

“Introduction to Judges”

1. The book of Judges picks up where we left off in Joshua:
 - a. Joshua has died, Israel is at peace,
 - b. The land has been divided amongst the tribes,
 - c. But the “possession” is not yet complete – more Canaanites to be driven out
2. Author – perhaps Samuel, but the author is not noted in the bible
 - a. If Samuel is the author, then it was probably written during the rule of Saul or David.
3. Timeline – approx 1380 BC to 1050 BC, 330 (approx) years
4. Outline
 - a. The unfinished conquest of Canaan_____1:22-36
 - i. The chastisement of the Angel of the Lord_____2:1-5
 - ii. The Death of Joshua_____2:7-10
 - iii. Israel’s unfaithfulness_____2:11-19
 - iv. The Lord’s chastisement_____2:20-3:6
 - b. The first judges_____3:7-31
 - i. Othniel (Caleb’s brother – fro Mesopotamians)
 - ii. Ehud (lefty – killed the fat king Eglon of Moab)
 - iii. Shamgar (killed 600 Philistines)
 - c. Deborah (and Barak defeat Jabin)_____4:1-5:31
 - d. Gideon (defeated Midianites with 300 men)_____6:1-8:32
 - e. Reign of Abimelech (Gideon’s son)_____8:33-9:57
 - f. Minor Judges Tola & Jair_____10:1-5
 - g. Jephthah (delivers from Amnon – rash vow)_____10:6-12:7
 - h. Minor Judges: Ibzan, Elon, Abdon_____12:8-15
 - i. Samson_____13:1-16:31
 - j. Micah’s idolatry _____17:1-13
 - k. Dan’s conquest of Laish_____18:1-31
 - l. Civil war, near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin_____19:1-21:25
5. The book is *somewhat* in chronological order – some judges overlap, the events in chapters 17-21 may have happened earlier in the period.
6. The book relates the history of Israel after the days of Joshua until the time of Samuel and the choosing of the first king over all of Israel.
 - a. But unfortunately it is NOT an account of the continued victory of the nation of Israel,

- b. NOT an account of Israel living in the promise and prosperity of the promised land...
 - c. Instead it is a account of alternating defeat and victory
7. We will see a repeated cycle throughout the entire book –
- a. a cycle of sin, bondage, repentance, devotion, followed by sin and bondage again.
 - b. We will see that Israel starts out well...

Judg 1:1

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?"

- c. **But very quickly we see things degenerate:**

Judg 3:7 *So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.*

- d. **And the book ends as it started**

Judg 21:25 *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

- e. **Israel would follow the Lord when there was a leader who reminded them of the ways in which they should walk,**
 - f. **but with his death they again wandered off following other gods and their own desires**
8. When this book uses the term *judge*, it doesn't mean someone who sits in a court and decides legal issues; the Hebrew word *shaphat* has more the idea of a *heroic leader*.
- a. **During this period of the judges, there was no standing "office" of national leadership.**
 - b. **Israel had no king, no president, no prime minister on earth - only God in heaven.**
 - c. **And at the necessary and appropriate time, God would bring forth a leader for nation who would pretty much rise up, do his (or her) job, and then move on back to their obscurity.**
 - d. **This required that Israel have a real, abiding trust in God.**
 - e. **These national deliverers were not elected, and they didn't come to leadership through succession –**
 - f. **they were specially gifted by God for leadership in their times, and the people of God recognized and respected that gifting.**

9. Israel was not without some excuses for their problems, they had formidable obstacles –
 - a. they were surrounded by people who lived in the most terrible immorality and idolatry; there were constant dangers to their walking with God.
 - b. The lives of the Canaanites who lived around Israel were focused mainly on three things: money, sex, and idolatry

A Message for Today

10. Not unlike our lives today...
 - a. We are surrounded by immorality
 - b. We live in a world that is focused on three things – money, sex, and idolatry (in different forms!)
 - c. We have no single Christian leader like Moses or Joshua – each one of us must cultivate a real, abiding relationship with God
 - i. God will occasionally raise up a leader – like Billy Graham – for a time and a purpose
 - d. Each one of us must do as Joshua did... make a determination that “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”
11. And the cycles that Israel experienced are similar to what can happen in our lives...
 - a. We are serving God – at peace and at rest, then we get spiritually lazy and compromise sneaks in.
 - b. Then we stray from God and begin to do what is “right in our own eyes” (translation – rationalization!)
 - c. Then God will allow our “enemies” to invade and plunder and place us in bondage
12. A Christian begins to worship at the alter of Ashteroth – sexual immorality, or Mamon (money)
 - a. Just as the Israelites were overtaken, oppressed, and enslaved by the surrounding peoples – the ones that they received the idols from....
 - b. That Christian will end up becoming overtaken, oppressed, and enslaved by that enemy.
 - i. Sometimes it happens later – there were times when they had 20, 40, even 80 years of rest before things started going south.
 - ii. But it does come – for sure “as a man sows, that shall he reap”
 - c. We “cry out to the Lord” and are delivered.
 - d. God’ grace and mercy are always close at hand...

13. So what is wrong with this pattern? If God always forgives, what's the big deal???
- a. Because all during this time – we are GOING NOWHERE
 - b. Our life – just like that of the Israelites – ends up being a cycle of ups and downs – highs and lows

Book of Sorrows, Book of Hope

14. As we go through this book, you will find it one of the most disturbing books of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- a. It's one of those books that will make you shake your head at times and wonder how they could have got it so wrong.
 - b. Things will get bad in this book, and they only get worse.
 - c. If you were to try to find a book in the Bible that illustrates that people are sinful, this would be your book.
15. And yet it's also a book of hope. No matter how bad things got at the time of the Judges, God never gave up on his people.
- a. This book shows us that God is gracious, and he often treats his people "not according to what they deserve but out of his boundlessly merciful heart".
 - b. The book of Judges reminds us that God's people often disappoint, human leaders often disappoint, but God's purposes will prevail, not because people are great, but because God is great.
 - c. "The true hero in the book," someone has said, "is God and God alone."

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