

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #1

Various Texts

God is a sovereign God in control of all history at all times. There has not been one second when this world has not been under His sovereign control. Everything that happens has a Divine purpose; even those things we don't understand and things that do not please Him.

If you look at a newspaper or listen to or watch the news on any given day, you will likely be exposed to some terrible kinds of things. You will see headlines that feature stories like this:

- 1) A powerful governmental official is caught having an immoral relationship;
- 2) A son steals money from his mother;
- 3) A gang rape leads to the death and dismemberment of a young girl;
- 4) Girls at a party are kidnapped and forced to marry strangers;
- 5) Family feud leaves 69 brothers dead;
- 6) A woman judge says it is no longer safe to travel on her state's highways;
- 7) A nation on the verge of civil war;
- 8) A major political leader is assassinated.

These kinds of headlines are actually not new to our day; every one of these stories comes straight out of the seventh book of the Old Testament, the book of Judges. Judges is a book in the Bible like no other. It is a book filled with violence, war, sex, and killing. If a movie were to be made about the book of Judges, it would, as one commentator said, be rated NC-17.

If ever there is a book of the Bible that fits our world right now, it is this book of Judges; and in the next weeks, we would like to take you on a journey through its 21 chapters.

As is our custom, when we begin a new study on any book of the Bible, we begin by asking and answering a series of introductory questions. This enables us to take a good overview look at where we are heading and what we are likely to see along the way.

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Judges? Here are five reasons for studying Judges:

Reason #1 - Because Judges is one of only 66 inspired books that God gave to man.

Judges is a rare book in that it is one of only 66 total books inspired by God and one of only 39 O.T. books inspired by God. When it comes to this book of Judges, it is one of the best preserved books in the entire Old Testament. Herbert Wolf said that manuscript evidence for Judges ranks at the same level as the first five books of the O.T. (Pentateuch) having the best manuscript support (*Isaiah*, p. 380).

The most remarkable preserved manuscripts of the O.T. are the Dead Sea Scrolls which date from the 3rd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D.. In March of 1947, Muhammad adh-Dhib, an Arab shepherd boy, was looking for a lost goat 7½ miles south of Jericho and one mile west of the Dead Sea. He went to a cave (Qumran Caves) and threw a stone into one of the caves and heard something break, so he went in and found ten ancient pottery jars containing leather scrolls.

In Cave 1 and in Cave 4 (Partridge Cave), archeologists found 100 copies of Bible books, and one of the fragments of books found in both of these caves was the book of Judges.

Throughout the world there are literally “tens of thousands” of Hebrew manuscript fragments of the Old Testament. Some 100,000 are housed at Cambridge. A Hebrew manuscript called the “Codex Cairensis” which was copied and vowel-pointed in A.D. 895 contains the book of Judges. There are also two important Greek manuscript translations of Judges, the Codex Alexandrinus (A) (A.D. 450) and Codex Vaticanus (B) (A.D. 325).

All of this evidence proves that Judges is one of God’s very rare inspired and preserved books He gave to man. Our time is short and it is important that we go through every book of the Bible, and Judges is one of those books we need.

It is a daunting and sacred privilege to have in our hands a written copy of the Word of God, and that is what you have when in this book of Judges.

Reason #2 - Because the book of Judges is neglected by most churches.

The Old Testament is not well understood by the average churchgoer. The Old Testament is viewed as dull, long, uninteresting, and irrelevant to our times. Of all the O.T. books, one of the least studied is the book of Judges.

Just the word “judge” is enough to keep most churches away from this book, because most people don’t want to hear about a God of judgment and **most people don’t like to face the fact that they must make judgments or else they can cost themselves an inheritance.** Clinton McCann said in his commentary that most churches don’t like the book of Judges and most don’t study it.

He said he actually knew of people who tried to avoid the book by saying, we have plenty of sex and violence on TV, so why go to church and hear more about it from a book of the Bible like Judges? Well one simple answer to this question is because God put this in His Word and He expects us to study it; and perhaps if more churches did study it, some of the serious moral problems would get resolved.

Most people love to go to church and hear about a God of love no matter what they do, and a book like Judges says there is another side to God. This book is a warning for our time. God pays close attention to what is happening in this world, especially as it relates to His children. He pays close attention to strife between people, disputes over inheritances, roles of men and women, power-hungry political leaders, immoral people, child abuse, spouse abuse, violence, and those who mock Him. **When God’s people turn from His Word and will, God will cause a series of things to hit that are devastating. Judges is a book that needs to be preached in our churches right now.** When God’s people turn from obeying God’s Word, their world will fall apart and God will specifically cause it.

In 1615, Richard Rogers decided to write a commentary for Edward Coke Knight, who was the chief justice of England. He said God had made Mr. Knight a key leader of England and he wanted to give him something that would enable him to govern properly and bear much fruit. The book he selected was the book of Judges (*The Epistle Dedication*, pp. A3-B2).

Judges is a book that says there are very serious consequences for disobeying God and there are wonderful blessings for obeying Him. When people of God decide to conform more to the world than to God, there will be serious Divinely-wrought consequences and most don't want to hear this.

Reason #3 - Because the book of Judges is a book that teaches much of God's amazing grace.

When King Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, he prayed that when God's people angered God by their sin and He allowed them to experience the conquering by many enemies, if they would recognize their sin and turn to God for His mercy and help, that God would be gracious and merciful and bless His people (I Kings 8:46-50). This book of Judges shows the amazing grace of God time and time again.

As we will see, there are some very seedy and sordid stories in this book that are connected to God's people. Some of the stories will make you cringe. God's people so wandered from God and His Word that they looked more like Canaanite heathens. God's people got themselves into serious trouble by their own choices. But when they would turn to God and His Word, God, in His amazing grace, would start showering them with His blessings. They went from defeat to victory, from negative to positive. **This book of Judges teaches us that as a believer our life could be a disaster, and the reason for it is because we have made choices against God and His Word. If we turn back to God and His Word, we will experience His amazing grace.**

You may have done some terrible things in life as a believer. Let me list the kinds of things you'll see in Judges. Some may have blatantly and purposely disobeyed God's Word. Some may have actually turned away from God and served and worshipped something else. Some may have done immoral things. Some may have been with a prostitute or had some same sex experience. Some may have had a failed marriage and you are the reason the marriage failed. Some may have aborted a baby that was actually cut in pieces. All of these kinds of things show up in Judges. What this book says to all of us is, if we will turn from our sin and turn to God and give our hearts back to Him, we can find His grace.

There are many parents here right now who would grant total instant grace and forgiveness if only their rebellious son or daughter would come back and say, "I am so sorry; please forgive me and please help me." God is waiting for the same thing from many of His children. You'll see it in Judges.

Reason #4 - Because the message of Judges is needed in Israel right now.

The events of the book of Judges are as important to Israel today as they were when the book was written. Had God's Word been obeyed back then, things in Israel would be completely different right now.

She would have her land and would not have enemies living in one inch of it. I don't know how many Jewish people we will actually meet, but they need to understand Judges. This book tells Israel why she is presently in a national mess surrounded by one hostile nation after another. She has turned away from her God; and if and when she will turn back to God, she will see Him do some wonderful things right in her Promised Land.

Reason #5 - Because the message of Judges is needed in all nations of the world right now.

God made a promise to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.” Even when God permits a nation to dominate Israel and do negative things as a punishment for Israel’s rebellion, this book of Judges says eventually God destroys those who do bad things to Israel. When you go through this book you will see God destroy many nations. All of these powers turned against Israel and all of them paid a high price.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote the book of Judges?

In all reality, the writer of the book is not specifically named. However, the most logical conclusion is that Judges was written by Samuel. We may come to this conclusion based on the following four observations:

- 1) The repeated phrase “in those days Israel had no king” toward the end of the book, indicates that this was written at a time when she did have a king (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).
- 2) The phrase “the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem to this day” (1:21) would indicate that it was written before David conquered Jerusalem, which puts this well within Samuel’s time frame (II Samuel 5:6-7).
- 3) Samuel was known as one who wrote inspired Scripture (I Samuel 10:25).
- 4) The Jewish Talmud (Jewish sages discuss interpretive matters pertaining to Jewish law in 6th century A.D.) says that the book of Judges was written by Samuel.

We are on very safe Biblical ground when we conclude that Judges was written by Samuel.

Samuel was a man who dedicated himself to God at a young age, primarily due to His mother’s (Hannah) influence (I Samuel 1:20-28). He spent years learning the Word of God and was greatly used by God. The more we know of God’s Word and the longer we walk with God, the more useable we are. Samuel is proof of this.

QUESTION #3 – When was the book of Judges written?

Michael Wilcock in his commentary on Judges says that the first verse of the book and the last verse of the book put us in the historical time frame. **Judges covers the time “after the death of Joshua” (1:1) and before there was any “king in Israel” (Judges 21:25)** (*The Message of Judges*, p. 13).

Israel left Egypt in 1446 B.C. and she entered the Promised Land 40 years later under Joshua in 1406 B.C. Joshua died somewhere around 1370 B.C. and Saul became the first king in 1050 B.C. **So the events that are described in the book of Judges cover a time period of about 1370 B.C. until 1050 B.C.**

There are several points of observation that we may make that help us zero in on the date:

- 1) It was written after the death of Joshua which means after 1370 B.C. (Judges 1:1).
- 2) We know from Judges 16:30 that the book was written after the death of Samson in 1065 B.C.

- 3) We know that Judges was written before David captured Jerusalem in 1004 B.C. because it was still controlled by the Jebusites (Judges 1:21/II Samuel 5:6-7).
- 4) We know that it was at a time when Israel did have a king which would have probably been Saul who became king in 1050 B.C.

Based on all of these calculations, we cannot be far from the date when we suggest that Judges was written sometime between 1040-1020 B.C.

What is absolutely amazing is that the things we read in the book of Judges are just as relevant as if we were reading them today. This world is still lousy and God's people still need God's help.

QUESTION #4 – What are judges?

The Hebrew verb (shophetim) from which the noun judges is derived is shaphat which means to make a judgment, to determine causes, to rule and to regulate (Deuteronomy 16:18). When you and I think of a judge we tend to think of someone sitting at a bench wearing a dark robe in a courtroom with a gavel, who is authorized to direct and control some judicial decisions over some legal trial. This concept of a judge is true to our day but not true to the book of Judges.

A judge in the book of Judges had a much broader role to play both nationally and theologically. **A judge was one who was providentially raised up by God for a specific time (Judges 2:16-19) not just to deliver justice to the nation, but to actually save and deliver the nation from oppressive enemies. He had to try to put a stop to sin and turn the nation back to God.**

He was a religious, civil, and military leader, who was raised up by God to deliver His people from various oppressors. One of his main responsibilities was to turn God's people back to God so they could experience His great mercy, salvation, righteousness, and blessings.

God raised up these judges at critical times when His people needed physical and spiritual deliverance. The nation Israel was a "loose confederacy" and everyone did what they wanted to do. In all reality, a judge was a wonderful blessed agent of God.

You and I have been put into God's family for a specific time. Some have longer appointments than others, but we all have righteous judgments to make in our own lives and world. The more we turn to the Word of God, the more we will see God do.

QUESTION #5 – Who are the judges?

There are 12-13 named, who functioned in this role from the book of Judges and two from the book of Samuel (Eli and Samuel), who functioned as a judge before Israel's first king.

The difference between Eli and Samuel and those from the book of Judges is Eli and Samuel did not have any military deliverance, although they did try to turn the nation to the Word of God. In analyzing the judges from the book of Judges, based on the amount of data, **there are six major judges (darkened names) and six minor judges.** All judges were important and necessary and all were selected by God for a specific time:

- 1) **Othniel** who judged 40 years from tribe of Judah. 3:7-11
- 2) **Ehud** who judged 80 years from the tribe of Benjamin. 3:12-30
- 3) Shamgar who judged for unknown years whose tribe is unknown. 3:31
- 4) **Deborah/Barak** who judged 40 years with Barak being from Kedesh-Naphtali. 4:1-5:31
These are two who may be counted as one because they appeared together, or they may be counted separately as two.
- 5) **Gideon** who judged 40 years from the tribe of Manasseh. 6:1-9:57
- 6) Tola who judged 23 years from the tribe of Issachar. 10:1-2
- 7) Jair who judged 22 years from Gilead, tribe unknown. 10:3-5
- 8) **Jephthah** who judged 6 years from the tribe of Manasseh. 10:6-12:7
- 9) Izban who judged 7 years perhaps from the tribe of Zebulun. 12:8-10
- 10) Elon who judged 10 years perhaps from the tribe of Zebulun. 12:11-12
- 11) Abdon who judged for 8 years perhaps from the tribe of Ephraim. 12:13-15
- 12) **Samson** who judged for 20 years from the tribe of Dan. 13:1-16:31

Now it is interesting in just analyzing these judges that some were very well known and some weren't. Some came from a strong pedigree and some didn't. Some of the judges ruled for longer terms and some ruled for shorter terms. What this tells us is that God can use anyone who takes Him and His Word seriously. Anytime someone gets serious about God and His Word, He will use them regardless of who they are or regardless of from where they came.

Do not ever minimize your responsibilities. Just because we may not be as impressive as someone else does not mean we are any less important. God uses you and me and others for specific purposes at specific times.

QUESTION #6 – Who were the enemies in the land at the time of the judges?

In **Judges 3:3-5** there are eight specific names of enemies that are mentioned. It is more than just a coincidence to see that most of them come from the line of the sex pervert “Ham” (Genesis 9:22; 10:6). In **Judges 11:17-18** there is another enemy mentioned. These were nine enemies God expected to be defeated:

- 1) The Philistines - originate from Casluhim (Genesis 10:14). They are the big, strong, intimidating enemies who loved to fight, who controlled the coastal land, and who worshipped false gods like Dagon and Baalzebub.
- 2) The Canaanites - (Genesis 10:15; 10:6, 15-18) - These are the very civilized people who are skilled in the arts and sciences. They like art, music, and architecture (I Kings 7:13-51). They were known for their immorality and fertility rites. These were the high-class cultured people who lived immoral lives.
- 3) The Sidonians - (Genesis 10:19) - These are the quiet, secure, isolated people who just want to be left alone (Judges 18:7). They were very skilled workmen known for their ability to cut timber (I Kings 5:6).
- 4) Hivites - (Genesis 10:17) - These were people who lived in mountain areas (Judges 3:3). They seem to have been pacifists who didn't want any war. Records indicate they were people who lived in tents and were very diplomatic.

- 5) Hittites - (Genesis 10:15) - There were commercial people who were very influential and involved in business, especially known for their horse trading business. They were devoted to false religion.
- 6) Amorites - (Genesis 10:16) - These were international diplomats who always were interested in negotiating peace, even with Israel (I Samuel 7:14).
- 7) Perizzites - Not certain of origin. Their name in Hebrew is closely associated with words that mean “unwalled towns” and “rural country villages” (Deuteronomy 3:5).
- 8) Jebusites - (Genesis 10:16) - These were people who love to live in the high hill country (Numbers 13:29; Joshua 11:3). These were people who loved the “high life.”
- 9) Moabites - Judges 11:17-18 - These were very friendly and very wealthy people who tried to cultivate friendships and relationships, including immoral, with the Israelites.

We will meet these different groups as we journey through the book. But here is the point - God wanted these enemies ridden from the Promised Land and Israel refused to obey completely, and as a result she had big problems.

I am convinced that a spirituality that will be blessed by God is one that will be willing to make judgments and get rid of any evil thing in our lives. It does not befriend enemies; it gets rid of them. It spots them, targets them, and eliminates them.

QUESTION #7 – What is the theme of the book of Judges?

In Deuteronomy 7:1, God told Israel that when they get into the Promised Land they needed to drive out their enemies or else those enemies would influence God’s people and turn them away from God and anger God and God would destroy them (Deut. 7:2-4). The theme of this book is simple: **God stands ready to fully bless His people, but before He will do that His people need to stop doing what is right in their own eyes and start doing right in His eyes. They need to start obeying the Word of God in specifically making judgments to get rid of evil.**

In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists 15 flesh enemies that we better get rid of if we want an inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Just as this book of Judges demands that Israel judge and get rid of enemies, it demands that we do the same thing. God is a gracious God and He gave Israel plenty of time to deal with things, and He gives us plenty of time to deal with things; but if we don’t, we will not experience the blessings of God.