

# Bible Workshop

## Developing Bible study skills

### 11. Phinehas and the book of Judges


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**T**HIS STUDY is designed to highlight a number of different aspects of Bible study, as follows:

- that Bible study is not difficult or the preserve of the intellectual
- the need to give careful attention to the text
- the importance of context
- the value of comparing Scripture with Scripture
- the value of building up a picture from various scriptures
- the value of recording and preserving information found.

#### The problem of the chronology of the period of the Judges

Developing a chronology of the book of Judges is extremely difficult. There is little data in the book or elsewhere to establish how long the period of the Judges was, or when during the period of the Judges each event in the book took place. This study will demonstrate that the events of Judges 20 and 21 took place early in the days of the Judges.

 You will need:  
Bible with marginal references  
Concordance or computerised Bible


We know that at the time of Jephthah it was 300 years after the entry into the Land under Joshua, because, in defence of the fact that Israel were in territory east of Jordan, Jephthah asks, “did he [Balak king of Moab] ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, while Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, *three hundred years?* why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?” (Judg. 11:25,26). The only other specific

comment about time and the period of the Judges is what Paul says: “And after that [the conquest and division of the Land under Joshua] He [God] gave unto them [Israel] judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet” (Acts 13:20).

It might seem quite natural to read the book of Judges as a chronological record of events that happened during the time of the Judges. But is this so? Of course, we do not use ‘feelings’ to support any claim that we make. Any observation must be supported by Scripture.

#### Phinehas and the Gibeah incident

In the record in Judges 19–21 of the issue to do with the men of Gibeah and the other tribes fighting against them, we read that, after “eighteen thousand” men of Israel died, “the children of Israel enquired of the LORD” (20:25,27). The record goes on to tell us that “Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron” was the high priest, or, more precisely, “stood before” the ark (v. 28). This information should cause us to reflect on when these events took place.

 Look in a concordance or computerised Bible, or follow up marginal references, for earlier references in Scripture to Phinehas and Eleazar

Notice that Phinehas is the grandson of Aaron. His father Eleazar became high priest at the time of the entry into the land of Canaan (Num. 20:24–28). Furthermore, we see that Phinehas, at the end of the wilderness journey, was more than a mere child, for when the children of Israel “began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab” we read that, “when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand” and killed an Israelite prince and a Midianite woman (25:1,7,8).

The book of Judges, of course, follows in time the book of Joshua. We should ask therefore, How long a period does the book of Joshua cover? This will give us some idea of the age of Phinehas at the beginning of the time of the Judges.

Joshua was 110 years old when he died (Josh. 24:29) and may have been about eighty when he entered the Land. This gives a period of about thirty years for the events covered in Joshua. We have already seen from Judges 11 that the period of the Judges must have lasted at least 300 years from the time of the entry into the Land under Joshua. So we have to conclude that the events of Judges 17–21 could not have taken place at the end of the time of the Judges. Even if Phinehas lived to the age of 100 the events we are considering could not have occurred more than about fifty years into the time of the Judges.

### A question for further investigation

Having established that the events of Judges 19–21 took place early in the time of the Judges, we should ask, Why are the events recorded at the end of the book when they recount events that took place early in the time of the Judges?

This question arises from the presumption that events should be recorded in the order in which they happened. There is no reason why this should be so. The Father is telling us what He wants us to know and nowhere claims to be writing a history book. So it is doubtless safe to conclude that the ordering of the events is part of the theme of the book of Judges and is designed to provide an insight, other than simply historical, into the purpose of God.

The answer to this question is outside the scope of this study. However, you might care to do your own research and look for place names in this section of Judges, comparing them with their occurrence in the rest of Scripture. Also you might reflect on the tribes which are mentioned by name and how they fit into the immediate events after the days of the Judges.

### Reading the Bible with care

The first and most necessary qualification if you would really make progress in your grasp of Bible teaching is that you *learn to read concentrating on the details*. Be attentive to note *what the words say* and not what you suppose that they say or would like them to say . . . This need for care in *getting your facts right* cannot be too strongly emphasised, especially to those who hope one day, in the grace of God, to be teachers of others . . . In a thousand places a careful attention to the *facts and details* of Scripture will bring a stimulating reward . . . there is far more in the Bible *on the surface* than most readers ever dreamed of. Yet how often does one scamper through four or five chapters in twenty minutes? The 'readings' have been 'done'.

Extracts from chapter 5, "Read with care", of *Exploring the Bible*, Harry Whittaker

Using a concordance or computerised Bible and/or marginal references, try to work out when the events of Judges 17–18 occurred, and also the events of the book of Ruth

Using the same method as above, you might also try to work out when during the period of the Judges the events in the book of Ruth took place, and when the events recorded in Judges 17 and 18 took place. Resolving these issues will explain why the incidents recorded in Judges 17–21, whilst recording events early in the time of the Judges, are found at the end of the book of Judges.

Carry out your own research as indicated above, using a concordance or computerised Bible and/or the marginal references in the Bible to find reasons why Judges 17–21 records events which occurred at the beginning of the Judges period.

### Conclusion

In this study we have, by simply reading the text, asking questions and following up references, established that the events of the last five chapters of Judges record events that took place early in the days of the Judges.

Record your findings as suggested below

To help you to remember this it will be valuable to mark your Bible. A note against 'Phinehas' in Judges 20:28 with a reference to Numbers 25:7 will serve as a reminder. You might also write in the margin in Judges, 'Early in the time of the Judges'. If you wish you could also note references which establish the period covered by the book of Joshua. Additionally, it might be worth highlighting "three hundred years" in Judges 11:26, as this is the only time period mentioned in the whole of the book of Judges.