

# THROUGH THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR

## MARCH 30-APRIL 3

### OLD TESTAMENT - JOSHUA & JUDGES

This week's readings finish the Book of Joshua and begin the Book of Judges. Joshua has always stood in the shadow of Moses. In comparison to the towering figure of the nation's deliverer and founding father Joshua has never received the attention he rightly deserved for the crucial role which he played in the establishment of the nation of Israel. Joshua's birth name was "*Hoshea*" (Numbers 13:8). He was the son of "*Nun*" ("*strength and prosperity*") from the tribe of Ephraim. Thus he was a descendant of Joseph. Joshua first comes to prominence in Exodus 17:19-16 where he is called upon by Moses to lead the warriors of Israel in battle against the Amalakites. "***And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword***" (Exodus 17:13) Throughout his life Joshua will remain a soldier and military commander. It is thus most fitting that when Joshua personally encounters God he sees a figure with a drawn sword. The Lord identifies Himself as "***the Commander of the Army of the LORD.***" (Joshua 5:13-15) Joshua consistent military perspective is reflected in his responses. When he comes down from Mount Sinai with Moses, his response to the tumult of the Golden Calf is "***He said to Moses, 'There is the noise of war in the camp.'***" (Exodus 32:17) In the Joshua 5 his response to the : "***Commander of the Army of the LORD***" is that of a general on a battlefield. He confront the



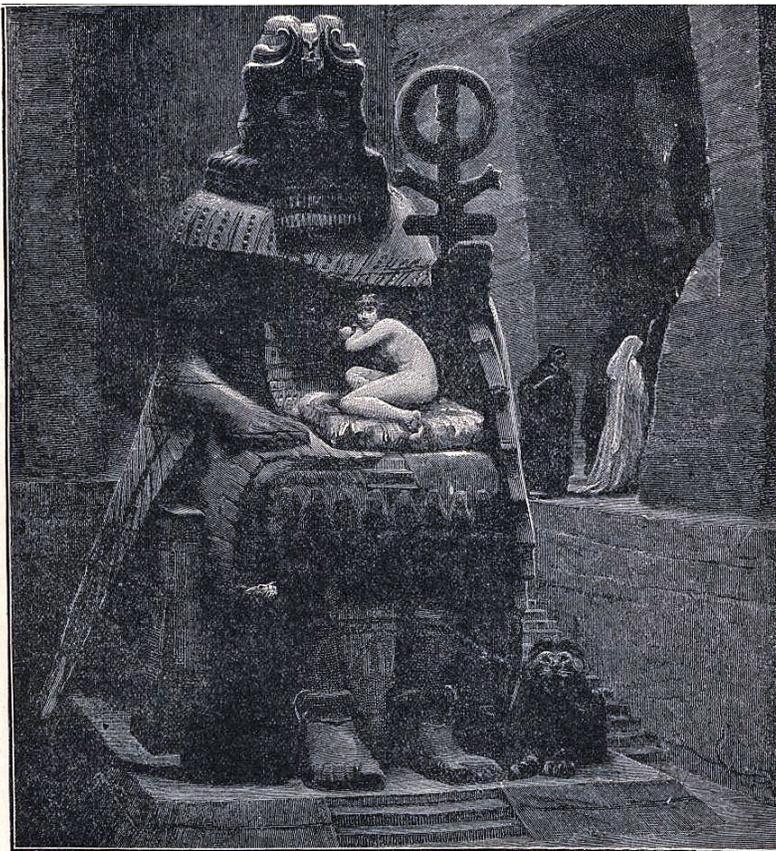
*"The Commander Of The Army Of The Lord"*

man and demanded "***Are you for us or for our Adversaries?***" Thus, Joshua was a soldier-saint. He died at the age of 110 and all of Israel mourned for the leader who had accomplished the conquest of the land of promise. This week's readings follow up on the actual conquest campaigns and deal with the establishment of the tribal confederation and the manner in which the tribes would dwell together in the land which God had given them. As previously noted, despite the commands of God a significant Canaanite presence had remained scattered throughout the territories of Israel which would remain a malignant source of spiritual temptation and ultimately lead to the downfall of the kingdom because of Israel's habitual inability to trust God and obey His commandments.

Joshua's valedictory message to the Israelites is one of the most stirring statement of faithfulness to the one God in all of Holy Writ. The subtle deviousness of Satan has from the beginning sought to convince us that we can have it both ways - worshiping both the true God and the gods of this world. That is a lie - a deadly lie. Joshua recognized the vulnerability of his people - and all people ever since - including us - to that lie. And so on the eve of his death he charged them:

***“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve Him with sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your sight to serve the LORD, chose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”***  
(Joshua 24:14-15)

The Book of Judges is the dismal description of a period of spiritual decay and moral degradation. Israel, for the first time, is without a divinely appointed national leader and the absence of such theocratic central leadership has a devastating effect. ***“In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*** (Judges 21:25) The Israelites degenerate into a tribal confederation which is riven with rivalries and competition. They are often in conflict with one another and the inroads of the numerous Canaanite enclaves which they have allowed to remain pose a constant threat. The contrast been the relatively sophisticated culture of the Canaanites and the primitive society of the



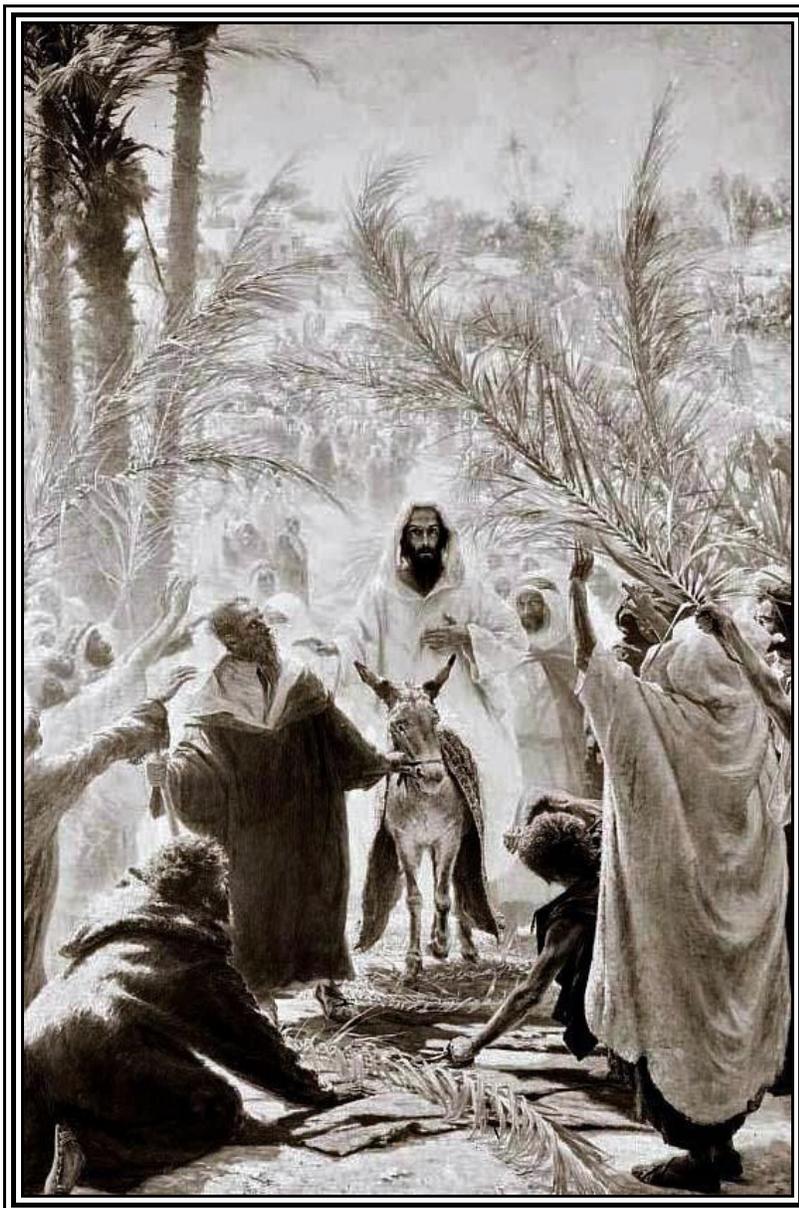
***“An Offering For Baal”***

Israelites continues to make the attraction of the wealth and sensuous religion of the Canaanites irresistible. The Book of Judges does not identify an author. Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship of the book to Samuel which would certainly be appropriate. The events described in the Book late in the 14<sup>th</sup> and on into the 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC. The Book takes its title from the twelve leaders whom God raises up among His beleaguered people between the death of Joshua and the Prophet Samuel. A Judge is a leader whom God calls at a moment of crisis to guide his people as both a civil and religious figure. The nature of their responsibilities does not seem to follow a set pattern. Some

of them are local in a particular tribe. Others have more general authority among the tribes. Some are leaders only in terms of an immediate crisis while others remain in authority for the rest of their lives.

Judges characterizes the Children of Israel as people who have largely fallen away from God and are constantly overcome by the consequences of their disobedience. The overall situation in the ancient Middle East at this point comprised a sort of lull between large empires which allowed smaller local kingdoms to rise and flourish. This would have been particularly beneficial to Canaan as the nature trade corridor along the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea connecting Egypt with the cultures of the great Mesopotamian valley to the Northeast.

The Judges themselves were a mixed lot whose faults, in most cases, are painfully obvious. The book seems to go out of its way to make the point that God chooses flawed individuals and molds them into effective servants of His will despite their personal shortcomings.



## *New Testament - Luke* *17-21*

This weeks New Testament readings comprise the second half of Luke's history of our Lord's public ministry. The long and painful journey toward Jerusalem and the cross has begun. This segment highlights the steadily increasing friction between Jesus and the Jewish religious establishment. Caiaphas and his cronies are being forced to confront the reality that this Galilean upstart cannot be ignored. He has become a force to be recognized. With increasing clarity Jesus is denouncing the hypocrisy, the self-righteousness, the dishonesty, and the worldliness of the elites. The tension is increasing with each chapter The rich are denounced, and all are warned that camel may pass through the eye of the needle more easily than a rich man become a

part of God's kingdom (18:25) Christ foretells His death and resurrection repeatedly. All of this is precisely the opposite of the messianic identity which the Israelites had been led to expect over the centuries. They wanted - yes, demanded - a deliverer who would reward them as the people of God, and bestow upon them all the worldly riches, power and glory to which they were entitled. They did not expect nor did they think they needed a savior from sin. They were already better than everybody else. In Chapter 19, the story of Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem is the trigger which sets the countdown clock ticking toward the cross. Never before had Jesus allowed such public acclamation to occur. In every prior incident He had quietly slipped away before things could get out of control. But now this time. The hordes of devout pilgrim already thrilled to be approaching the temple for what may have been the first time in their lives, electrified by the rumors of the resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany, and now enthralled by a messiah who was one of them, a common man burst out into joyful song. From there Jesus drives the money changers - all of whom were working hand in glove with the High Priest - in yet another open challenge to the establishment. The most poignant moment in this section is Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. God did not desire this harsh Judgement to fall upon His people. He wanted them to believe and be saved. But they refused again and again. And now that dreadful moment was at hand. The segment ends with a grim prophecy of the utter destruction of Jerusalem which would be fulfilled in AD 70.