

JUDGES

Overview of the Old Testament

Session 8, November 16, 2008

“Judges shows us our potential for greatness . . . and our capacity for catastrophe. . . . Judges describes a time of moral, spiritual, and ethical anarchy, a society without standards whose life-style is captured in a thoroughly modern phrase, found at the back door of the book: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).” Judges is a book which speaks to our time because it presents us with living examples of people who served God in such a time and not only survived spiritually but flourished. At the same time, it presents us with people who did not survive, but who succumbed to the wave of sin.” . . . “Unless we grab hold of the great principles of spiritual living presented in the book of judges, we may find ourselves to be spiritual dropouts, mere spectators at the climax of the invisible war. . . . The fundamental principle that the Holy Spirit communicates about spiritual survival in a society without standards is that partial defense is not defense at all. As D.L. Moody once said, “The place for the ship is in the sea, but God help the ship if the sea gets into it!”

-Gary Inrig, Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay (pp. 10-11)

The Book of Judges takes its title from the twelve men and one woman who served as judges during the period from Joshua's death to the time of Samuel.

This book was written during the period of the monarchy, judging by the phrase which occurs four times, "In those days there was no king in Israel." It is possible that it was written by Samuel, but the actual writer is unknown.

All the judges were themselves limited in their capabilities. In fact, each one seemed to have some defect and handicap which was not a hindrance but became a positive asset under the sovereign direction of God. None of them were national leaders who appealed to the total nation as Moses and Joshua had done. The record is not continuous but rather a spotty account of a local judge in a limited section of the nation.

Backsliding and the amazing grace of God in recovering and restoring is the theme of Judges. The New Scofield Reference Bible gives the theme of the Book of Judges as "Defeat and Deliverance." This is unusually appropriate. There is, however, another aspect which this book emphasizes: disappointment.

The children of Israel entered the Land of Promise with high hopes and exuberant expectation. You would expect these people -- who were delivered out of Egypt, led through the wilderness for forty years, and brought into the land with such demonstration of God's power and direction -- to attain a high level of living and victory in the land, and in their lives. Such was not the case. They failed ignobly and suffered miserable defeat after defeat.

The Book of Judges is a philosophy of history. "Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" ([Prov. 14:34](#)).

1. Historically it records the history of the nation from the death of Joshua to Samuel, who was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. It bridges the gap between Joshua and the rise of the monarchy; chronicling some 300 to 350 years. There was no leader to take Joshua's place in the way he had taken Moses' place. This was the trial period of the theocracy after they entered the land.

2. Morally it is the time of the deep declension of the people as they turned from God, the unseen Leader, and descended to the low level of "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (compare [Jud. 1:1](#) with Jud. 20:18). This should have been an era of glowing progress, but it was a dark day of repeated failure.

The "hoop" of Israel's history begins with the nation serving God. Then they take certain steps downward. They did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim (see Jud. 2:11). They forsook the Lord, and they served Baal and Ashtaroath. The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of their enemies. Israel entered a time of servitude. Soon Israel cried out to God in their sad plight and distress. They turned to God and repented. God heard their prayers and raised up judges through whom they were delivered. Then again the nation served God.

Soon the same old story repeated itself. The children of Israel did evil, forsook God, followed their own pleasure, were sold into slavery, entered a period of servitude, cried out to God in their distress, turned to Him, judges were raised up, and Israel was delivered. The nation began serving God again, and they were once again at the top of the cycle. My friend, the hoop of history just turns over and over. You can follow that hoop right through the Bible, and it is still turning today. The old bromide "history repeats itself" is absolutely true.

-J. Vernon McGee's Thru The Bible

Most of the world's civilizations have lasted 200 years. Almost without exception these civilizations have passed through the following stages:

From bondage to spiritual faith to great courage...

From great courage to liberty to abundance...

From abundance to leisure to selfishness...

From selfishness to complacency to apathy...

From apathy to dependency to weakness...

From weakness BACK TO BONDAGE...

- adapted from Chuck Swindoll's introduction to Judges in his [Living Insights Bible](#).

Where is America in this cycle?

Outline of Judges

Introduction to the pattern of rebellion and restoration, Judges 1 & 2

First Oppression, Judges 3:7-11:

Sin—Idolatry
Punishment—Eight years
Deliverer and Judge—Othniel

Second Oppression, Judges 3:12-31:

Sin—Immorality and idolatry
Punishment—Eighteen years
Deliverer and Judge—Ehud and Shamgar

Third Oppression, Judges 4-5:

Sin—Departed from God
Punishment—Twenty years
Deliverer and Judge—Deborah and Barak

Fourth Oppression, Judges 6-8:32:

Sin—Departed from God
Punishment—Midianites for seven years
Deliverer and Judge—Gideon

Fifth Oppression, Judges 8:33-10:5:

Sin—Departed from God
Punishment—Civil war, etc.
Deliverer and Judge—Tola and Jair

Sixth Oppression, Judges 10:6-12:15:

Sin—Idolatry increased
Punishment—Philistines and Ammonites, eighteen years
Deliverer and Judge—Jephthah (and successors)

Seventh Oppression, Judges 13-16:

Sin—Departed from God
Punishment—Philistines, forty years
Deliverer and Judge—Samson

From Disobedience to Disgrace and Depravity, Judges 17-21

Micah family and Danite tribe, 17-18
Levite and a concubine, 19
Civil war and Mourning, 20-21

Adapted from Henrietta Mears— What the Bible is All About

Sermon Notes On The Book of Judges

1. The wickedness of the _____

Judges 2:10-13, 17, 19 Judges 8:33-35

Judges 10:6; Judges 13:1; Judges 21:25

Jer 17:9, Gal 5:13, John 8:34

2. God's delight in using the _____

Judges 3

Judges 3:31

Judges 4

Judges 6 - 8

Judges 15

1 Cor. 1:26-29

3. The _____ in Judges.

Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29; Judges 13:25

Zech. 4:6 and Eph. 5:18

4. Four Important Lessons from _____

Judges 6:12-16

Judges 6:25-26

Judges 7:2-8

Judges 8:1-12

Invitation: Philippians 2:15

Sermon Notes On The Book of Judges

1. The wickedness of the human heart (Judges 2:10-13, 17, 19; Judges 8:33-35; Judges 10:6; Judges 13:1; Judges 21:25). Jer 17:9, Gal 5:13, John 8:34

Jeremiah 17:9 (HCSB)

⁹The heart is more deceitful than anything else and desperately sick—who can understand it?

Galatians 5:13 (HCSB)

¹³For you are called to freedom, brothers; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

John 8:34 (HCSB)

³⁴Jesus responded, "I assure you: Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.

2. God's delight in using the weak things

Ehud, an assassin with a homemade dagger (Judges 3);

Shamgar, a rustic with an ox goad (Judges 3:31);

Deborah, a woman in a patriarchal society (Judges 4; see also Judges 9:53);

Gideon, from an obscure family in the smallest tribe (Judges 6);

Gideon's shrinking army with pitchers and torches (Judges 7);

Samson using a jaw bone (Judges 15:14-19).

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (HCSB)

²⁶Brothers, consider your calling: not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth.

²⁷Instead, God has chosen the world's foolish things to shame the wise, and God has chosen the world's weak things to shame the strong.

²⁸God has chosen the world's insignificant and despised things—the things viewed as nothing—so He might bring to nothing the things that are viewed as something,

²⁹so that no one can boast in His presence.

3. The Holy Spirit in Judges.

Othniel—"The Spirit of the Lord came upon him" (Judges 3:10).

Gideon—"The Spirit of the Lord clothed himself with Gideon" (see note on Judges 6:34, NASB).

Jephthah—"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah" (Judges 11:29).

Samson—"The Spirit of the Lord began to stir him" (Judges 13:25; see also Judges 14:6; Judges 15:14, etc.).

Over the book of Judges as a guide to its spiritual interpretation might be written Zechariah's great word (Zech. 4:6)—"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty."

Ephesians 5:18 (HCSB) ¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which [leads to] reckless actions, but be filled with the Spirit:

4. Four Important Lessons from Gideon:

God believes in you more than you believe in yourself. Judges 6:12-16

Start by removing the unholy from your home. Judges 6:25-26

God changes the odds to get great glory for Himself. Judges 7:2-8

With God you can overcome complainers, exhaustion, discouragement, and a powerful enemy to win great victories. Judges 8:1-12

Invitation: Philippians 2:15 (HCSB)

¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world.