

The Message of the Old Testament

A Book-by-Book Study

JUDGES

Background

The name of the book of Judges comes from the title given to the 12 leaders (“judges,” whose temporary leadership was both civil and military) of Israel during the period between Joshua and Samuel. The book is anonymous; nowhere in Scripture is any author indicated. The book consists of various blocks of material about different judges, which conceivably could have been written by multiple authors over a period of time. Late Jewish tradition ascribes authorship to Samuel, which is certainly possible. However, in the end, the book’s author is not known. (ESV Study Bible)

The events in Judges took place in the period between Joshua’s death (either mid-14th or late-13th century BC) and the rise of Samuel and Saul (mid-11th century). (ESV Study Bible)

How We Got Here

- ▶ God promised Abraham a people and the land
- ▶ Moses led the people to the land
- ▶ Joshua led the people to conquer the land
- ▶ Judges sets before us life in the land

Contents of Judges

Three Basic Divisions

1-2: Introduction

3-16: Twelve Judges

17-21: Moral Decline

Introduction

1:1-18 --

Israel appears to be on the right track:

They look to God for who should go up after the Canaanites

There is cooperation between the tribes

The Lord gave the Canaanites into their hand

They defeated the Canaanites this way and that

1:19-33 --

God . . .

. . . Had kept his _____

Joshua 23:14 -- “And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not _____ of them has failed.”

. . . Had given clear _____

Joshua 23:6-13 -- "Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses . . . that you may not _____ with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day. . . . For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for _____ that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a _____ and a _____ for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you."

The Israelites . . .

. . . _____ the Lord

2:10-13 -- "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth."

. . . _____ with the remaining peoples

3:5-6-- "So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods."

. . . Suffered the _____

2:14-15 -- "So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress."

-the _____ of the Lord was kindled

-he gave them over to _____

-they could no longer withstand their enemies

-the hand of the Lord was _____ them for harm

-they were in terrible _____

The Lord . . .

. . . raised up _____

2:16-19 -- Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and

oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

JUDGES

The Second section of the book tells of the judges God raised.

Four of the judges are given much more extensive treatment--- Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson

Othniel – Caleb’s nephew

Ehud – stuck his sword in a fat man (Eglon)

Shamgar – killed 60 Philistines with an ox goad

Deborah – Jael drove tent peg through head of Sisera

Gideon – defeated Midian with 300 men

Tola – son of Dodo

Jair – 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys

Jephthah – after victory vowed to give God first thing out of his house; when he got home his daughter was first

Ibzan – 30 sons and 30 daughters

Elon – judged 10 years

Abdon – 40 sons and 30 sons

Samson – strength was in his hair

What was a judge?

These judges came from various tribes, worked regionally, and delivered Israel from various enemies. They were called to deliver God’s people from their oppressors and to resolve disputes among the Israelites themselves. (Dever, 212-213)

Observations on the Judges

1. The judges were _____ (at best).

Deborah’s military leader was a cowardly man named Barak

Gideon was slow to trust God; made an ephod which his people came to worship; had a son, Abimelech who is one of the worst persons on the book.

Jephthah was the son of a prostitute and made a stupid vow which cost him his daughter.

Samson was an absolute mess: hot-tempered, foolish, violent, deceptive, vengeful, and married a foreigner.

2. The judges were _____ deliverers.

After each judge died, the people went right back into _____ to an even greater degree than they had been before and were later plunged back into oppression.

Religious and Moral Decline: 17-21

- ▶ A man makes his own household idol and hires a _____ to be his household priest.
- ▶ Danites steal the god and the priest and go attack a peaceable and unsuspecting town and take it over for themselves setting up the idol.
- ▶ Another Levite goes to retrieve his runaway concubine and on their way back home stays in Gibeah overnight. The men of Gibeah gather at the home demanding the host let them have relations with the visiting Levite.
- ▶ The Levite gives them the concubine instead whom the men abuse all night. She dies as a result.

- ▶ The Levite cuts the concubine into pieces and sends them around to the rest of Israel, who gather to call the men of Gibeah of the tribe of Benjamin to account.
- ▶ Civil war erupts between Israel and the tribe of Benjamin.
- ▶ Tens of thousands of Israelites are killed in battle.
- ▶ The tribe of Benjamin was all but decimated. 600 men survived but had no wives. Israel basically raided the town of Jabesh-Gilead for 400 wives and condoned the abduction of 200 more from the dancers at Shiloh.
- ▶ "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was _____ in _____ own eyes." (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) Things are absolutely falling apart!!

Lessons to be Learned

1. The People Respond to God's Blessing with _____.

- ▶ God blessed the people
- ▶ God warned the people
- ▶ But the people sin

"This is the story of Judges. God had given them rich blessings. He had brought them into existence as a people and made them his own special people called to bear his name. And now they return his creative love by _____ him and worshiping other ____." (Dever, 205)

How do we respond to the goodness of God?

The hymn writer of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" insightfully wrote, "Prone to wander Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love." In the midst of _____ is so often the place of our turning from God. So often it is there that we come to value his gifts to us more than himself.

We must beware! In the midst of prosperity, we must exercise the greatest of discipline to give attention to spiritual disciplines of prayer, the consumption of the word, and the giving of thanks.

2. God's People Respond to Punishment with _____.

A. God _____ the people in response to their sin.

He used the peoples around them to bring _____ upon them because of their sin.

3:7-8 -- And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and _____ sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

3:12-14 -- And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the _____ strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. And the people of Israel _____ Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

4:1-3 -- And the people of Israel again did what was _____ in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he _____ the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

6:1-6a -- The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel, and because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their

livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number—both they and their camels could not be counted—so that they laid waste the land as they came in. And Israel was brought _____ because of Midian.

10:6-9 -- The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and _____ into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

13:1 -- And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord _____ them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.

►“God appears to join with his people’s enemies in order to bring distress upon them. Yet though he may join the actions of their enemies, his motives could not be more different. Israel’s enemies act in sin and hate. But God means to punish and . . . drive his people to repentance.” (Dever, 207)

B. The People respond to punishment in repentance

3:15a -- Then the people of Israel _____ to the Lord, and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer,

4:3 -- Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for _____, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

6:6 -- And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel _____ for help to the Lord.

►“Your trials may not be a sword-wielding Ammonite or Philistine, but the trials oppress you nonetheless. Just as he did with the ancient Israelites, God uses trying circumstances to cause us to examine _____ allegiances, and to teach _____ that we need to change. Every one of us needs—in the Bible’s language to repent.” (Dever, 209)

►“People who want a religion that will merely affirm them will find Christianity disappointing. Christianity is about _____. Now, if you believe you have never sinned, you may believe that you don’t need to repent. If you do have sins to repent of, then Christianity is for you. Christianity is the religion for sinners.” (209)

Every other religion on the planet will explain everything _____ must do to make yourself right with God. Christianity alone will explain that you have already failed; that, though majestically made in God’s image, you have selfishly turned in on yourself and rebelled against him; and that your _____ lies in acknowledging your _____ and crying out to God to forgive you for Christ’s sake.” (209-10)

“ . . . The Canaanites remained in the land because of Israel’s own disobedience. But in God’s strange sovereignty, they also remained because of _____ design and purpose. When the next trial comes your way, know that God has purposes in it. And more trials will come, whether you inflict them on yourself or someone else does. Either way, you can be sure that God is behind it and that his purposes are good. This is how God deals with his people.” (210)

“ . . . We can look at trials as valuable _____. They will teach us what we will not learn any other way. So beware of despising them. They remind us of what matters most. We might even say that, in his love, God sometimes frustrates us until we recognize our need for his power; he exhausts all of our “I’ll do it my way” solutions. Don’t you see his love in that? Nothing you have in this life will last forever, no matter how tightly you hold on to it. God knows what he is doing, and we must trust him.” (Dever, 211)

3. God Temporarily Delivers the People Through Imperfect Judges

We have seen that these judges were imperfect (at best), and we have seen that the deliverance was temporary. The lessons are several.

1. God uses imperfect _____ to accomplish his plan. Despite their faults the judges believe God and see him do mighty things through them. That means he will use you and me as well.
2. "Though faithful and helpful, the judges were _____ enough in and of themselves. I hope you realize that all of God's good gifts in your life cannot replace God. If God has caused you to be born in a land of liberty and prosperity, with good health care and education opportunities, then he has certainly blessed you. But none of these things are meant to answer your deepest problems. Do you realize that? All such gifts are only the dimmest reflections of the great good that God intends in Christ for those who repent of their sins and trust him." (214)
3. Our deepest need is for a _____ and permanent savior.

"Perhaps some today would say that the Israelites simply needed to be saved from their own hang-ups about other local deities, that they needed to stop being so totalitarian and exclusivistic. But God wanted to liberate them not from intolerance toward other gods but from _____ to them! The people needed liberation from false worship; their false worship is what caused them to degenerate." (215)

"No people ever rise higher than their idea of _____, and conversely, a loss of the sense of God's high and awesome character always involves a loss of a people's _____ values and even what we commonly call humanity. We are startled by the disregard for human life that has overtaken large segments of the western world, but what do we expect when countries like ours openly turn their back upon God? We deplore the breakdown of moral standards, but what do we expect when we have focused our worship services on ourselves and our own often trivial needs rather than on God? Our view of God affects what we are and do..."

(James Montgomery Boice, Psalms, Volume 3: 107-150, 912)

"God would let this sinful people, who were determined not to rely on him, rely on every other possible means, until every other possible means was exhausted. Finally, they would learn the only one who could save them was _____ himself, and then they would turn to him. This is what the book of Judges is meant to do for us as well. We are meant to be morally and emotionally _____ by the time we finish reading it. And we are meant to despair of trusting in some other judge to save us." (217)

" . . . The judges could only save _____ of the people from _____ of the raiders _____ of the time. What they—what we—need is something far more powerful. And that is what God has provided in Christ."

4. The deepest need for the people of the world in which we live is for the same Savior. And as surely as the Israelites needed a deliverer so do the people among whom we live. And we have been appointed to point them to the deliverer—_____!