

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 1b Judges: Failure Through Compromise

Presented by the



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CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Judges. Who wrote it? What's it all about? We're going to find in Judges that there's a lot of spectacular ups and spectacular downs as this nation goes from following Joshua to now following several different judges, some of whom you've heard of quite a bit and some that you haven't heard of much at all. I hope to take you through the details of it and then maybe share some of the personal applications I've learned as well as some things that I think will challenge you as you live out your day to day life. The Book of Judges doesn't specifically name its author. Tradition and most scholars assume that it's the prophet Samuel. He was also the author of other writings, so they think in that time period that he was there. As I said, it wasn't stated exactly, but that's what we lean towards. It was probably written between 1045 and 1000 B.C.

The purpose of the Book of Judges can really be divided into two different sections. Chapters 1 through chapter 16, which gives an account of the wars of deliverance, beginning with the Israelites' defeat of the Canaanites and ending with the defeat of the Philistines and the death of Samson. And then the second section that we talk about is in chapters 17 through chapter 21, which is referred to as an appendix really and it doesn't relate to the previous chapters. These chapters are noted as a time when there was no king in Israel, as is stated in Judges 17:6, also in Joshua 18:1, Joshua 19:1, and Joshua 21:25. The Book of Ruth was originally a part of the Book of Judges, but in A.D. 450, it was removed and it became a book on its own. We'll be learning more about Ruth at a later time.

The key verse is felt to be Judges 2:16-19. I'd like to read those for you. It says, "Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they wouldn't listen to the judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands. Now the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways."

Wow. What a book of contrast as you hear the difference. And you think about even in our own lives, as I was processing that, how many times do I follow God because I have men in my life who challenge me to do what God has called me to do? Should it be that way? Shouldn't the Holy Spirit enough in my life be able to carry me through those things? Yes. And yet God knew the frailties that we have in our own life. God knew the struggles that we face in our own life. And that's why he laid out all these 'one anothers' in Scripture. That's why he shared with us the importance of having other individuals in our lives to help us be directed. That's why he promotes in the New Testament discipleship, and in the Old Testament mentoring, where one comes along another, man to man, woman to woman, couple to couple, father to son, to be able to make sure we have somebody who lovingly helps us on the journey to becoming more like our Father. The Israelites needed the judges as that physical reminder to them. And without them, they seem to do their own thing.

In our own lives, I believe that God puts other people in our life, and then we need to seek them out. And believe me, individuals that are here on the earth, it's so easy for us to become independent in our thinking, especially for those of you that live in America and we think that we have it all. And yet God instructs all mankind, from whatever nation we are, that we need others in our lives, that we were designed, first of all, to have the Holy Spirit in us, directing and guiding us, but he places other humans around us, so that we can be directed to be called by them and encouraged and challenged by them to live a legacy lifestyle of godliness.

We find a couple of other verses that are often referred to as key verses as well. One would be Judges 10:15. "But the Israelites said to the Lord, 'We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now.'" You hear the cry of a people hurting in bondage, in pain. We live in a world in which people are in bondage, in pain. Bondage to sin, pain from their own sins and pain from the sins of others, and just the pain of living in a world that is unredeemed as mankind seeks to serve himself in what they do. The Israelites give us a cry that can be even heard today in our neighborhoods, in our cities, and even in our churches. "We need you, God. Do what you need to, but draw me back to yourself."

And then Judges 21:25, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Again, does it sound like a headline in our own newspapers and our online news reports of people who see and do what they only want to do in their own eyes? A moral fabric that's established on each person's whim and belief system rather than the foundations of the Scriptures to direct and guide us in the way that we should live.

The Book of Judges is a tragic account of how Yahweh or God was taken for granted by his children. After years and years and centuries and centuries, they go on the ups and downs of "Yes, God, we're with you" to "No, God, we're not going to follow you." Judges is a sad contrast to the Book of Joshua, which chronicles the blessings of God bestowed in the Israelites for their obedience in conquering the land. In Judges, they were disobedient and idolatrous, leading to their many different defeats they had. Yet God has never failed to open his arms in love to his people whenever they cried out to him. And by the way, that's still true today. Repent and turn and follow him.

Judges 2:18 shows us again that God listens to the cries of his people. Through the 15 different judges of Israel, God is honored and God honors his promise to Abraham as he's honored by the judges. He protects and blesses his offspring, the promise that he made way back in Genesis 12:2-3. Sadly, after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries, the Israelites returned to serving Baal and Astaroth. God allowed the Israelites to suffer the consequences of worshipping those false gods. It was then that the people of God would cry out to Yahweh for help. God sent his children judges to lead them back to what? righteous living. But time after time, they would turn their backs on God and return to living lives of wickedness. However, keeping his part of the covenant with Abraham, God would save his people from their oppressors throughout the 480-year span of the Book of Judges.

Probably the most notable of all the judges is the 12th judge, Samson. He came to lead the Israelites after a 40-year captivity under the rule of the ruthless Philistines, the constant enemies and antagonizers across the border to Israel. But Samson led God's people to victory over them, where he lost his own life after 20 years as a judge of Israel. Now, the announcement to Samson's mother is interesting. That she would bear a son to lead Israel is a foreshadowing of the announcement that Mary was given for the birth of Christ, our Messiah. God sent his angel to both women and told them that they would conceive and bear a son (Judges 13:7 and Luke 1:31). Who would what? Lead God's people. God's compassionate delivery of his people despite their sin and rejection of him presents a picture of Christ on the cross. Jesus died to deliver his people, all who would believe in him, from their sin. Although most of those who followed him during his ministry would eventually fall away and reject him, still he remained faithful to his promise and went to the cross to die for them. Don't you love the way that God uses the Old Testament to again be pictures of what would happen in the New Testament for the redemption of all mankind? Samson, a picture of what Christ did for all mankind and Samson did for his people that he judged, the Israelites.

We need to understand that disobedience will always bring judgment. The Israelites present a perfect example of what we're not to do. Instead of learning from experience that God will always punish rebellion against him, they continued to disobey, and as a result, they suffered God's displeasure but also his discipline. Now, if we continue in disobedience, we invite God's discipline. Not because he enjoys our suffering, but because the Lord disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as his son. (Hebrews 12:6)

Now, as a father, I can certainly understand that. The reasons I've punished my children are various. Some are for safety. When they chose to want to dart out into the street to get a ball, I had to remind them through a punishment. "You can't do that. Your personal safety is at risk." Some in the way they treated others. "No, you can't push your sister." "No, you can't take that from that person." A punishment came afterwards. Why? Because I wanted to, in some way, abuse my children? No. Because I wanted them to understand that these are the principles we live by for their protection, for the protection of others, and for the blessings even of the family, that they could live a full life to do that. It certainly is something I think all parents can understand.

The Book of Judges is a testament to God's faithfulness. In 2 Timothy 2:13, it says this: "Even if we are faithless, he will remain faithful." Though we may be unfaithful to him as the Israelites were, still he is faithful to save us and preserve us. He gives us that promise in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, but also to forgive us when we seek forgiveness (1 John 1:9). He'll keep you strong to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into his fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

The text of Judges really gives us no indication, as we read through it, sometimes of the individual backgrounds of the judges. Some it does, but some it doesn't. But we do know that as he established the judges, we find that they oversaw not just merely the legal matters but also the spiritual matters of the children of Israel, and oftentimes, the military and administrative responsibilities that were necessary. They function in many ways like a king, but they knew that they were stewards of God's command. Oftentimes, the kings thought that they were the ones who were the true rulers. But the judges knew that they were truly and only the instruments of God to carry out his message and his methods to the people that he called his children.

Now, we think about the Judges as both a period of time and a book of the Bible. The period of the judges began, as we mentioned, after the death of Joshua in Joshua 24:29 and it continued all the way until Saul was crowned king of Israel by the prophet Samuel in 1051 B.C., which you'll see stated in 1 Samuel 10:24. The Book of Judges acts as the sequel to the Book of Joshua, linked by a comparable account of Joshua's death (Joshua 24:29-31), and then you see that also in Judges 2:6-9. Events within the Book of Judges span the geographical breadth of the nation, happening in a variety of cities and towns and battlefields. And interesting to note, scholars believe some of the judges ruled simultaneously in separate geographical regions. Attempts to calculate the exact amounts of time covered in Judges are hard to really put altogether there. But generally, the book begins soon after the death of Joshua and ends in the years just before the entrance of Samuel on the scene, a period of about 300 years.

The contents of the Book of Judges were likely written in a chronological way, though. The final few chapters, chapters 17 through 21, give an overview of the moral climate during those days. And rather than occurring after the period of the judges that are listed earlier in the book, they probably happened in and around the time of the various judges mentioned in the earlier chapters. So more again of a summary of what happened and the concluding remarks, so that we could really get the power of the choices that were made by the people that were living at that time.

So you got to ask yourself a question. Why is Judges so important? The time of the judges was a time that brought great apostasy into the land. The nation underwent a political and religious turmoil as the people tried to possess the different parts of the land that had not yet been fully conquered. Remember? That's what they were told to do in Joshua and failed to do it. We see the reciprocal aspects of that in the Book of Judges. The pattern of behavior in the Book of Judges is clear, though. The people rebelled. How? Through idolatry and disbelief. Remember that—Idolatry and disbelief. God brought judgment through what? Foreign oppression. God raised up a deliverer or a judge, and the people repented and turned back to God. When the people fell back into sin, the cycle started all over again.

Ironically, in this book, we meet many of the heroes of the faith. We meet Othniel. We meet Gideon. We meet Samson, which we've talked about. We meet Shamgar. We meet Deborah. We meet Jephthah. We meet Ehud. A lot of people we know much about and some little about. But they're fine individuals who answered God's call to deliver the Israelites in sometimes a dramatic form. The book includes many of the most graphic, violent, and even disturbing scenes in all of Scripture. Some in the name of righteousness; others in the name of evil. The common thread of these judges were, although they were flawed, as we mentioned, they were obedient to God.

Remember that, dear friend. Remember, God wants to use you. Now, we don't have judges today, but God calls his children, those who come to know him, as their personal savior, to be obedient to him and to impact the people that you get to impact through your reputation, through your testimony, through the legacy you lived. Fathers to their children and their grandchildren, mothers to their children and their grandchildren, families towards each other, husbands to their wives, our neighborhoods, our churches, our communities, our country, our world. We're called to be the beacons of hope. We're called to be the shining lights like the judges were for the children of Israel. We're called to be those same beacons of light where we're at. I love that God took people that you and I would have discarded possibly, that you and I would have thought are useless in this. I mean, look at Samson and the erratic life that he lived, ups and downs. But God saw the heart of Samson. And God sees your heart. He sees someone who is redeemed by him and wants to serve him. Don't allow the baggage of the life that you have lived in the past possibly or the lies that you believe today to hold you back for the amazing journey that God has for you.

So there's some big ideas here in Judges that we want to really talk about. Now, again, the primary message of Judges is that God will not allow sin to go unpunished. As Exodus established, Israel was what? God's people. He was their king. They had forsaken the covenant that was established at Mount Sinai. Now, in Judges, he disciplined them for what? Following other gods. Disobeying his sacrificial laws and engaging in blatant immorality and descending even into anarchy at times. Yet because they were his people, he listened to their cries for mercy and raised up leaders to deliver them. Unfortunately, even those godly individuals did not wield sufficient influence to change their nation's direction in a permanent way. The people's inability to resist sinful Canaanite influences eventually revealed their desire for a centralized monarchy led by a righteous king whom God would choose as his intermediary.

God desperately wanted the Israelites to just use him as their king and him alone. Do not put somebody in between. And yet they cried out, as we see Judges wrapping up, "Give us a king like other nations." [1Sa 8:5 NLT] Why do even today believers so much want to crave and be like the world around us, a world that's dying and going to hell? And yet we so often want to be like them instead of realizing the valuable treasure we have, that we're his children, that we have him as our God and our God alone, and that he'll provide, and that what he calls us to do will be enough that we could find satisfaction in. But we so often, like Lot, look to the world and are drawn to the world and want to be like the world.

Israel did the same thing. So be careful when you read Judges not to be too critical of them because you may find some of those same life patterns in your very own backyard.

Memory is a gift. Remembering the past teaches us countless lessons about how to live today. I remember as a child one time, in particular, I liked to climb things, and one time I decided to climb a post in front of my grandparents' house. And as I shimmied up that, as I did many other places, I would go up and I would kind of slide back down. Well, I got in my wrist still today a scar from as I slid down and got a pretty severe sliver jammed up there. Didn't need stitches, but that's the reminder of a scar. That scar is a memory to me. And even as a kid, I remember there would be times I'd think about climbing something, going, "Wait a minute. Am I going to be able to get back down it? Because I know I can't slide, because I don't want to have that sliver jammed in my arm or somewhere else again as I do that."

And we can use those same positive and negative memories in our own lives, understanding that they are gifts from God. The Israelites forgot. They didn't remember the miraculous events that brought them to this land or the covenant that united them to their God. But God didn't forget his. I think back to the time when the Israelites had just crossed over the Jordan. The Jordan that God split. The Jordan that God allowed them to walk on dry land and they got to the other side. Can you imagine the emotions? "God finally got us here. God has this land in front of us. We just have to follow him." And now as they're in the Promised Land, they had forgotten all that God had done and all that God had promised that they would continue to do in following him.

Have you forgotten the great works of God in your own life? Perhaps your difficult circumstances are overpowering your faith. Do you feel that he's disciplining you maybe even right now? Know that he disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:5-11). Return to him. Remember: trust, and obey. He is waiting with open arms. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? Because that happens today. Every time the Israelites chose to go back to God in Judges, he received them. I think of the story of the prodigal son, the son that took his half of the wealth and went and lived his life the way he wanted to and wasted it all and ended up feeding pigs and wanting to eat the food that he fed the pigs. And he comes back home, saying "Dad, just take me as a servant." [Luke 15:19] And his dad, the Bible says, waited day by day, looking for son. When he came, he didn't go, "No. Shame on you. Yes, I'm going to make you a servant." He put on his garment and ring to signify that his son was a part of his family. He hugged him and restored him. Do not believe the lie of the devil ever that you're too far gone. He receives us. Repent and receive his gift of forgiveness.

We talked about several of the people in the Book of Judges that are there. And we talked a little bit about the breakdown of the chapters, but I'd like to expand on that a little bit more as we continue on this journey. In chapters 1:1 through 3:6, we find the Israelites have failed to keep their part of the covenant, among many other things, and didn't entirely conquer and take control of all the land they were promised. This problem unfortunately grows wildly out of control as time goes on. Then we pick up in 3:7 all the way through chapter 16. God raises up judges to rescue Israel several different times.

That cycle of sin, rescue, worship, sin continues constantly. These rescues were temporary. Why? Because we find the nation's obedience only lasted as long as that particular judge they had. Out of the 14 judges mentioned, it's interesting to note that in their obedience, the major judges that stand out are the famous stories of Deborah and Gideon and Samson. We don't really pay as much attention to the other ones. I encourage you to even take a little further study yourself into their lives. And we'll talk a little bit more about them as we move on.

Now, in chapters 17 through 31, a big chunk there, we see Israel slumping into a horrid state of moral demise and even ruin. Predominantly, we see in the tribes of Dan and Benjamin how far man has really turned from God, the God of Abraham, the God of their forefathers. The Dan tribe, in fact, had almost completely given into the worship of idols made by a man named Micah, even to the point that they practically defend worshipping idols. Later, the entire tribe of Benjamin is wiped out down to only 600 men in a violent and vicious civil war. It's here that we read the passage of truth, Judges 21:25. We referenced that earlier. "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Israel continues to conquer Canaan after the death of Joshua, but fails to completely drive out the Canaanites as God commands. And that's what creates a lot of these aspects of fighting and in-fighting and wars that took place. Those that remained behind turned Israel toward the worship of their idols, their gods. Not the God, but their gods. Some of them like Baal and Astaroth, which we mentioned before, that's what broke Israel's covenant. Not to mention how it affected God's feelings of seeing his people turn from him after all he'd done for them. But as we stated before, God steps back and the Israelites unfortunately don't learn from their mistake but continue in their path.

Now, the last five chapters of Judges actually take place during one of these times, and they're not pretty. Israel becomes a barbaric nation led by whomever was the biggest and the baddest bully on the block. There's rape. There's murder. There's genocide. There's mass kidnappings aplenty in these chapters. Once God allows Israel to be conquered by oppressors, that time, and then only, is when they find that they need him. So then they turned from their idols and go to him. And what does he do? He sends warriors. He sends champions that were called the judges. Each time God sent a judge, he led that judge into battle for Israel to conquer their enemies. And that's where we see some spectacular power of God in the way that he allowed these minor nations, so to speak, which is what Israel had become, conquer the greater nations that had them in bondage, and in some pretty graphic ways. They restore peace. They restore prosperity. But like clockwork, they go back to it again.

Deborah is the only female judge. She was a prophetess who, along with General Barak, defeats a Canaanite king and his general Sisera with a little help from Jael, a woman, and her handy-dandy hammer. The general goes in there after the defeat looks completed for Sisera and his army. And as Jael sees Sisera take a nap or helps him go to sleep, she takes a tent spike and a hammer and takes care of Sisera in a pretty graphically destructive way. We know it's interesting, but Deborah and Barak are so happy about this that they sing a victory song that lasts a whole chapter. Then they die and the people fall to pieces again.

Then we see Gideon, again, who is oftentimes forgotten. We've talked about Samson. We've talked about Deborah. Now we talk about Gideon. And he rallies Israel. And remember, the unlikely judge, Gideon is hiding behind a winepress, taking a few seeds of grain, trying to make some meal out of it so he could have a loaf of bread to eat. And God calls him, and Gideon over and over again has to ask for the affirmation of God. And how does God do the victory? Once again, he shows the Israelites through the victory that it's not Israel that conquers. It's God that conquers. He takes a small remnant that he shaves down and he asks them just to have three instruments that none of us would choose as weapons of warfare: a pot, a trumpet, and a flame or a torch. He puts them around the invading army, and at the sign given, the pot over the torch, the horn in the hand, they break the pot. It appears as if an army is around them, and the trumpets sound, and the enemy literally is so scared and so discombobulated that they start to kill each other. The hand of God is always powerful.

I just want to mention, as we wrap, up a few things that I find are interesting as we think of the end part of this. And just some of the stories for you to remember and, again, to examine on your own. We see not just the armies that are defeated, but I want to encourage you to look at the numbers that are conquered. We talk about 5000, 10,000, 100,000, which should remind us once again that God is never overwhelmed by the might of man. The might of man never can overcome God. Why? Because God is the ultimate creator. God is the ultimate judge. And that's always good for us to remember as we consider all that God does for us and even to us, that he is a good, kind judge, a judge that wants what's best for us, a judge that is considerate and thoughtful but is not unwilling to mete out justice when necessary.

Now, the Israelites over and over again didn't get that, but you and I can. Obey God and receive his blessings. Disobey God and receive his justice. Don't be shocked by it. Know it's coming when you choose or I choose to be disobedient. There's a lot of great lessons that we can learn from the Book of Judges. And I hope that even as you explore on your own or individually and unwrap each of the 14 judges and find out the part they played, as we mentioned, you'll not only see a flawed man, but you'll see an amazing God to be able to take humanity and have them do the impossible for the redemption of his people.