweh.

The main religious theme is that Israel is the people of Yahweh, their only true Ruler. First, they are rebuked for their decadence and sin by the last judge, Samuel, who under Yahweh's guidance reluctantly accedes to the peoples' demand for a king like that of the surrounding nations. Then, Saul, the sort of king the people wanted, is anointed at Yahweh's command, but his self-willed leadership proves to be a danger to the nation. Finally, David is appointed and leads the people with the aim of pursuing God's will. Yet at the height of his power David too falls into serious sin, and he, his family and the nation suffer the moral consequences.

ANALYSIS OF 1 SAMUEL.

1-6	Eli's high priesthood and its failure.
1	Samuel's birth.
2:1-10	Hannah's song.
2:11-36	Corruption of Eli's sons.
3	Samuel's call.
4-6	The ark narrative.
7-12	Samuel's judgeship.
7	Samuel's judging and the defeat of the Philistines.
8	Samuel's warning about the disadvantages of monarchy.
9-11	The process of choosing Saul to be king.
12	Samuel's farewell discourse.
13-31	Saul's tragic reign.
13-14	Saul's war against the Philistines.
15	Yahweh's rejection of Saul as king.
16:1-13	Samuel's anointing of David to be king.
16:14-23	David's introduction to Saul.
17	David's defeat of Goliath.
18-20	David's relationships with Saul and with Saul's family.
21-27	David on the run as an outlaw pursued by Saul.
28	Saul consults the witch of Endor.
29-30	David discharged by the Philistines and campaigns in the south.
31	Defeat, death and burial of Saul.

ANALYSIS OF 2 SAMUEL.

- 1-5 David consolidates his rule in Hebron and takes Jerusalem from the Jebusites.
 - 1 David's lament over Saul and Jonathan.
 - 2:1-11 David's anointing as king of Judah in Hebron.
 - 2:12-4:12 Wars with Ishbaal and Abner who lead Israel
 - 5:1-5 David anointed king of Israel.
 - 5:6-25 Jerusalem captured and Philistines defeated.
- 6-10 David's early reign in Jerusalem
 - 6 The ark moved to Jerusalem.
 - 7 Nathan's oracle and David's prayer in response.
 - 8 David's wars and officials.
 - 9 David's loyalty to Saul's last son, Mephibosheth.
 - 10 Wars with Arameans.
- 11-20 David's great sin and his subsequent family problems.
 - 11-12 David's affair with Bathsheba and its immediate tragic consequences.
 - 13:1-37 Ammon's rape of Tamar and his execution by Absalom.
 - 13:38-20:3 Absalom's revolt.
 - 20:4-26 Sheba's revolt.
- 21-24 Six miscellaneous appendices on David's life and reign.
 - 21:1-14 The Gibeonite's revenge.
 - 21:15-22. Exploits of David's men.
 - 22 A Psalm of David
 - 23:1-7 David's last words.
 - 23:8-39 David's warriors.
 - 24 David's census and the ensuing plague.

Thus, the first two major sections of 1 Samuel deal with the conclusion of the era of the judges, while the balance of the two books deal with the beginning of the era of the united monarchy [Trail IV], which continues to be covered for Solomon's reign in 1 Kings.

1. Why was Hannah so distressed? How did her family and Eli exacerbate it? What distresses you? How do others sometimes make matters worse, even when they seem to mean well? Do you sometimes also do that with others' feelings? How can this be avoided? How so?
2. How well did Elkanah succeed in comforting his wife? Why? How and why did Hannah find some immediate relief (Ps 142; 1 P 2:23; 4:19) and eventually complete satisfaction (Mk 11:24; 1 Jn 5:15)? What can you learn from this for yourself? Have you ever tried to bargain with Yahweh? Even with a vow? With what result?
3. How pastorally sensitive was Eli at first? How might he be somewhat excused? How well did he handle his mistake? How quickly do you recognize your mistakes? How quickly and well do you handle them? How well do you change your treatment of others once you've recognized that you've misjudged them? How did Eli's blessing help Hannah? On what grounds can you offer blessings to others?
4. In what ways does Hannah's thanksgiving prayer (2:1-10) compare to Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55)? What themes do they have in common? In what aspects does Hannah's prayer differ? What emotions are expressed in each one? In what ways is Yahweh's gracious sovereignty most relevant to you? When might you feel like offering a similar prayer? Could your prayer also be employed liturgically in Christian churches?
5. How might the use of the verb translated "remember" in 1:11 and "remembered" in v. 19 and the other verb translated "visited" in 2:21 here in Hannah's story and prayer, help you understand the meaning of the very same two verbs in Ps 8:4's exclamation over the great, sovereign and creator Yahweh's astounding relationship to weak humanity and its individual human beings? As you read aloud Ps 8 as a thanksgiving prayer of praise with these same verbal meanings in mind in v. 4, how does the thrust of the whole psalm make you think and feel about (a) Yahweh's amazing special relationship to all humanity and (b) the unique responsible vocation he shares with each individual human person, including you?

1. What was wrong with a whole range of actions of Eli's two priestly sons? How appropriate was the judgement on them and Eli's whole line of priests (2:30-36; 3:13f)? What might leaders of God's people today learn from this about the importance of their family life (1 Ti 3:4f; Tt 1:6)? Why did Eli's sons pay so little attention to him and his words (2:12f, 22-25, 29; 3:13)? How well can you identify with him and/or them in this circumstance?
2. How did Yahweh reward Hannah's faith and faithfulness? How have you witnessed this in your life too?
3. For a Christian, what is the answer to Eli's rhetorical question (2:25) to his wayward sons (1 Ti 2:5)? Was Eli really correct in saying that there are sins that are only against fellow human beings, and not also against Yahweh? For example? Would the sins of Eli's sons qualify? Why?
4. Does 2:30 indicate that sometimes Yahweh breaks his promises? Why (2:35f, 3:20f; 4:21)? How important is the principle cited here? Does it apply generally, even to Christians? Why? What does that mean to you?
5. How could 2:35 easily be interpreted later as a prophecy of a coming priestly Messiah? How does it fit Jesus (He 2:17-3:1)? How well does it also fit Samuel himself (3:1, 19-21; 8:1-3)? What about Zadock the priest whose priestly line proved faithful to David, Solomon and their royal descendants until at least the Exile (Ek 40:4; 43:19; 44:15, 48:11)? Can prophecies have more than one valid interpretation (Is 7:14-20; 8:5-8, 10; Mt 1:21-23)? Why?

1. How do the times of Samuel (3:1, 19, 21) and John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-6; Mk 1:4f; Lk 3:2f; Jn 1:6-8) compare with respect to the need of God's people for a fresh word from Yahweh? How important is the human mediation of God's word in any age and society, including your own (Ro 10:14f)? What role can you play in disseminating God's contemporary word?
2. What was the early spiritual development of Samuel, in spite of the adverse religious and family life context in Shiloh? How life changing for Samuel was his experience of hearing Yahweh's voice? Why did he need help to know what was happening (Ac 8:30-35)? Why do you think Eli could help Samuel recognize that it was Yahweh's voice, but not help his own sons come to know God? Who helps you recognize when Yahweh is speaking to you? What do you do with what Yahweh then says to you? Why?
3. How does the attitude of the Israelites to the ark of Yahweh's covenant help answer their "Why?" question in 4:3? How much did they differ from the polytheistic and superstitious Philistines in their attitude to Yahweh and his shrine's most sacred furnishing? What progress have Christians made in this matter over three millennia later (Jr 7:1-15; Mt 21:13)? How might Ps 78:58-64 help us understand Yahweh's own answer to the same "Why?" question?
4. How might the Israelites and the Philistines have interpreted the amazing results of the second battle compared with those of the first one?
5. Why do you think Eli was worried about the fate of the ark, when the Israelites and the Philistines were so confident in its holy potency? Was his daughter-in-law's interpretation of what had happened correct? Why? For what reasons might some Christians today be tempted to nickname their own church "Ichabod" [Hebrew = "inglorious"]? Could they possibly be right? Why/ why not?

1. What about the theme of Is 40:18-26 and Jr 10:1-16 might the Israelites and even the Philistines have been able to grasp through the incidents in ch. 5? How different is Yahweh from all other gods? What does that mean to you? What difference does it make to your worship and lifestyle?
2. How does this story demonstrate how gracious Yahweh can be in accommodating his self-revelation to naïve human minds, even to those of pagan peoples and their religious officials (Ac 14:16f, 17:30)? Does Yahweh, however, encourage his own people to employ similar very limited means of revelation (Ex 17:7; Dt 6:16; Mt 4:7; Lu 12:48)? Why? What are his normal methods of self-revelation to his own people? How do you distinguish Yahweh's actions from chance happenings (6:9)? Should Christians really believe in coincidences chance happening?
3. To what extent does He 12:28f help you understand why so many Israelites in Beth Shemesh were punished (6:19f)? How much did the Levites (Js 21:16) of Beth Shemesh in Judah understand? Why do you think the Israelites called upon their neighbours the pagan Gibeonites / Hivites of Kiriath-jearim (Js 9:3-27), to come and get the holy Ark? What better understanding of Yahweh's holiness did these pagans seem to have? What is your understanding of Yahweh's terrible holiness (Ez 3:20; Is 6:5; Rv 20:11)? How does his holiness impact your attitudes, worship and actions?
4. Why do you think Yahweh allowed Eleazar to care for his Ark for 20 years without mishap (7:10f)? Given the fact that Eleazar is a common Jewish name meaning "God has helped", must he have been a practicing Jew living in a predominantly Hivite town? Why? ["El" is the common name for God / god, even Yahweh, but also the proper name of the highest male god in the Canaanite pantheon]
5. Why do you think that the Israelites themselves were content to leave the ark amongst pagans for 20 years? What might their lamenting after Yahweh have involved, but also not have involved? Can you think of any parallels in your own or your congregation's Christian life?

1. How long did Samuel have to wait in his career as a judge in Israel for the people to heed his call to them to worship and serve Yahweh alone and faithfully? How many Christian leaders today have a similar response time? What conditions did Samuel place upon Israel's repentance? Why (Ps 78:56-64)? In what ways did Samuel carry out his ministry as a judge? Despite his great ministry, why did Samuel fail as a father? What might the regular exercise of his ministry have had to do with this failure? How is this relevant to Christian leaders today (1 Ti 3:41, 12; Tt 1:5f; Cl 3:21; Ep 6:4)?
2. Why do you think so many Christian churches over the years have been named "Ebenezer" [Hebrew = "Stone of help"] (7:12)? Why might some churches have been even named "Shiloh" (1:3; Jr 7:12-14; Ps 78:60), but never officially "Ichabod" [Hebrew = "inglorious"] (4:21)?
3. To what extent does fear play a major role in the lives, decisions and destinies of individuals and nations then and now (7:10)? What does Yahweh have to do with this?
4. What was wrong with the Israelites' request for a king (Dt 7:14f)? How do the positive and negative features of monarchy in that day (Dt 17:16-20) compare to those of today's constitutional monarchy? Were hereditary judges to be preferred to a dynasty of kings (8:1-5; Ju 8:22f, 30f; 9:1-6)? How did Samuel think that the sovereignty of Yahweh himself was being questioned in Israel's demand for a king (8:7; 10:18f; 12:12, 19)? How do you yourself acknowledge Yahweh's political and economic as well as his spiritual sovereignty/ lordship today (Dn 2:21; 4:17; Jn 19:11; Ro 13:1-7; 1 P 13-17; 1 Ti:1-5)? Does calling Yahweh "LORD" really facilitate this? How so? How does your Christian congregation, in its practice as well as its theology, take Yahweh's universal sovereignty seriously? How does your congregation help you to do so too?
5. To what extent do Christian churches and congregations today tend to take their patterns of governance from their surrounding culture (8:20)? How appropriate is this human tendency for Christians and their churches (Ro 12:2; Ep 1:22f; 4:15)? What can be done about countering this?

1. What are the many positive characteristics of Saul that made him an attractive popular candidate for Israel's kingship? How many of these same characteristics continue to make some people more likely to be chosen leaders today? How true is this in and by Christian churches? What other characteristics are equally if not more important for choosing Christian leaders (Ac 6:3; 1 Ti 3:1-12; Tt 1:5-9)? How relevant are these same criteria for Christians when choosing appropriate secular leaders, especially those who claim to be Christians or who specially appeal for Christian support?
2. What were the four stages in Saul's becoming king of Israel (9:1-11:15)? Why were they all necessary for a first legitimate king of Israel, given that the memory of the exploits and character of the usurper king Abimelech (Ju 8 & 9) must have been still fresh in many minds? To what extent are similar stages of a process appropriate in selecting and commissioning Christian leaders today? How so?
3. What encouragement may we take from the fact that the apparently free movements of young men and women, asses and God's prophet are employed by Yahweh to accomplish his good purposes? How could you illustrate the same truth from your own Christian experiences? How have these immanent operations of God affected you? Do you feel you have been manipulated or coerced? Why?
4. How do you think the three signs given to Saul (10:1-9) would (a) give him assurance that Samuel's words were true, (b) show that God fully equips all those whom he calls to serve him in a special role and (c) reveal that Yahweh's foreknowledge, sovereignty and guidance operate efficiently without any apparent manipulation of his subjects?
5. What do you make of the distinction between the two acts of God in Saul recorded in 10:9f? What parallels might there have been for the earliest Christians (Jn 20:22; Ac 1:8; 2:14)? What about Christians today? What about you?

1. To what extent do Saul's and our fulfillment of our respective divine callings depend upon the work of Yahweh's Holy Spirit in and through our lives (10:6, 10; 11:6, 13; 1 Co 12:4-13)? How was Saul himself involved? How are we too? Could God's ministry/ service, therefore, correctly be called a DIVINE-human partnership/ co-operation/ working together/ fellowship (1 Co 3:9; 2 Co 6:1)? Why? And if so, who is the senior partner? Whose values and purposes are to be served? How well did Saul know and acknowledge this at this very early stage of his reign (11:13)?
2. What does Saul's amnesties for his early detractors (10:27; 11:12f) say about his vocational confidence at this stage? Why?
3. How many of the leaders of your country or church can truly make a claim like Samuel's about his stewardship in leadership (12:3-5)? Could you in your several spheres of Christian influence/ ministry make such a claim and have it confirmed by those most affected by your service? How so?
4. How similar and different would the covenant relationship of Israel with their true Sovereign, Yahweh, be under the new monarchical regime, in comparison to what it had been under the leadership of Moses and the charismatic judges? What conditions still obtained (12:14f, 24f)? How is this also relevant to Christians and our congregations?
5. Why was the thunder and rain during the wheat harvest a terrifying sign for the many Israelites who were farmers? Who would be most affected in their agricultural economy? What was it meant to prove? What did it accomplish? Why was Samuel's great affirmation of Yahweh's continuing gracious commitment to his covenant people so important (12:22)? Why did that, however, not exempt them from judgement (He 12:7-11)? What can you learn from this compatibility of grace and judgement (He 12:4-11)?
6. What two important ministries did Samuel commit himself to continue to exercise even while a king ruled? How vital are these ministries still today for Christians, no matter what type or quality of secular government we live under? How so (1Ti 2:1-6)? How often do we do this personally, not just liturgically in the congregations regular "prayers of the people"?

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Do not forget to write up your answer to the comprehensive question based on your notes.