



Wednesday Bible Education
Biblical Theology
Lesson 8: Judges

REVIEW

Questions from last week's lesson:

1. What is in the book of Joshua?
2. How does Joshua help us today?

Answers:

1. Joshua recounts the history of the conquest of Canaan. Joshua leads the second generation of Israelites into the promised land. The book has a number of familiar accounts—Rahab and the spies, the battle of Jericho, sin in the camp and the death of Achan. The book tells of the deception by the Gibeonites and how they remained in the land. Joshua tells of the battle with ten kings at Gibeon and the sun standing still to give Joshua the victory.

The book also recounts the dividing of the land, the renewal of the covenant, and the death of Joshua. The book of Joshua is about God glorifying himself through bringing judgment on the idolatrous nations of Canaan and faithfully fulfilling his promises to Israel. God is especially revealed as the God who fights for his people and brings them rest.

2. We can take the charge to Joshua in Joshua 1:1-9 and be personally exhorted to have courage and to trust in God. From the book, we find this means to walk in his ways and honor him. Though we are not Israel today, we do receive blessings in Christ's kingdom according to his promises to Abraham (Luke 13:28-30). Israel is set aside for a time and we are grafted in. They will be regathered and restored and we will be with them in the kingdom of Christ, so we certainly have interest in the faithfulness of God to his promises to Israel.

The battle of Jericho encourages us to keep God's word no matter how odd it may seem. God's word is out of step with conventional worldly wisdom and might even seem strange at times to believers. Nevertheless, we are to follow and keep his word always.

Understanding Joshua helps us to God is in control over history to accomplish his purpose. He employs the means of men and nations, but he is not limited by them. Even when men fail, God's purpose succeeds.

INTRODUCTION

What is the book of Judges about? Judges tells the history of Israel after the death of their leader, Joshua. Israel tries to complete the conquest of Canaan, but fails to drive out all the inhabitant nations.

The judges are leaders who provide temporary deliverance for Israel from their enemies, the Canaanite nations who oppose them. These deliverances involve various unusual means. The left-handed Ehud kills the king of Moab, Eglon, with a concealed dagger. Shamgar kills 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Jael drives a tent peg through Sisera's head. Gideon destroys a Baal altar at night, puts out a fleece, and defeats the Midianites with a mere 300 men. The angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife, the birth of Samson, and all of Samson's exploits.

Judges describes the lack of leadership and authority in Israel. There was king in Israel in those days and every man simply did what was right in his own eyes. The sins of Israel were heaped up and Judges shows God's righteous wrath against sin and also the glory of his mercy and faithfulness to forgive and deliver his people.

This lesson covers the entire book of Judges. We will consider the content and structure of the book, along with major themes and practical applications to modern readers. We will consider what Judges reveals about Christ and his kingdom as it fits into the Bible's global story.

OBSERVATION

Judges is the second book of the historical books of the Old Testament. The book begins with the death of Joshua, and so continues the account from the book of Joshua. Judges is historical narrative recounting events taking place in different areas throughout the land of Israel. It is not strictly chronological and the times of the different judges overlapped, as they were in different areas. The time of the judges in Israel's history extended from the death of Joshua to the coronation of Saul as king, around 300-350 years. Judges does not cover that entire time, but it does cover most of it.

The book is named for the key figures in the book who were judges, or deliverers for Israel from their enemies. There were twelve judges total—seven major and five minor. The distinction between major and minor is only made by the amount of space given to each judge in the book. The seven major judges are Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah/Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. The five minor judges are Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Looking at the list, we are typically more familiar with the major judges than the minor ones.

Judges has three distinct parts—beginning, middle, and end. The beginning starts with the death of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan continuing without a leader. Joshua was the replacement leader who took Moses' place after he died, but there was no such leader raised

up after Joshua. Israel doesn't succeed fully in taking Canaan as they leave inhabitants who later become a thorn and snare to them. This is the reason they need the judges to deliver them. This beginning sets up the second part of the book, introducing and summarizing it in Judges 2:16-19.

The second part of the book is the largest part and is the account of the judges. This section describes a pattern, or cycle, that is repeated seven times.

1. Israel sins (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)
2. Israel is oppressed by an enemy nation (3:8, 12; 4:2; 6:1; 10:7; 13:1)
3. Israel cries out to God (3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6-7; 10:10-16)
4. God raises up a deliverer for Israel (3:9, 15; 4:4-9; 10:10-16)
5. God gives Israel victory through the judge he raised up (3:10; 6:34; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)
6. Israel and the land have rest (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:30)
7. The judge dies and the cycle repeats

The last part of the book is the conclusion to the book. This section offers a different perspective on Israel during this period. There are no judges or foreign nations mentioned in this section. The conditions in Israel are terrible and this section presents those conditions as due to Israel's disobedience.

A brief outline of Judges:

1. 1:1-3:6 Introduction and failure of Israel to drive out the Canaanites
2. 3:17-16:31 The account of the judges and the deliverances of Israel from enemies
3. 17:1-21:25 Conclusion and depiction of Israel's condition without a lasting, righteous king

INTERPRETATION

Judges is historical narrative but also provides critical commentary on the condition of Israel during this period. The book begins hopeful with Israel in the land of promise they had been longing for, but conditions quickly deteriorate until it hits a tragic low at the end of the book. Judges offers five distinct reasons for Israel's decline.

1. Disobedience by not driving out the Canaanites (1:19, 21, 35)
2. Idolatry (2:12)
3. Intermarriage with pagan Canaanites (3:5-6)
4. Refusing correction and instruction (2:17)
5. Turning away from God (2:19)

Judges describes the entire land of Israel as corrupted as the middle account covers all geographic regions—south (3:7-31), north (4:1-5:31), central (6:1-10:5), east (10:6-12:15), and west (13:1-16:31). Judges gives critical commentary as it pronounces three particular judgments against Israel's actions.

1. Everyone was doing right in his own eyes (17:6; 21:25)
2. Condemned as doing evil in God's sight (2:11; 3:7, 12; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; 14:1)
3. They had no king to deliver them from their enemies, from their sins, and to cause them to keep God's covenant (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)

Judges highlights the mercy and faithfulness of God in delivering Israel because of his word. God is faithful in bringing judgment for their sins, because he told them he would. God is faithful in delivering them in order that they would not be totally destroyed, because he had promised to do so.

Judges contributes to the expectation of the Messiah and his kingdom. The book doesn't have any direct prophecies of Christ, but the very last verse certainly speaks to Messianic expectation (21:25). It's as though we come to the end of a tragedy and ask for a moral from the story. The failure of the judges and the fact their deliverances are only temporary both point to the need for a fully capable and lasting deliverer. This will only be had when Israel has an everlasting, righteous King.

The book has several references to a king and so contributes to the expectation of the kingdom. In the incident with Gideon, the people wanted Gideon to be a dynastic king (8:22-23). The people of Israel were asking for a perpetual kingship that would stabilize the kingdom. Gideon rightly recognized that kingdom rule comes from God and he was not the One who would rule over Israel.

APPLICATION

How does the book of Judges apply to modern readers? Sin is not only a problem for Israel over three thousand years ago. Sin is universal from the fall of Adam to today. Understand-

ing Judges should help us see the outcome of sin. Where does disobedience lead? It leads to the corruption we see in Israel as Judges gives us scenes of unthinkable societal corruption. We today cannot think we can walk contrary to God's word just as Israel did and escape judgment, which they did not.

Judges certainly highlights the necessity of righteous authority, but the book also helps us see that righteous authority does not come from man. The book gives a certain political perspective. We can see that even if the "right" people are elected and appointed, and even if that leads to some betterment for the country, it will not be full and it will not last.

We can apply the message of Judges to ourselves because we can identify with Israel in ways. Judges makes clear that Israel's problem is not out there among the nations, but it is within Israel. They needed a king to deliver them from themselves as much as from their enemies. In short, they need a Savior, and so do we.

CONCLUSION

Judges recounts the failure of Israel to complete the conquest of Canaan after the death of Joshua. The book shows Israel's condition without a leader, as everyone lived by their own ideas. Judges highlights the faithfulness of God in punishing Israel for their sins and in raising up temporary leaders to deliver them from their enemies.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology going book by book through the entire Bible. Each lesson typically covers one book of the Bible, though occasionally covers more than one book when the books are short. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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