

Decline and Deliverance

Judges

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Bible Text: Judges 2:11-21:25

Preached on: Tuesday, March 3, 2015

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Well, as we come to our study tonight, I think that you will be encouraged and surprised even in the way that the book of Judges points us so clearly to our Lord Jesus Christ, and what's going to happen this evening is that it's going to kind of work as a culmination of the study that we've been doing for the past several months and I'm excited that you're here to enjoy the fruit of this; everything from Genesis through the book of judges is going to come to a great climax and give us a great sense of perspective on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and exactly how great he is and how great his fulfillment is and, by contrast, how desperately helpless all of humanity is and you and I, being men and women of the flesh, fall into that category as well.

Judges is a book of cycles. It's a book of a spiritual spiral of decline that takes place and that's where we're going. I would invite you to turn to the book of Judges. This is the last message that I'm going to preach on Judges and next week I'm going to do something completely different that I know will be a great blessing to your heart and an encouragement in your Christian walk. Of course, opening the word of God is always like that but next week we're going to look at a New Testament character that I'm excited to share with you, some things that we haven't talked about in my time here at Truth Community. Tonight we're going to conclude the book of Judges. We're going to cover chapters 2 through 21. As you know, it takes me about an hour per verse and so you can do the math on that. I hope you brought supplies with you.

We see what happens in Judges. It's the book that we introduced last time. Look at Judges 2:10. There is really profound, deep truth for us here this evening and it so much culminates in Christ. I might as well stop talking and get into it. Judges 2:10, "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers," talking about the generation of Joshua, "and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." So that's just a little bit of a summary of last time. We saw that the spiritual prosperity of the days of Joshua did not last and a period of decline started. There were the seeds of decline that we saw; the spiritual energy after the conquest of the land dissipated and a downward cycle started in the nation. The book of Judges records that spiral and labels and points us to the need that it expresses. There are some very clear repetitive themes in the book of Judges and we're just going to touch on

them this evening and trust the Lord for another time where we might be able to study them in greater depth.

First of all, tonight I want you to see Israel's decline. Israel's decline and basically what you have here is that once the nation got into the land, they did not do well on their own and the writer gives us a survey in the second chapter of Judges which is going to serve us as our treatment of the book. As you go through the book of Judges, you see over and over again the same cycle taking place. The people enter into a time of prosperity and things are going well for them but in a way that sometimes you and I can relate to, their prosperity causes them to lose their focus on the Lord and in this book, they fall into sin as a result of their neglect of the things of God. In that position, God brings discipline upon them. He brings them into a time of slavery as a result at the hands of foreign nations and they suffer in their sin. They suffer under the chastisement of God. This is just a little bit of an overview then we'll come back to it again. And they are in slavery for decades sometimes and then finally at the end of their rope, they cry out to God for help and for deliverance and God sends them a man, sends them a judge, as it were. We'll talk about what those are in a minute. He sends them a judge to deliver them and they are brought back out from under slavery. They are enjoying peace again and then they fall and the cycle starts all over again.

As you read the book of Judges, beloved, it becomes, in a sense, very wearisome because the cycle becomes so predictable and it is so disappointing, but what you have in the book of Judges is you have the story of a people who are unregenerate, who are not born again and so it is inevitable that the spiritual inertia is going to drive them back into sin eventually. And as we study this, as we look at it together tonight and as the weight of this starts to fall upon us and we see how hopeless it all is, it should give us a perspective on how desperately lost all of humanity is. That humanity cannot rise above its sin. That there is too much downward pull of the gravity of sin. It keeps men there and we are not the masters of our own destiny. We're not the captains of our fate. We are doomed to wallow in our sin unless there is a divine deliverance that is provided for us and Judges teaches this, not in a didactic way like you would learn from reading one of Paul's epistles where he explains it theologically, in Judges, what you get is you get this theology laid out for you in the form of narrative history and we're supposed to learn the lessons as we go along and pick up on them.

So I want to spend a little bit of time looking at this decline of Israel. Remember, Judges comes on the heels of a great victory and a conquest of the land but it doesn't last and Israel's decline starts first with a fall into sin. From a position of success, the people would forsake the Lord. Look at Judges 2:11 as we get into the text now, "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers," notice the emphasis here. We've come out of a time of triumph. We've seen the faith of Abraham. We've seen Moses lead the people. We've seen Joshua succeed and conquer the land. And the God who provided the victory through the hands of those men, this nation forsook that God. "And they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and

followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger."

You see it right there in the text, don't you? The writer of Judges says, "They forsook the Lord. Remember who he is, the God who brought them out of Egypt. The God who miraculously delivered them from slavery, took them through the Red Sea and planted them in a new land, who had mercy upon them. They turned their back on him for the sake of false local deities whom they believed could provide fertility and rain for their crops." This was just unthinkable. The guilt of this. The shame of this. The inexcusable nature of forsaking the Lord is there for all to see and you see how guilty they are and how great their sin is as a result of this, turning their back on the Lord.

Verse 13, "So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroath." You look at that and you just think about it on a human level and you say, "This is so wrong. This is utterly inexcusable. It should never be this way." God who had been so good to them, God who had delivered them miraculously and their people knew this. It was imprinted on their consciousness and they still turned away from him and you see the inexcusable guilt of the people.

Well, this is a summary statement in Judges 2. As you go through the rest of the book, you see this pattern over and over again. This nation, this people, was predisposed to sin. There was a spiritual anchor in their heart that kept them in disobedience. That kept them and manifested the reality that they needed something new. They needed something else. They could not do it on their own. In like manner, in the same way that you if you're a Christian, you found that you could not achieve spiritual success on your own, that you fell short of the law of God on your own and you came to a recognition that you were totally and helplessly, completely lost. That's the beginning of conversion. The beginning in the sense that we need that conscious recognition before we'll ever turn to a Savior. Well, the book of Judges shows that an entire nation of people was like that, anchored in sin and predisposed to it.

Look at Judges 3:7 and I'm just going to point out these verses without giving you all of the historical context of them. All we are doing here is just seeing the theme, the theme that runs through this entire book on this level of the sin of these people. Judges 3:7, "The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." Look over at verse 12 in that same chapter, chapter 3, "Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD." Evil. Evil. Evil. They forsook the Lord. They forgot the Lord. Judges 4:1, "Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD." Judges 6:1, after the deliverance that Barak and Deborah gave to the people, chapter 6, verse 1, "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years." Judges 10:6, it's sounding like a broken record, isn't it? For those of you that remember vinyl records and why I would say something like that. Judges 10:6, "Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroath," and then he goes into more detail. You can

see that they are descending down. "The gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him."

This people, this nation, called out of Egypt, called by the name of the Lord, the recipients of much divine favor and under the divine promises granted to Abraham and to his descendents, they turned their back on it all time and time and time again. I realize we're not working out the chronology of all of this. The book of Judges covers about 350 years. Look at one more, Judges 13:1. You can see the painful repetition, the wearisome reoccurrence of this same theme again and again. "Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years." So there we see, we see this theme of Israel falling into sin again and again and again, hard heartedly, stubbornly turning their back on the Lord and manifesting the sin that was in their heart.

I talked to a Jewish Rabbi several years ago, long before I ever came here. We spent a day together and I tried to talk with him and impress upon him the fact that it was unrealistic, they still think that they can obey the law. After all of these centuries of disobedience, after all the centuries of failure and just a proven failure of the Jewish people to keep the law that God has revealed in the Old Testament, you would think that they would realize that the sheer weight of time would show the folly of thinking that they could ever turn and keep his law. That argument falls on deaf ears to them but to those of us who have new natures and our minds have been revealed, there is something really serious that you should see as we're looking at the weight of the Old Testament and the scope of all of these things. Let me back up and start it over this way: it has been manifested over millennia that the people of Israel are incapable of keeping the law of God. The sheer weight of chronology should teach us and tell us that man cannot save himself by obedience to the law because he continually falls into sin. He does not have the heart capacity. He does not have the heart power. He does not have the heart desire even to do that, because given the opportunity, they drift into sin again and again and again. So we just see this weight of sin that falls, this darkness that is revealed over centuries and we realize that this nation is hopeless by itself. These people are hopeless left to their own because they continually fall into sin and show how they are predisposed in that direction. That's a very important point that we'll come back to at the end of tonight's message.

Now, in that condition of sin and we're just going to look at this briefly, we see that the Lord brings slavery upon them. He disciplines them, that's the second aspect of the cycle. There is sin and then there is slavery that they fall into. Go back to Judges 2:14. We'll look at a couple of verses maybe. Judges 2:14, after saying that they had forsaken the Lord, they served Baal and the Ashtaroath, now verse 14, "The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed." So the Lord is a jealous God, Scripture tells us. The Lord is a God

who vindicates his own holiness. He is a God who does not tolerate sin in his people and so he brings a severe discipline upon them time and time again that you see unfolding as you go through the book of Judges. A severe discipline is brought against them as he raises up and strengthens foreign nations to bring oppression upon them and to bring them into servitude under the weight of a stronger military force. Humanly speaking, this was all utterly unnecessary. Their own disobedience brought this upon them. They were reaping what they sowed. When they sowed disobedience, when they sowed rebellion, when they sowed to false religion, they guaranteed that they would reap the discipline of the Lord in response.

You see another example of it in Judges 3:7, "The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." Verse 8, "Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years." And so, we're just seeing the pattern in general from a period of prosperity, they turn their back on God. Rather than giving thanks as they should in a Romans 1 sort of sense, they ought to have given thanks, they ought to have served him all the more in gratitude, instead they forsook him and they brought discipline upon their own heads as God disciplined them with foreign nations and you see that pattern going on as you read through the book of Judges.

Now, just as he does with us, there is a gracious intention in God's discipline. God's discipline was not to forsake them utterly and to cast them aside forever. If he was going to do that with his people, he would have done it long ago. What we see is that even the disciplining hand of God has an element of grace in it because it is designed to be a discipline that brings us back to him and this is what God was doing with his people. In the midst of their oppression, they would cry out to him. Look at verse 9 of Judges 3. This is just an illustrative part of it here. Judges 3:9, "When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother." So here's the next part of the cycle: they sin, they go into slavery, they are oppressed and they are miserable and finally they cry out to the Lord. The pressure upon them squeezes out a cry for relief.

You see it over in Judges 4 as well. Judges 4:2, "And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim." Verse 3, they are in slavery and so what happens? Verse 3, "The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years." So they sin, they fall into slavery, they suffer and they cry out and now that brings us to the salvation, you might say, salvation by which we mean deliverance. The Lord in his grace provides deliverance for them. He raises up a leader to deliver them from the oppression and watch this as it develops. We kind of went through things quickly so that we could get to this part and kind of focus on it for the rest of our time here. The Lord raises up a leader to deliver them from the oppression. He calls a man to the hour. He raises up and endues a man for the hour in order to help his people.

Look at Judges 2:16. All of this is going to culminate in a great focus on Christ at the end for us. You remember from Judges 2:15, the hand of the Lord was against them, but then in verse 16 it says, "Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them." That's interesting. Look over at Judges 3:9. When you see the first aspect of it, the first judge of the book, verse 9, "When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother."

Now, the book of Judges gets its name from these men who act as deliverers for the people and I just want to clarify something for you: the word "judge" here in this book is used much differently than the way that we think about a judge in our modern day life. We think about a man or a woman in a courtroom, handling litigated cases and applying law to solve the disputed case that is in front of them. That's not what this book is talking about at all. The judges were not like our modern judges. The judge in Israel in this book particularly had a much broader function. They were raised up and empowered by God to provide military deliverance. The ones that are focused on in the main part of the narrative, most of these judges provided military leadership to overcome foreign oppressors and so they were more of a political and social and military deliverer for them as opposed to a magistrate in a courtroom someplace. And when we see this playing out, we see this repeatedly as you go through the book of Judges, you see something else about it that distinguishes them from a modern judge in our day. Scripture says and the book of Judges says repeatedly that God empowered these judges with his Spirit for the tasks at hand and we'll look at some of these instances in just a moment. But in chapters 3 to 16 in the book of Judges, you see the accounts of Deborah and Barak, of Gideon and Jephthah and Samson, and you see that God brings mighty power upon these men and in Deborah's case, the case of a woman, God brings power upon them. His Spirit imbues them with power to give them the supernatural ability to overcome the oppression that his people are facing. Enough time had elapsed to show that they could not deliver themselves on their own. I have a friend who likes to say in difficult situations, "Okay, we're agreed that this is an impossible situation, right? Therefore when deliverance is brought, we give the glory to God because there was no human answer for the oppression that was in place." That is what you see going on in the book of Judges, a supernatural provision of power to equip these men for the task at hand.

Look at Judges 3:10. Having spoken of Othniel, the son of Kenaz, verse 10, you see that, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel." He judged Israel to kind of help you see what I was just saying that it was a military aspect, not a magistrate. "When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand." What I want you to see is: the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.

Look at chapter 6, verse 34, actually going to verse 33. And all we're doing here is just seeing themes of this book so that we can kind of connect it with the rest of biblical history. Judges 6:33, "All the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel." What happened? Verse 34, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a

trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him." And Gideon won his great victory. The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and victory followed as a result.

Look at chapter 11, verse 27, Jephthah is speaking, he says, "I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon. But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him." What happened? They're in this place of conflict now. The people of Israel had been oppressed. Verse 29, "Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah," and then Jephthah went out and won his great victory.

You're familiar with the story of Samson, Judges 14:5, just wanting you to see the supernatural provision of the Lord on these men. "Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him." Verse 6, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a young goat though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done." The Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord. And deliverance followed.

Last one, look at verse 19, still speaking of Samson. "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle." The Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord. We're meant to see 2 really prominent themes as we read through the book of Judges: the hopeless sin of the nation and the power of God coming upon those who provided deliverance to them.

So those themes are not so foreign to the New Testament when you come into the New Testament and think through what's going on, the utter sin and depravity and lostness of man and the need for supernatural divine deliverance. Men cannot work out their own problem with sin. They need help from outside. Well, we see that in general but even in the book of Judges, it points this out and helps us to see what the problem was. Point 2, we looked at Israel's decline, I want to show you Israel's deficiency. What was Israel lacking according to the author of the book of Judges? What was going on through these 3 1/2 centuries of spiral, of decline, this repetitive, monotonous cycle, predictably falling into sin in the midst of prosperity? Well, beloved, as you read through this book, you start to realize that this was a period of profound disorder and chapters 17 through 21, we won't take the time to go there, but chapters 17 through 21 give a couple of illustrations of just how profoundly sick the society was. You read the stories there of a concubine being cut up into pieces and sent and distributed out through the 12 tribes of Israel in order to call people to a war and you say, "This is just perverse." Well, the point of it is to illustrate just how bad and how severe the evil of the society was.

You know, let's look at the deficiency so that we can kind of draw a parallel to our modern day. This people could not lead themselves. They needed a strong leader to unify them with spiritual authority because without that leader, they fell into sin. Look at Judges 17:6. You'll see 4 times the same theme repeated. Judges 17:6. You say, "What

was wrong? How did this get so bad?" Judges 17:6, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." Oh, this is ugly. Look at Judges 18:1, "In those days there was no king of Israel." There was no king in this time. The people were on their own. Look at Judges 19:1. What was Israel lacking? What was their deficiency? Chapter 19, verse 1, "Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel." Then the book ends on that same theme. Look at the very last verse of the book of Judges. It ends on this somber note. This is our take-away. It ends on this note so that we would look at this and say, "Here's the take-away from this spiritual cycle of decline." Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." So on a human, political level, there was no king. There was no central figure to unite these 12 tribes together and give spiritual direction to them. They were like sheep without a shepherd and they meandered and wandered accordingly.

Now, notice what people default to and this may just be so painfully obvious and I'm wasting my breath in calling it out to you, but just to help you see kind of the parallel to today's society. Obviously there is no spiritual king in Western culture now and what is left as we start to see the sexual revolution of the 60s coming to full flower? What's left with the defining principle of what defines morality in society today? This is very frightening in one sense to think about it when you just think about it from a human level. Everything boils down to the principle of whether it's a matter of consent or not and so anybody can do anything with anyone as long as they agree to it. What is this, what is that other than simply saying, "You just do what is right in your own eyes"? What we're seeing play out before us over the past many years and into the future is what we're seeing as the moral collapse of society goes on about us and we watch it in the headlines getting worse and worse month by month, what you're seeing is this is what happens when you have cast aside the law of God, you have cast aside the fear of God and it just comes down to a principle of what's morality defined by? It's whatever I think is right. So there is no principle to stop or to restrain anything because what I think is right I'll do and what you think is right you'll do and we're just left with moral chaos as a result. And as you watch this unfold, beloved, this is why we see an ever increasing, rapidly recurring cycle, you get numb to the people who just wantonly go out and just murder 5, 10, 15, 20 people at random, seemingly at random. People go into schools and shoot up schoolchildren. People parade their immorality and it's all called good. Why is this happening? It's because the whole principle of restraint of the fear of God and the law of God has been set aside and what Judges teaches us is that this is what you get when you do that. This society is reaping what it has sown, having set aside any principle of holiness or external authority. What happens is you get the utter decay and depravity. When you read Judges, it seems so shocking but is it really any more shocking than a guy going into an elementary school in Connecticut and shooting up 21 schoolchildren? This is what happens and what you and I need to see and keep fresh in our minds is that there is a connection between all of these things. Society loves it's so-called sexual freedom, but what comes with that, what comes with setting aside and doing whatever you want to do in your own eyes, what fills that spiritual vacuum is the worst kind of human depravity and there is no human hope, there is no human answer to it. It will continue to get worse and Judges shows us that this is what happens when there is no king, there is no ruling spiritual authority in place. So the New Testament tells us that evil men and

imposters will proceed from bad to worse and so I say these things not because they are particularly encouraging to us but just to help us have the sense that when we see these depraved things play out in front of our eyes, that we are not shocked and that we're not confused. This is the natural result of a society turning its back on Scripture, on the fear of God, on his revelation. It is inevitable. When people do what is right in their own eyes, evil rushes to fill the vacuum and we see just how ugly and how dark the evil is.

Now, let's trace this through, having come to this conclusion here at the book of Judges, let's trace it through and work it out through the rest of revealed history. We don't want to leave it on this dark, depressing note. Judges tells us and it's possible that this was written by Samuel early in the days of the monarchy of Israel because for him to say that there was no king in Israel, that wouldn't have meant anything unless Israel was now acquainted with the reality of a king. So the writer is saying they lacked a king and Judges shows you the need for this leader and yet the solution is not there in the pages of that book itself. Well, as you go on in the subsequent historical books, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, what happened? God gave them a king and for a short time during the reign of David, for a short time during the reign of Solomon, you get a glimpse of something good happening, that there is a sense of order and there is a sense of worship and there is a sense of progress. There is a spiritual elevation that takes place, including in some of the later monarchs.

But what happened? We're stepping beyond the realm of the book of Judges and just taking a satellite view of what happened in history. Israel, in the days of the judges, fell and the writer of Judges said, "They need a king." But what happened when they got a king? That eventually failed too, didn't it? Saul was a colossal failure. David, David, 2 Samuel 11, sinned with Bathsheba. You know, and you look at David and you're kind of watching this and you say, "Finally, David and finally there is the man." But he falls into sin and a whole course of ugly consequences follow in the rest of the book of 2 Samuel. You see Solomon completing the temple and yet in 1 Kings 11, Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not follow him fully. Just a little piece of arithmetic to help you find these things in the Bible, in 2 Samuel 11, David sinned with Bathsheba. In 1 Kings 11, you find Solomon, his son, falling away from the Lord as well.

God was gracious not to abandon his people but here's what you see: you see the people without a king failing. You see the best of the king's failing and after Solomon and the kingdom splits, the northern kingdom of Israel had nothing but evil kings and even the good kings in Judah, the southern kings of Judah are repeatedly seen failing in one way or another. And you read through this sweep of history and you're left with a terrible sense of despair if you're just left with Genesis through Malachi in your English Bible. You're left with this terrible sense of despair. The people can't do this on their own. Judges says they need a king and what follows after that was written is you get these kings and the kings of failures too and you're left with this utter sense of hopelessness. The people can't solve it. The best of kings can't solve it. They are part of the problem as well. And you're left panting, gasping for a solution for something permanent after all of the centuries of failure and the whole weight of sin and extended chronology falls upon you and you are left saying, "Where is there to turn?"

Point 3: Israel's deliverance. Israel's deliverance. In the wisdom of God, in the wisdom of God, humanity, the nation of Israel, God's people, needed a long sweep of revelation. They needed a long sweep of history so that time would prove the truth of the fact of what Scripture says even in the Old Testament that the hearts of men are full of insanity and they do nothing but evil continually. That humanity cannot save itself. That God's people cannot save themselves. Even the best of their kings cannot provide them with lasting deliverance. So that every sense of human pride is eradicated. Every sense of human confidence is extinguished. Every sense of somehow accomplishing spiritual good and deliverance on their own is totally washed away so that we are brought to a position of utter spiritual bankruptcy as we understand the Old Testament together. We're left with this sense that unless something acts from outside, it's never going to get better. The stage is dark and 400 years of silence from the last prophet of the Old Testament passes until the coming of Christ. Israel had all of this biblical history and then the curtain goes down for 400 years and there is no prophetic voice until John the Baptist arises. How dark, how hopeless it was and what happens is that all of this Old Testament history prepares you to welcome and appreciate the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The yearning that the Old Testament creates through all of its failure is met in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who is the Incarnate Son of God.

Look at Acts 13 and this is going to summarize and pull together everything that we've looked at since who knows when, last fall. That's vague enough. Acts 13 and what you see here is the Apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, preaching and what happens in Acts 13 is he does a quick sweep through the Old Testament history and he does it in such an inspired method of conciseness that shows the work of the Spirit, a divine summary of Old Testament history, and where does this Old Testament history lead us, that's the question. Where should our study of Genesis through Judges, where should it point us? Where should we be looking? How can we know that we are understanding these first 7 books of the Bible properly? Well, by one standard we are left with a sense of hopelessness. We're looking for a king that the Old Testament doesn't provide. We're standing on tiptoes, as it were, looking, waiting, anticipating, hoping but in the Old Testament no answer being given. Well, when the Apostle Paul steps forward in the pages of the Old Testament, watch what happens.

Acts 13:16, "Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand," to people who were in the synagogue, "said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.'" What a great moment that must have been for an apostle to stand up with utter authority and say, "People of Israel, you listen to me." I love the authority of the spoken word which Paul is about to give to them and what he does is he takes them on a jet tour through Old Testament history. Watch this, it's fascinating. You can identify the books of the Old Testament that he's referring to. Verse 17, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it." There is the books of Genesis and Exodus summarized for you. Then he goes into the book of Numbers, verse 18, "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness." Verse 19, he goes into the book of Joshua, "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance

- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years." Verse 20, "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." That takes us up through what we have studied, Genesis through the book of Judges. I covered Judges in 2 one hour messages, Paul covered it in one 2 second verse, "He gave them judges until Samuel the Prophet."

So that passage covers what we've done in our survey over the past several months. This is all familiar material to us. Where should it lead us? Where should it point us? Where does it push us? Verse 21, "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.'" Verse 23, "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel." Stop right there and notice what is happening. These are big themes coming together being expressed in a very succinct fashion. Paul has swept through the history of Israel in about 2 minutes of what's given to us here in the Scriptures and he says, "The point of all of this, the point of the promises to Abraham, the point of the flow of the Old Testament was to come to this one person, Jesus Christ."

Verse 23, "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." Do you see, beloved? Before I get into the rest of this text here, do you see how sweet the name of Jesus is in light of Old Testament history? This is so much more than saying, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." It actually has nothing to do with that. We see the coming of Christ in an historical context that God chose a people, they failed miserably, their kings couldn't deliver them and for a millennia these people were basically in darkness and now the Apostle Paul is saying the conclusion of this, the culmination of all of this is found in a Savior, Jesus. There is a Deliverer for real.

Verse 25 of Acts 13, "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'" John had preached. He was a prophetic voice. There was a lot of commotion around him. People were paying attention and John says, "Look, you may think I'm something because I speak like this but there is one coming after me and I'm not worthy to untie his sandal. That's how great he is."

Paul goes on in verse 26, there is a Savior from the loins of David. This Jesus is the one we have waited for. Verse 26, "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb." They laid him in a tomb. How then could he be the Deliverer? How could he be the one to whom all of this is pointing? He's dead. Verse 30, "But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came

up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people."

So you see after this long period of silence, after this long history of failed kings and before that a failed people who could not manage themselves but utterly just fell into darkness, darkness, darkness, failure, sin, all of this just showing utter inability, now Paul says the culmination of all of this is found in Jesus and he is one who never will fail. How do you know? Because he conquered death. God raised him from the dead. So all of a sudden, the resurrection defines Christ as someone separate, someone above it, someone beyond it, and now we have the King, the Deliverer that we have been waiting for.

Verse 32, "We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that," in this way, "He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.'" Verse 34, "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'" Verse 35, "You will not allow Your holy One to undergo decay." And he sets this contrast between David, the greatest of the kings.

Verse 36, "David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay." He's saying, "Your greatest king died and underwent decay. There is no hope in that human man. What we have in Christ is something qualitatively different," Paul says. "What we have in Christ is someone from the loins of David but who transcends David in an infinite way and in him you can put your hope. In him now our nation finally has the Deliverer that has been promised to us."

Verse 37, "but He whom God raised did not undergo decay." The power of the simplicity of these words. Paul draws out the application for his audience. It's the application for us today. Those of us who long, are weary of sin, those of us who know that we are not at home in this world, that we are in a realm right now with our feet on this sod that is under the rule of the prince of the power of the air. We live amongst people who hate our God, who reject our Scriptures and who would silence us if only they could. That what this world loves, we are indifferent to at best. We hate it. We don't love what they love. We realize that we are aliens and foreigners in this land. And we've seen through the world and we've seen through its temptations. We've seen through its false philosophies. We realize how empty it is because we recognize the emptiness of the world because we have seen the emptiness of our own sin sick souls. And we're left bankrupt and hopeless in our own resources. So what's the big deal about Jesus then? What makes the difference? What makes the difference? He is raised from the dead. Everything is different with him.

And verse 38, the shining light of the resurrection, vindicating, verifying, validating the Lord Jesus Christ, setting him aside for human attention and human faith, verse 38, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him," look at this, look at your text, verse 39, "through

Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses."

The law of God exposes our inability. The passage of centuries and millennia with the people of Israel shows utter inability. Your own spiritual life shows your own utter inability to live righteously on your own. It all combines to convict and to condemn us and to expose us as the objects of wrath apart from Christ that we all are and having every sense of human righteousness and human ability and human pride extinguished like a flattering candle, blown out. Now finally, then and only then, are we ready to have Christ displayed to us and to receive the words of the good news and to embrace him for the fullness of who he is and to gladly bow down and adore him and to receive him because here and here alone is the hope of humanity. Here and here alone is the one who can deliver his people from their sins.

So while we are brought to utter despair as we go through the book of Judges, as we continue on, we realize that it has set the stage for us to recognize our Savior. To receive him. To humble ourselves before him. To realize that he has to be the only one, the only Savior, the only name given among men by whom we must be saved. So this sorry history of the Old Testament people comes to a glorious outcome because it points us to Christ and as we see this, as we see the way that Paul takes the Old Testament and applies it, we understand we are understanding those early books of the Old Testament properly. They are not given to us to show us how we can save ourselves. They are given to us to show that we cannot save ourselves and ultimately and driving out our sense of self-righteousness and self-confidence, we're left to humbly come before a Savior who was crucified for sinners, who has risen from the dead and now through him forgiveness of sins is freely offered to anyone who would believe. So all of this teaches us to come to Christ, to bow down and to love him and adore him and worship him and, above all, to thank him for delivering us from that hopeless condition from which we have been saved.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a joy it is to have the Scriptures point us to your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, may his great name be praised. May those within the walls of this room who do not know him believe in him tonight. May they find what those of us who know him have found, that he frees us from all things. He frees us from the demands of the law which we could not keep. He frees us from the punishment demands of that law which were rightfully upon us but which we could never pay. O Lord Jesus, with your life you fulfilled the righteousness of the law, with your death you satisfied its penalty and all of the accumulated accusations of guilt against us because of the way that we had sinned against God have been cleared away and now as we have seen in Ephesians, Lord Jesus, you have opened up the door of bold and confident access through faith in you and we are fully reconciled to God and the sorry history of his Old Testament people is not our lot and our future and our destiny because you have overcome it all through your life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven where you intercede for us without fail. Lord, help us to respond with grateful obedience, with a heart full of affection for you, and may this so shape our understanding going forward that we see ever and always the

Scriptures pointing us to Christ and that you would be the recipient of our highest, deepest and most loyal affections as a result. We give these things to you and we thank you for this time together and in your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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