

JUDGES

CLASS 1: Establishment of Israel in Canaan

READING: Deuteronomy 7, Judges 2:15-19, Joshua 23-24

OVERVIEW

Exodus through Deuteronomy records the law of Moses and the story of the creation of the nation of Israel. God's promise in Genesis to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarch ancestors of this nation, was that their descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Joshua is the record of their conquest over several decades. The last chapters of Joshua set the stage for the book of Judges by showing us that God had kept His promises and had brought them the land. In the final chapters Joshua reiterates the nature of the covenant of Moses, a covenant with consequences (Deuteronomy 30:1, Romans 8:2, Hebrews 10:28).

POINTS OF APPLICATION

We are told repeatedly that the nation of Israel is a figure of the church, and we might see the various tribes as images of local churches (Romans 9-11, 1 Corinthians 10, Romans 15). We are meant to see parallels in Christ and Moses, in the covenant of Moses and the covenant of Christ, in the promised land and the promise of eternal life. But we are also meant to see that these "foreshadows" of the things of Christ were imperfect. Deuteronomy 7 told Israel to overcome the nations before them. We are told to overcome the works of darkness in Ephesians 5:11 and 2 Corinthians 10:5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a foreshadow (Hebrews 10:1)? What is an *anti-type* (1 Peter 3:21 NKJV)?
2. Why did God give the children of Israel the land of Canaan? In other words, why not Egypt, or the land of Ur?
3. What might the nations that Israel needed to overcome represent for us today as an antitype?

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CLASS 2: The Failure of Israel

READING: Judges 1-2

OVERVIEW

The book of Joshua detailed the victory of Joshua in the land. So it is a bit confusing that there is still a conquest that needs to occur after his death. We should probably understand this that Joshua broke the reign and power of the kings of Canaan, and now it was up to the individual tribes to then annihilate these people (compare Joshua 11:1 with Judges 4:2). Chapter 1-2 record an important point that is key to the entire book: the tribes of Israel universally fail to drive out the inhabitants, but ultimately take up residence along side them. This sets the scene for God's charge in Judges 3.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

There is a key application from this text: the danger of quitting before a job is done. Consider the work of a local church as similar to the charge of the individual tribes. We have works given to us (edification, evangelism, benevolence, doctrinal purity, orderly arrangement). If we began one or all of these works and did not finish or did not do all of them, what would the result be for us?

There is also an important lesson in the issue of purity. When the tribes failed to drive out the nations, the behavior of the nations became their own. It is a constant truth that we are susceptible to being drawn into the behavior of those around us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When God ordered each tribe to secure their land in Judges 1:2, what did Judah do in verse 3? Was this what God commanded? What can this be compared to in the church today?
2. How are some of the churches in Revelation (such as Ephesus in Revelation 2) an example of only partially completing their purpose? What was the danger they faced?
3. What meaning or significance is there in the name "Baal"?
4. Why is the mention of Moses' father-in-law confusing?

JUDGES

CLASS 3: The First Judges

READING: Judges 3

OVERVIEW

A pattern is being established here that will become a theme in judges. A foreign king overcomes parts of Israel, and God raises up a righteous man to deliver them. The first king and nation is Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia (Padam-Aram, Laban's homeland). The first man raised to deliver them is Othneil, a nephew to Caleb. Little is spoken of him here, but in Judges 1 and Joshua 15:16 we see he was a man to fight for Debir for Caleb.

The next nation to overcome Israel was Eglon of Moab (Lot) and an alliance of Ammon (Lot) and Amalek (Esau). Ehud of Benjamin delivers them. Finally, Shamgar was raised to strike at the Philistines.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Many of the nations God drew up to persecute Israel were related to Israel. These relatives caused grief from their very origin. We might again consider a parallel that many churches are offshoots of the church of Christ, and many congregations are not sound in their doctrines.

The cycle established here is important because we need to consider how it might be around today. In the US we see churches at their most successful during national crisis (Civil War, Great Depression, WW II). We see them the most static during times of prosperity. This is true in our lives as well. Successful discipleship requires attention to God in both the good and bad times in our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Was Ehud assassination of Eglon honorable?
2. Why do we see churches grow in difficult times?
3. What things can we do to avoid diminishing when prosperity is present?
4. Should we pray for national catastrophe to bring repentance?

JUDGES

CLASS 4: Deborah and Barak

READING: Judges 4-5

OVERVIEW

When Israel strays next, they are enslaved to a Canaanite king named Jabin (not the earlier one in Joshua) and his general Sisera. He has the most powerful and advanced war machines in the world: iron chariots. The prophetess and judge Deborah calls Barak of Naphtali to lead Israel in overthrowing. In battle the Lord routes Jabin (Deborah's song tells us how). When the battle ends, Sisera flees to the tents of the Kenites, where he is killed by the wife of the chief. Chapter 5 is the song of Deborah and Barak which points out the victory of God and the lack of participation by the other tribes. In the end, even great weapons of war fail before God.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

This event with Canaan is the only time when one of the nations to be overthrown held power over Israel (Deut. 7:1).

The issues that arise are when Barak refuses to take the position of authority in this battle; it is a lesson to all who are called to lead but decline for whatever reasons. One of the themes of the song is that great things happen when people willingly offer themselves to the service of God.

In this event we see two very different women who are particularly blessed. Deborah as the leader of Israel and Jael as the vindicator of Israel. Deborah is one of only a few judges who were also prophets.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Are there other women who were leaders of Israel? Are there other judges who were prophets?
- 2) Why was Barak denied the honor of personal victory over Sisera?
- 3) Who are the Kenites? Why are they important in Scripture?
- 4) Why might Jael have struck down Sisera? What might verse 11-12 have to do with her actions?

JUDGES

CLASS 5: Gideon

READING: Judges 6-7

OVERVIEW

When Israel turns to sin again, Midian and the Amalekites drive them out of their farms and into the hills. The Angel of Jehovah meets Gideon of Manasseh (aka *Jerubbaal* and *Jerubbesheth*) and calls him to lead the war. Gideon demands a sign, which God provides. He then destroys the altar of Baal and the Asheroth pillar and calls out from four tribes to join him. He asks for two more signs, which God provides. In chapter 7 God reduces the numbers of his forces through a series of tests. Then, with God's aid and subterfuge Gideon attacks the enemy camp, and the enemy flies. The two princes of Midian are killed. The war is not over, but the battle belongs to the Lord.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Gideon's work of liberation begins not with the enemy but with the idols of the land. These are the causes of their suffering; the Midianites are merely the symptoms of their true problems.

The engagement of Israel with Baal is an enormous problem. It might be worth considering that their first encounter with Baal was also at the hands of the Midianites (Numbers 31:2). Baal means "lord" and represents a counterfeit of Jehovah God.

Finally, we see in Gideon that asking a sign is not wrong if God has not already provided something. Today we have the Word of God, which is the total sign of our faith (Romans 10:17).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Who are the Midianites?

2) What other men in the bible asked a sign of God in order to believe?

3) What parallels in our day can we point to as a difference between a cause and a symptom? In other words, what things does our society suffer today that are often mis-diagnosed because the cause is spiritual?

JUDGES

CLASS 6: Gideon Pt 2

READING: Judges 8

OVERVIEW

After the striking victory of Gideon, the tribe of Ephraim complains that they were not invited to participate. Gideon suggests that they were given the chief honor by God. As his small army pursues the Midianite/Amalekite army, they are rebuffed by the cities of Penuel and Succoth, upon whom Gideon vows revenge. He then takes the vastly superior army of Midian, secures the kings of Midian, and returns to the cities who spurned him. After this, we find out that the kings of Midian had killed Gideon's brothers at Tabor. Gideon executes them and refuses to become king of Israel. Sadly, Gideon's story ends with his creation of a stumbling block of idolatry to Israel, and being forgotten by his people.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

The first half of the chapter is a testimony to the importance of participation. Some were not called but wanted to be; others were called but refused. 1 Corinthians 12 speaks to our individual places within a local church like this. We need to do what we are called to do, and not do things we are not called to do. Second, Gideon's greatest act was to reject a crown from his people. He understood that God was the King (1 Samuel 8:7).

The sad ending is also important to observe. It was the blessings God gave Gideon that caused him to stumble. It does not say what the ephod was (the term is not clearly understood in the OT but it seems likely it was meant to worship God at first, then later became an idol to Baal).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Was Gideon right to bring vengeance on the people of Penuel and Succoth?

2) Why are the Midianites called Ishmaelites in 8:24?

3) What do you know about Ephods in the Bible?

4) If Gideon made the golden ephod to worship Jehovah, would that have been acceptable?

