

# Mountain and Plain

- settlement in the land and the era of the shophet

## JOSHUA AND SETTLEMENT

### A significant individual

#### □ Standing at the 'bridge'

Joshua stands at the turning point in Israel's history; behind him lay the years of 'wandering' motivated by God's 'promise', ahead lies 'settlement' and the beginnings of 'fulfillment'. He forms the 'bridge' between the two.

#### □ A person of proven worth

Joshua's name means 'God saves' (the same name that Jesus took.) He did not suddenly spring into the limelight; a young person at the time of the Exodus he became Moses' constant companion and intimate friend, never far from his side. He was faithful during the times of rebellion. He took guard over the 'Tent of Meeting'. He is said to have been 'full of the spirit of wisdom' through the laying on of hands. Yet he is not another Moses. He continues the work but he is a different person. It is interesting to compare his relationship to Moses with that of Elisha to Elijah, yet he and Elisha are not the same!

#### □ Agent of the settlement

Joshua's work begins at Jordan. He becomes the instrument of God's mighty works, and agent of the Conquest. He is the 'court of appeal' for tribal grievances, and in this is a forerunner to the 'judges'. Under his hand the community is structured in settled circumstances, and the Covenant is reaffirmed at Shechem.

### The Israelite settlement

#### □ An act of God

The first 12 chapters of Joshua tell this story. But what is taking place?

- The wickedness of the Canaanite nations is being judged;
- The promises to the Patriarchs are being fulfilled.

While we may have emotional and moral questions there is one thing of which we can be certain, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25).<sup>1</sup>

#### □ Three dramatic campaigns

The Bible shows Canaan falling to Israel in three dramatic military campaigns:

- Foothold across Jordan (Jericho) and then unresisted movement up as far as Shechem;
- Movement into central and Southern Canaan (tricked by the Gibeonites, the Jebusite city of Jerusalem untouched);
- Into the northern hill country (valley of Jezreel, into Galilee).

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<sup>1</sup> These issue will be dealt with in much more detail in 'Peace and Power' sessions



## □ The Paradox

The Bible seems to make two conflicting statements about the conquest:

- That 'the whole land had rest from war' (Josh 11:23);
- 'Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them' (Jg 1:1).

The implications are that the Settlement was significant but not complete. Israel held Canaan in her power but pockets of resistance remained, ever to be a threat in the future.

## SETTLEMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

### Archaeological issues

A major problem for historians of Israel's settlement in Canaan is the lack of clear, unambiguous archeological evidence for dating the event in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC (the end of the Late Bronze Age). The site that would be expected to show the clearest evidence of Israel's invasion is Jericho. However, the excavation of Jericho has shown no trace of a city there in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. The city walls that at one time were seen as evidence for Joshua's attack have been dated to a much earlier date. In fact it had been frequently destroyed and rebuilt many times before the time of Joshua.

The difficulty of finding archeological evidence for the Settlement has led some scholars to recast the events in terms of a gradual infiltration of Canaan by nomadic herdsmen occurring over several generations. Others have envisaged the events that are biblically presented as a 'conquest' more as a revolt of inhabitants in the land rather than of invaders from outside. However, English Egyptologist David Rohl contends that there *is* archeological evidence for the destruction of Jericho (and the other cities in the biblical narrative) by Joshua but only if the events took place at a much earlier date (the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age rather than the Late Bronze Age). Moving the events of the Exodus and Settlement from the Egyptian 19th Dynasty to the 13th Dynasty and Hyksos period resolves some problems but creates others. For this reason most Egyptologists and academics are sceptical of this 'New Chronology' but research is ongoing and the debate is still alive.

Although there may be some 'legendary' elements in the biblical story, there seems to be no reason why we can't accept the overall picture painted by the narrative. The events include the destruction of only a few cities. "A desolate land with its towns in ruins would be of little benefit to the Israelites, just emerging from 40 years of semi-Nomadic life. What had to be destroyed were the pagan shrines of the Canaanites with their cultic paraphernalia...If the biblical record is to be believed, then, we shall not expect to find much physical evidence of the Israelite conquest. The change in ownership probably left few recognizable marks except in the religious sphere" (Alan Millard).<sup>2</sup>

## SETTLEMENT AND MORAL DILEMMAS

### Options

- Do we dismiss the Hebrew Scriptures because of its attitude to settlement and war?
- Are we speaking of a different God in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament?
- Are we asking the wrong question? If so, what question should we be asking?

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<sup>2</sup> Millard, Alan, 'Cities of the Conquest' in *The Lion Handbook of the Bible*, (Lion: 2002), p.228



## Read

‘However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them - the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites - as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.’

(Deut 20:16-18 NIV)

What do we learn from this text? What do we infer?

- Covenantal relationship with Yahweh
- Peaceful life in the land
- Israel’s survival
- Context of the time
- Difference between Israel’s laws and Israel’s practice
- How we are to live?
- Vision of *shalom*
- Sovereignty of God
- War in our society today

Where does Jesus fit with this picture?

## SETTLEMENT AND CRISIS

### Faith wrestles with culture

#### □ Tribal Confederacy

As Israel begins to settle down on the soil of Canaan and take her inheritance as 'the people of God' among 'the nations', the struggle between 'faith' and 'culture' began.

As a community Israel functioned in a 'tribal Confederacy', with each of her twelve tribes having independent leadership but being united and bound together on the basis of the Covenant.

#### □ God of History - God of Nature

The settlement changed the whole pace of Israel's life. Up until then Yahweh had proved to be the 'God of History', fulfilling promises to them through the drama of the Exodus and Settlement. Suddenly the momentum changed; they settled, put down roots, their daily needs began to change with a dependence upon the cycles of the seasons and the rhythms of nature, for seedtime and harvest, which they had not needed before. Yahweh and proved to be the 'God of History', the question was, “Did God hold the same power over the cycles of Nature?” “Could Yahweh win against the pagan gods who did claim to control them?”

#### □ Survival

Israel's struggle was on several fronts; against oppressors, against the forces of nature, and against the spiritual temptations from Canaanite religion in the face of the purity of Yahweh's covenant.

### Canaanite religion



## □ Fertility nature religion

The Bible describes Canaanite religion as 'the worship of Baals and Ashtaroth' (Jg. 2:13).

Like many fertility religions it believed the earth was the sphere of divine powers and to ensure the fertility of crops and cattle people must move in harmony with these forces and assist the cosmic rhythms. These powers were believed to be male and female with life depending on the cosmic union of the two.

The seasons were seen as the cycle of life; autumn and winter (death), spring (resurrection) and summer (fruitfulness). Elaborate myths were developed to explain these forces in which the sexual interaction between gods and goddesses became vital to life and fertility. These deities themselves were seen also as caught up in the huge drama of life and death themselves.

## □ Canaanite pantheon

The Canaanite pantheon was complex:

- The supreme Canaanite deity was 'El' (the god), an obscure high god called 'Father of humanity', 'Father of Years'; Asherah was his consort
- The active male god was 'Baal' (lit. lord, owner), son of El and Asherah; the rain and storm god, lord of vegetation and the earth
- The female side of the pantheon was complex, but there were three main goddesses; 'Asherah' (consort of El, mother of Baal), 'Ashtarte' (goddess of fertility), 'Anath' (a goddess of violent sexual passion and sadistic brutality);
- 'Mot' (representing death).

Each autumn Mot kills Baal and carries him to the underworld, while the gods mourn (winter). Anath, filled with passion for her lover, seeks out and kills Mot, bringing about Baal's resurrection (spring). With the uniting of the lovers the earth is once again filled with virility and fruitfulness (summer).

## □ Continuing struggle

The Canaanites believed they must do everything they could to assist these forces; if they did not, life itself would cease. Therefore the temple did not become merely a place of worship, but the centre for 'sacred prostitution' (male and female); with men and women taking the roles of Baal and Ashtarte. Lives were therefore brought to the lowest levels of degradation, and presented a major temptation to the children of Israel and evil constantly challenged by the prophets as we shall see.

## **SAMUEL AND SHOPHET**

### **The Philistines**

#### □ The Sea People

Just prior to the time of the Exodus, a huge population upheaval took place in the Aegean Islands, due to their being invaded by Southern European tribes. Many of these displaced peoples moved by land and sea via Crete and Cyprus, into the coastlands of Egypt and Canaan.



## □ **Formidable people**

The Egyptians called the new migrants 'the Sea People'; they included numerous groups among who were the 'Philistines' (destined to give the land of 'Canaan' the name 'Palestine'). The Egyptians managed to contain the Philistine flood within the southern coast lands of Canaan, and by the time Joshua was an old man they had established themselves in the five cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. They engaged in sea trade (note their god 'Dagon' was represented as a fish). They also gained a monopoly in the iron trade, which they probably learned from the Hittites.

They are to be a major threat to the Israelites, having every intention of turning Canaan into a Philistine empire.

## **Cycles of rebellion and return**

### □ **Discovering Covenant afresh**

Israel's crisis of faith lay in the fact that it is vital for each generation to rediscover for themselves the meaning of the Covenant and act in faithfulness to it. It cannot be passed from parent to child like property or wealth. The Covenant is eternal but must be born afresh in each generation.

### □ **Reoccurring pattern**

Throughout the period of the Judges we repeatedly hear of a new generation of Israel 'who did not know Yahweh or the work he had done in Israel' (Jg 2:10). This is a recurring pattern that sets a sad rhythm to the period, (and in fact throughout Salvation History into our own times):

- The people forsook Yahweh and served other gods;
- In anger Yahweh delivered them into the hands of their enemies;
- In affliction the people cried to God and he sent a 'judge' to deliver them and give them peace;
- When the 'judge' died the people forsook Yahweh again and they became prey to their enemies once more.

The principle is clear. 'Obedience means life, disobedience means death'. However, God is always ready to forgive a penitent people and redress their grievances.

## **The *Shophet***

### □ **'One who obtains right for the people'**

Our English word 'judge' is a poor translation of the Hebrew *shophet*. They were leaders who obtained 'right' for their people, either by taking military action or by judging legal disputes. So a *shophet* is a 'ruler' rather than a 'judge' but not a 'king'. They grew out of the concept of 'eldership' developed in the wilderness. They are a 'military champion' and 'deliverer' but also an 'internal arbitrator'.

### □ **Charismatic person**

The *shophet* had 'charismatic' anointing; 'the spirit of the Lord clothed himself in Gideon' (Jg 6:34), and the same with the others. Being a member of one of the more important



families also seems to have been a requirement, they were not raised from the mass of the people by inspiration alone.

#### □ **'Ruler' not a 'king'**

The *shophet* seems to have been a local or national hero who continued to rule after their specific acts of deliverance, but they did not leave dynasties as a king would have done. Gideon, with his plurality of wives, is as close as we get to kingship during this period though he shuns the title. Very rarely did one judge influence the whole of Israel, and there appears to have been considerable overlap between some of them. However, the chronology of the Judges is a complex subject.

#### □ **Exploits of the *shophet***

The period of Israel's settlement of Canaan coincided with a period of political weakness in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. So while the 'superpowers' of the day did not pose a threat, her immediate neighbours did, and it was in response to this that the Judges ministered.

#### ▪ **Attacks from trans-Jordan**

- In c. 1200 BC. Cushan (east Syria/north Iraq) attacked Israel; Othniel repelled them.
- In c. 1170 BC. Moab attacked Israel [took Jericho]; Ehud delivered them.
- In c. 1070 BC. (towards the end of the period of the Judges) the Ammorites attacked Israel; deliverance came from Jephthah, and probably Ibzan, Elon and Abdon.

#### ▪ **Attacks from Canaanite city-states**

- In about 1125 BC. a coalition of Canaanite city-states, led by Sisera, attacked Israel; Barak, spurred on by Deborah, defeated them at Megiddo (a strategic area).

#### ▪ **Attacks from the Arabian desert**

- In c. 1100 BC. Midianite Bedouin made wild and surprise attacks on the encampments and villages of southern Israel. This was made possible with the camel as a new, fast and effective military weapon. The Israelites were forced to live in caves and were in danger of losing everything they had gained in the Conquest. The deliverer was Gideon, whose minute guerrilla band of 300 showed beyond question 'the battle is Yahweh's alone'.
- Two other judges that appear to have acted in response to the crisis from the Arabian desert are Tola of Issachar and Jair of Gilead.

#### ▪ **Threats from the Philistines**

- In c. 1150 BC. Shamgar was used to deliver Israel by killing some 600 Philistines with an ox-goad (setting a precedent for the future!).
- In c. 1070 BC. near the end of the Judges period and probably overlapping with Jephthah and the others, we have Samson, the most famous judge of all. He has been described as, 'that lusty Israelite Tarzan with a fatal weakness for women!' He is a 'charismatic individual' rather than a military leader. God is sovereignly able to use Samson's personal pursuit of passion to inflict a strong check on the Philistines at a time when they could have done irreparable harm to Israel. A more permanent solution would have to come later.



## □ **Covenant ideal**

Christians often dismiss the period of the *shophet* and the 'tribal confederacy' as being transient and insignificant as one hastens past from the Exodus to the rise of the Monarchy. This is a sad misunderstanding. The 'tribal confederacy' depended for its existence upon having its roots deeply planted into the Covenant backed up by strong 'charismatic' leadership at all levels of society. It unquestionably represents an ideal of Covenant life under Yahweh's rule. It blends 'unity' with 'diversity'; 'form' and 'freedom'; 'covenant' with 'charisma'.

While it was 'fragile' in structure this was only because it demanded that each generation embrace the Covenant afresh for itself; a principle that has never been revoked. As we shall see, Samuel's resistance to establishing a 'monarchy' strongly indicates that Israel was moving away from God's ideal structure for their nation; events only prove this to be the case. Broad observation would seem to suggest that from the whole sweep of Salvation History three eras are distinctively 'charismatic'; Israel as a tribal confederacy under the Judges, the early Christian Community after Pentecost, and the Church in the 20th Century. The parallels between these three eras are most interesting.

## **Samuel**

### □ **Tribal confederacy crumbles**

The twelve-fold 'tribal confederacy' depended for its existence upon deep roots into the covenant and upon strong leadership at all levels of society. It represented an important, in fact ideal, aspect of life under Yahweh's rule. It lasted for over 200 years, but the period of the judges shows what a fragile structure it was. We do not know how long it could have continued, but the pressures of the Philistine crisis brought fundamental changes.

### □ **Philistine crisis**

Having established their foothold in Canaan, the Philistines embarked upon a programme of conquest. They were formidable fighters, with a military tradition, disciplined soldiers, chariots and iron-making skills that gave them a technological advantage in weapons. While they did not have a central government they had an authority structure that enabled them to act as a single unit against Israel. The Philistines were a threat to Israel in her totality; the fragmented, ill-equipped 'people of Yahweh' stood little chance against them in open battle.

The Philistines attacked Israel at Aphek (on the coastal plain); desperate for victory the Israelites brought the Ark, symbol of God's presence, from Shiloh (1Sam 4:3). The result was defeat and humiliation for Israel. Eli's sons were killed, the Ark they carried was captured by the Philistines. On hearing the news Eli took a seizure, fell, broke his neck and died. His daughter-in-law, giving birth at the fateful hour, called her son *Ichabod* ('the glory of the Lord has departed'), declaring the mood and emotion of the time.

The Philistines occupied the land. They built garrisons in all strategic places and forced Israel to become dependent upon them. While Israel probably had some freedom in the hills to carry out resistance fighting, she could not marshal any significant force against her oppressor.



## □ Samuel - person for the hour

Above all others, Samuel was the guiding light for the nation during these dark days. Under his hand the nation moved through a period of traumatic transition:

- He was the greatest spiritual leader since Moses; both prophet and judge;
- He was, like Joshua, a 'bridge' between two eras; from judges to the monarchy;
- In him 'tribal confederacy' gives way to 'centralised monarchy';
- In him ecstatic prophetic ministry overshadows the priestly hierarchy.

Samuel lays the social-political foundations that will make Israel, under David and Solomon, a nation without parallel in its day. Under God, he both raises up kings and casts them down.

## □ Commitment to covenant

The story of Samuel's youth is well known; he is the 'promise-child' of a childless Ephraimite couple, fostered at the central sanctuary of Shiloh under the care of the aging High Priest Eli. Despite the corruption of both the nation and the household in which he grew, he gained the respect of all who knew him (1 Sam 2:21-26).

Samuel's age at the time of the fall of Shiloh to the Philistines is unknown. He probably returned to Ramah, the place of his family origins. We know nothing of his activities during these days of oppression, but we can be certain that he worked ceaselessly to keep the heart of the nation alive. From what we know of his activity in later years we can imagine him moving from sanctuary to sanctuary encouraging the people in the covenant and administering its law.

Suddenly the time was right. Samuel called the nation to repentance and covenant renewal at Mizpah (1Sam 7:12-14), which led to their routing the Philistines by a direct act of God. So while the Philistine stranglehold was broken, final victory would have to wait until the time of David.

## □ King like the nations

While Samuel is the spiritual Colossus of his time, his sons did not display his integrity. Fearing for the future, the elders of Israel asked for 'a king like the nations' (i.e. after the Canaanite pattern). But Yahweh is the king and Samuel is merely God's servant. The great man feels rejected, though God tells him that it is he, not Samuel, who is being spurned. While the people lack faith in Yahweh it is within God's purposes to give them the desires of their heart. Samuel is commanded to anoint a king.

National leadership may pass to Saul but spiritual leadership remains with Samuel. It is to him that all turn for guidance; he spoke from the heart of God. He rebukes Saul. It is he that anoints David as the next ruler. Samuel is the 'father-figure' of Saul's life; loving and guiding. Even after his death Samuel is the one Saul turns to on the fateful eve of the battle of Gilboa. When Samuel was buried at Ramah a new era dawned, but something of Israel's covenant past was also gone.

## □ The priest

Samuel was not of priestly stock but his upbringing and education at Shiloh was thoroughly priestly. Throughout his ministry we see him leading either individuals, or the nation as a whole, in sacrifice. However, while Samuel functions as a priest to the nation he is nonetheless different from that which preceded him:

- He turns the priesthood from its corruptions back to the foundation and original intentions of Yahweh's covenant;
- His attitude towards sacrifice has the full spirit of the 8th-century prophets who will follow him in the distant future; 'to obey is better than to sacrifice, to listen than the fat of rams' (1Sam 15:22-23; cf. Amos 5:21-27; Micah 6:6-8);
- He emphasises 'spirit' rather than 'ceremony' and 'institution'; he sees the ecstatic prophet is as important as the priest; in fact from this time on the two will always stand in tension with each other;
- He sees the local shrine playing an important role alongside the central sanctuary.

## □ The prophet

Moses may be the prophet par excellence, but Scripture also gives an important place to Samuel's prophetic ministry:

- As a youth he brings the stern message about the imminent fall of Eli's house;
- In a day when prophetic 'word' and 'vision' were rare, his gift brought national recognition;
- When Saul meets him he is called a 'seer', one with clairvoyant power to answer vexing questions;
- He works closely ('head over') the new phenomenon in Israel, the travelling bands of ecstatic prophets (1Sam 11:5-13; 19:20), bringing the spirit of the covenant to the people once more; they set the precedent for the 'schools of the prophets' of Elijah–Elisha's time;
- With Samuel the prophetic spirit does not simply blossom anew, but he in fact sets the scene for it to become a 'corner stone' of Israel's future development.

## □ The *shopet*

Samuel is the last and greatest of the *shopet* (Acts 13:20). Yet he is different in not being a military 'saviour' (warrior); though at his command the Philistines were routed and he personally executed the Amalekite King Agag (1Sam 15:32-33). Like Deborah, Samuel is 'judge' in administering covenant law; moving in an annual circuit between Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah (1Sam 7:15-17).

## Questions and Reflections

1. There are two significant biblical 'Joshua's'; Joshua son of Nun and Joshua son of Joseph (Jesus). What might be any similarities and differences between these two figures?
2. What lessons could the church today learn from the account of Hebrew faith wrestling with Canaanite culture?



3. Samuel is the last and greatest of the *shophet*. What do you think is his real significance, both in his own times and in Christian thinking today?

### Reading and Resources

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