



Aim of lesson

To see where these 4 books fit into the Old Testament history and to gain a few lessons from them.

Bible background

Joshua, Judges, Ruth and 1 Samuel

Preparation required

It would be helpful to have a Bible version with headings so that it is easier to see at a glance what is in each book.

The students' books include a set of 8 pictures which illustrate events from the books we are considering. You'll need to decide whether you are going to use them, and if so how. They could be used:

- As memory-joggers with children who are already familiar with the events of these times.
- As revision at the end of the lesson.
- As a puzzle: the students could try to put them in the right order, or to say which book records the event illustrated. This could be done at the start or end of the lesson.

From the top, the pictures are:

- Eglon, the fat king of Moab killed by Ehud (Judges 3).
- The torches and trumpets that Gideon's men used when defeating the Midianites. (Judges 7).
- Jael kills Sisera with a tent peg (Judges 5).
- The people walk around Jericho and the priests blow their trumpets (Joshua 6).
- The priests stand in the middle of the Jordan while the people cross (Joshua 3).
- Ruth gleanes in the field of Boaz (Ruth 2).
- Samson, the hairy judge (Judges 13 - 16).
- Samuel takes a flask of oil to anoint Saul (1 Samuel 10) or David (1 Samuel 16).

Outline of lesson

Start the lesson by looking at Acts 7. Explain that this is Stephen's speech and he is reminding the Jews of their history. Pick out specific verses so that the students can see that it covers the period of history so far covered in these notes. In verse 45 we are brought up to the time of Joshua which is where we are going to start today. Notice verse 6 which says the Israelites were afflicted in Egypt for 400 years. Look at the class timeline or the one in the students' books and try to establish when Joshua led the Israelites into the land.

According to the NIV Study Bible some key dates are:

BC	
2006	Jacob and Esau born
1898	Joseph sold into Egypt
1876 ¹	Jacob and family settle in Egypt
1526	Moses born
1446	Exodus
1406	Israel enters Canaan
1050	Saul becomes king
1010	David becomes king

and while there is no guarantee of their accuracy, these dates do fit in well with scripture and with other sources.

Joshua

At the end of lesson 11 we left Moses on the edge of the promised land but unable to enter. Get the students to look at Deuteronomy 34:9-12 to remind them of this and to introduce Joshua again. Ask them what they remember about Joshua.

¹ This early date for the time when Jacob and his family entered Egypt fits in with God's statement that his people would be afflicted for 400 years (Genesis 15:13, Acts 7:6-7). It assumes that the genealogy in Exodus 6:16-20 omits some generations, but it allows more time for a family of 70 people to grow to a nation of around 2 million.

Prior to this time he and Hur assisted Moses by holding up his hands when the Israelites were fighting the Amalekites. He was also (with Caleb) one of the spies who had previously been into the promised land. They should also remember that Joshua fought the battle of Jericho.

Look through the book of Joshua in a modern version, using the headings to see that the book is about the conquest of the Promised Land. As you look through you could remind the students of the battle for Ai (chapter 8); that there was still land to be conquered (chapter 13); point out that specific territory was allocated to each tribe (13-19); Caleb and Joshua both were given land of their own (14 and 19) and that the book ends with the death of Joshua.

The students' books contain a map of the tribal allocations. The territory of Benjamin is not labelled, but it is the small area around Jerusalem. The tribe of Simeon were not actually allocated territory, but lived in cities among the tribe of Judah.

If the students do the exercise in their books about 'strong and courageous' the references they should find are Deuteronomy 31:6,7,23 and Joshua 1:6,7,9,18. Once Joshua said it to the men of Israel - Joshua 10:25

Judges

The book of Judges describes a largely dark time in Israel's history, when 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 17:6 and the last verse in the book, 21:25).

Read Joshua 23:6-13 or pick out suitable verses to see Joshua's charge to the people before his death. Judges shows us what actually happened. Judges 2:6-23 sets the scene for the rest of the book. Get the students to look through these verses and pick out that after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries the people as a whole deserted God. Because of this God punished them by raising foreign nations to oppress them (2:14); when they were in great distress God raised up judges who gave them relief for a time (2:14-15) but they returned to their own ways at the death of the judge (2:19). This pattern never really stopped throughout Israel's history.

What were conditions like when the people were not worshipping God?

Judges

- 3:15 high taxes.
- 3:27 not able to live where they wanted
- 6:2 living in caves
- 6:3 crops destroyed, animals taken
- 6:11 needing to hide food so that it would not be taken
- 18:1 not all the land was conquered
- 19:10-12 Jerusalem not conquered

Ask the class to name any judge they know and to say a little about them, then get them to turn to the students' books and complete the table by writing something they find interesting about each of the judges and if known, the oppressor. For instance:

Reference	Judge	Interesting fact	Oppressor
3:7-11	Othniel	Caleb's nephew	Cushan of Mesopotamia
3:12-30	Ehud	Killed fat King Eglon with a sword	Eglon of Moab
3:31	Shamgar	Killed 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (a prod)	
4	Deborah	A woman judge	Jabin of Canaan
6-7	Gideon	Sorted the people by making them lap water	Midian
9	Abimelech	he killed his 70 brothers	
10:1-2	Tola	Judged Israel for 23 years	
10:3-5	Jair	He had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys	
10:6-18. 11	Jephthah	Offered his daughter to God	Ammon
12: 8-10	Ibsan	He had 30 sons and 30 daughters	
12:11-12	Elon	he judged Israel for 10 years	
12:13-15	Abdon	40 sons and 30 grandsons rode 70 donkeys	
13-16	Samson	Killed more people in his death than in his life	Philistines

It is interesting to reflect that the judges mentioned in Hebrews 11 are not the paragons of virtue we would expect to be mentioned alongside Abraham, Joseph or David. But it is encouraging to know that faith in God and his grace can list even such as we with those whom God wants to save.

If the students do the exercise about how many judges ruled for 40 years the references they should find are Othniel (3:11), Deborah (5:31) and Gideon (8:28). They might also see that before Samson there was trouble for 40 years (13:1) and that if we look in 1 Samuel 4:18, Eli was counted as a judge and he also judged for 40 years.

Ruth

The story of Ruth will be very well known to the class. Get them to establish that the story took place in the time of the judges (chapter 1:1) and that Naomi and Elimelech's departing to Moab was because of famine in Israel. Not surprising if the people had turned away from God.

Samuel

We are including Samuel in this lesson as his role as judge was perhaps the most significant. He judged Israel 'all the days of his life' (1 Samuel 7:15)

Get the class to outline what they know of Samuel. His birth and call as a young boy will be mostly what they will recall but encourage them to see in these stories that God had a special part for him to play in Israel's history. 1 Samuel 3:19-20 shows how respected he was and also, of course, that he was more than a judge but a prophet as well.

During Samuel's life the people asked for a king so ending the period of judges. Saul and David will be included in lesson 17 but note that Samuel died just before the death of Saul but after he had anointed David.

Relevance to our lives

You could ask the class whether there are any glimmers of hope in these books. Some things they may come up with are – Joshua's courage in leading a difficult people; the zeal and faith of the judges to stand out in faithless times, or the loyalty of Ruth once she had learnt about Naomi's God.

God has always kept for himself a loyal following even in the most difficult times. It is something we can remember when we see how people have turned away from God today, and once more most people do what is right in their own eyes. We need courage to stand by our principles.

Extension activities

- If you are interested in numbers you might like to talk about other '40's in scripture or the fact that God said 'Be strong and courageous' to Joshua 7 times
- You could ask the class what happened to Jephthah's daughter. She was a willing sacrifice or dedication. She may have become a sort of nun, her life dedicated or sacrificed to God and in the tabernacle when Samuel arrived about 57 years later, as Anna was many years later when Jesus arrived as a baby.
- If your class are not aware of Ruth's relationship to Jesus you could discuss Ruth 4:21 and point out Ruth's name in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.
- There are some interesting parallels between Israel in the times of the judges and today, apart from 'every man doing what was right in his own eyes'. The nation had returned to a land of promise (1948); they were oppressed by surrounding nations; they were taunted by the Philistines; surrounding nations vowed to wipe them out (Psalm 83:4); what of a future kingdom and temple?