

*The Settlement Era*

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## Introduction



The Jordan River

**Introduction**

The Beginning era of Old Testament history ended with Israel at the edge of the Jordan River waiting to enter their land. This generation had lived in tents and many had eaten manna all their lives and were now prepared to settle in the land God had promised to their father Abraham.

We call the next Old Testament period the Settlement era because the “time” books of Joshua and Judges and the “color” books of Ruth and Deuteronomy tell the story of Israel invading and settling down in their land. The Settlement era is difficult to date precisely but it covers a period of a little more than four hundred years. The period began with Joshua’s commission in Joshua 1, continued through the disastrous period of the judges and ended with a transition to the Kingdom era.

The Settlement era tells three major stories. First, Deuteronomy describes the covenant between God and Israel that prepared them to live in their new land. Second, Joshua led Israel to take possession of their land, divide it among the tribes, and settle down to live in it. Judges records Israel’s rebellion against God and the tragic consequences of their sin. Ruth gives us a glimpse of the people in Israel who remained faithful to God during the terrible time recorded in Judges.

## Introduction

**3 major stories**

**Deuteronomy**  
God’s **covenant** prepares Israel for the Promised Land.

**Joshua**  
Israel **takes possession, divides, and settles** the land.

**Judges & Ruth**  
Israel **rebels against God** and suffers the consequences.

**Joshua**

Joshua is the book of success. The book’s purpose is to show how God kept His promise to bring Israel into the land He swore He would give to Abraham and his descendants. Its big idea is that God rewards obedience. His people followed His law and He guided and protected Israel as they reclaimed Abraham’s land.

## Joshua

**WRITER**

Joshua

**PURPOSE**

To show how God kept His promise to bring Israel into the land He swore He would give Abraham and his descendants.

**BIG IDEA**

God rewards obedience.

*“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”*  
Joshua 1:7

Joshua's story covers Israel's history from Joshua's commission in chapter 1 to his death in chapter 24; and it has three major movements. First, Israel conquers their land under God's protection (chaps. 1–12). Next, they divide the land among the tribes and appoint cities for the Levites (chaps. 13–21). The book closes with Joshua's two addresses to Israel in chapters 22–24. He reviews God's faithfulness to Israel from Abraham to the present and then, based on God's faithfulness, he challenges Israel to live by God's laws.

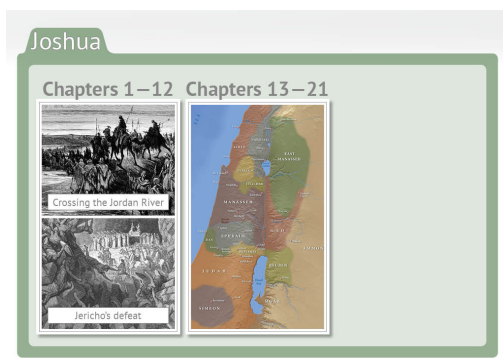
Joshua is the major character in the book. He was first introduced in Exodus 17 as Israel's military leader. He was also the only person allowed to accompany Moses to Mt. Sinai when God gave Israel the law (Exodus 24:13). He and Caleb were the two spies who urged Israel to trust God and invade Canaan.

Joshua 1–12 records Joshua's commission as God's choice to lead Israel into their land. The book then records the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, Jericho's defeat, and the many victories Israel experienced as they reclaimed their land.

Then chapters 13–21 describe how Israel allotted portions of the land to the twelve tribes. Joshua's two challenging speeches and Israel's positive response close the book on a high note. Joshua challenged Israel to "fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness." He urged them to throw away their idols and make a conscious choice to follow God. He made his own choice clear to them by saying, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14–15 NIV). The people responded, and "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel" (Joshua 24:31 NIV).

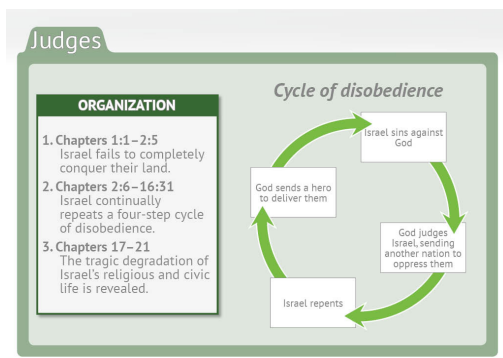
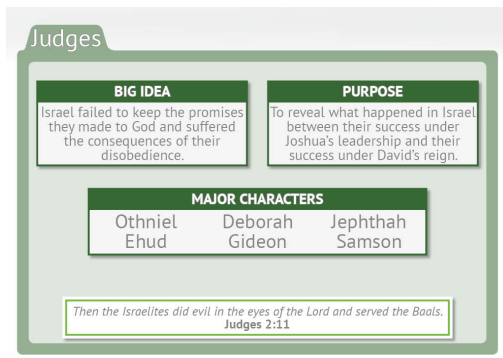
## Judges

Judges 1:1 continues Joshua's account and ties the two books of the Settlement era together. "After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, 'Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?'" (NIV). Judges 1:1–26 records the successes of various tribes as they conquered their territories. But then in 1:27 the mood changes with a list of the tribes who disobeyed God's command to drive the Canaanites out of the land. God commanded Israel not to live among the Canaanites or to participate in their religions. But Judges 2:11 tells us, "Then



## Judges 1:1

*After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, "Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?"*

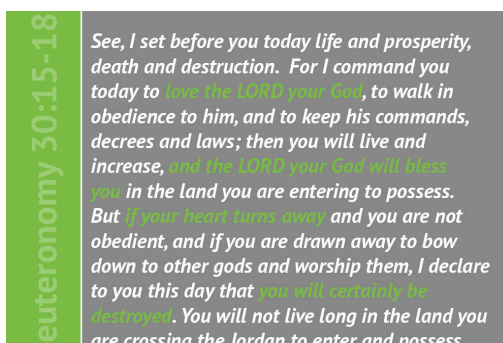


the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals” (NIV). The remainder of the story of Judges continues this theme of Israel’s disobedience and God’s judgments.

Judges’s big idea is that Israel failed to keep the promises they made to God and suffered the consequences of their disobedience. The book’s purpose is to reveal what happened in Israel between their success under Joshua’s leadership and their success under David’s reign as king. The major characters in the book are its judges. Although there are twelve judges named in the book, only six of them are named as “major” judges because their stories are told in greater detail. Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson are the major judges.

The book divides into three sections. The introduction records Israel’s failure to completely conquer their land (1:1–2:5). Then the major portion of the book repeats the four-step cycle of Israel’s disobedience. (1) Israel’s sin is described. (2) God judges their disobedience by sending one of their neighboring nations to oppress them. (3) Israel repents, and (4) God sends a hero, called a judge, to deliver them. Judges records six of these cycles in 2:6–16:31. Each cycle begins with the announcement that “the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord” (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).

The final section recorded in chapters 17–21 reveals the tragic degradation of Israel’s religious and civic life during the time of the judges. God’s people had rejected Him as their king and these five chapters describe in terrible detail how bad life had become. This final section of the narrative opens and closes with the same announcement that “in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25 NASB). And the statement that “there was no king in Israel” is repeated twice more in 18:1 and 19:1. The writer emphasized what happened when Israel rejected God as their king. With no king and no way to govern people’s behavior, even God’s chosen people, with all their history of His blessings, became a dangerous, barbaric nation. The book of Judges was written during Israel’s monarchy and demonstrated why Israel needed a king to rule over them.



## Deuteronomy

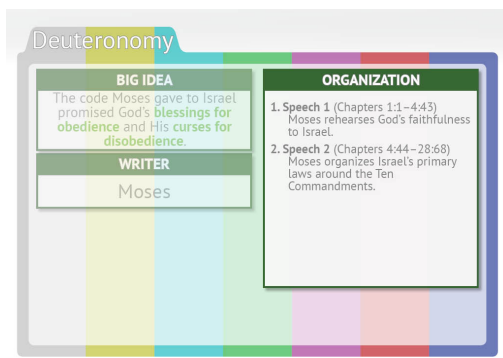
Joshua and Judges are the “time” books that move the Old Testament narrative through the Settlement era of Israel’s history. But important details are added in the “color” books of Deuteronomy and Ruth. Deuteronomy is one of the Old Testament’s most important documents because it presents the theological covenant that explains and interprets Israel’s history from Moses’s time to the end of the Old Testament. The book’s events occurred at the end of Numbers’s story. Deuteronomy’s big idea is best presented in Moses own words,

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess (Deuteronomy 30:15–18 NIV).

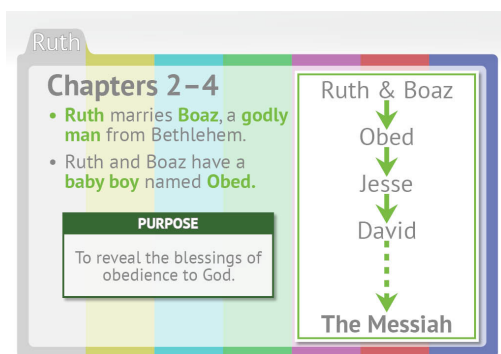
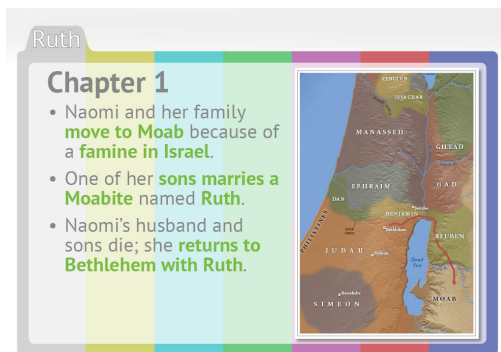
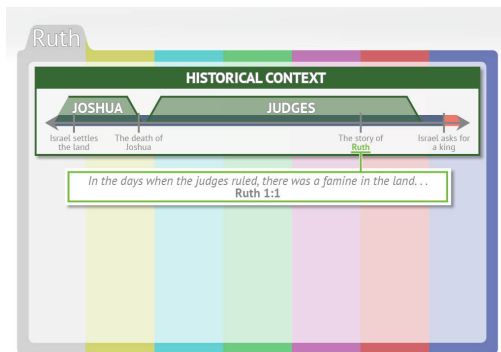
This code, or formula, Moses gave to Israel in Deuteronomy promised God’s blessings for obedience and His curses for disobedience. That is Deuteronomy’s big idea.

Joshua and Judges, the next two books in the Old Testament, illustrate this code of Deuteronomy in graphic detail. Israel obeyed God under Joshua’s leadership and God protected and blessed them. Judges records Israel’s frustration and failure because they rebelled against God and His laws. That same code of Deuteronomy characterized the centuries under Israel’s obedient and disobedient kings and led to her final destruction and enslavement by foreign powers.

Deuteronomy is organized around three addresses Moses gave to Israel. In the first speech recorded in 1:1–4:43, Moses rehearses God’s faithfulness to Israel. The second speech, recorded in 4:44–28:68, organizes Israel’s primary laws around the Ten Commandments God gave at Sinai. Then, in the third speech in chapters 29–33, Moses spells out in detail how God would bless Israel for obedience to those laws and curse them for disobedience. These chapters, called the code of Deuteronomy, characterized







Israel's history from the time it was given to the end of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 34 records Moses' death.

Moses is the primary character in Deuteronomy. But it's important to remember that his speeches were delivered to the children of Israel's citizens who exited Egypt. The speeches' purpose was to personalize God's covenant with this generation of Israel in preparation for their success in their new land. A major emphasis in the book is Israel's famous "*Shema*" recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the LORD is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (NIV). This crucial statement established who Israel's God was, the fact that He was *one* God, and that the relationship He desired between Himself and His people was based on love.

## Ruth

The second color book in the Settlement era is a story of success in the midst of failure. The book's opening verse tells us that the events occurred, "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1 NIV). Ruth's big idea is that even though Israel as a nation disobeyed God's laws, God still blessed individuals who obeyed Him. The major characters are Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. In 1:1-5 Naomi and her family move to Moab because of a famine in Israel. One of Naomi's sons marries a Moabite woman named Ruth. After Naomi's husband and sons die in Moab, Naomi returns to Bethlehem and Ruth accompanies her (1:6-22).

In the central part of the story recorded in 2:1-4:12, Ruth marries a godly man in Bethlehem named Boaz and they have a baby boy. The story concludes with Naomi holding Ruth and Boaz's son Obed. The purpose of this little book is then revealed. Ruth 4:16-22 tells us that Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. God had wonderfully blessed Naomi and Ruth's obedience. He gave Ruth a husband to care for her and then gave them a baby boy. But God also placed this Moabite woman who followed His law into King David's lineage. And because she was in David's lineage, she was an ancestor of God's promised Messiah. Matthew included Ruth's name when he wrote Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:5).

Governed by the code of Deuteronomy, the Settlement era introduced in graphic stories the glorious blessings of obedience in Joshua and Ruth and the tragic stories of failure in Judges. Let the wise reader ponder and carefully weigh the truths of Israel's Settlement era.