

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?

JUDGES

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?

JUDGES

CLASS 7: Abimelech

READING: Judges 9

OVERVIEW

Abimelech (“Father-King”) was the illegitimate son of Gideon. He journey’s to Shechem and there declares himself king. He hires mercenaries to kill all of his brothers. One brother (Jotham) escaped, and in a parable cursed Shechem and Abimelech. Abimelech “ruled” three years, until an evil spirit came upon the men of Shechem, who then betrayed him to serve Gaal Ben Ebed. A battle ensues at Shechem, and Abimelech destroys the city with fire. Abimelech moves to assault Thebez, but is mortally wounded by a stone from the tower and orders himself slain. The chapter concludes declared the curse of Jotham complete.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Baal-Berith (also called El-Berith in vs. 46) means “Lord of the Covenant”. The covenant of Shechem was created with God by Joshua in Joshua 24:25. It is important to see that something that was created for Godly purposes became idolatrous. Many things given by God have become and still can become idolatrous (e.g. Numbers 21:9).

Another point worth considering is the sending of the evil spirit to the men of Shechem. It is not clear what this means, but is similar to the spirit send to Saul. Finally, we end with the assisted suicide of Abimelech. It raises the consideration of the wickedness of such an act.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the logic of the men of Shechem to make Abimelech king?
2. What was the meaning of Jotham’s parable?
3. What other mentions can you think of when evil spirits were sent from God? How might 2 Thessalonians 2:11 fit into this?
4. Is Abimelech the first king of Israel? Are there any other men who called themselves king but are not considered kings of Israel?

JUDGES

CLASS 8: Jephthah

READING: Judges 10-12

OVERVIEW

Judges 10 moves swiftly through the work of Tola and Jair to Jephthah of Gilead (a region that included at least 30 cities). Then the chapter tells us again of the cycle of apostasy, torment and repentance. This time the persecution is from Ammon and the Philistine. The deliverer is Jephthah, a man whose origin (his mother a prostitute) and treatment is contrasted with his Godliness and success in Judges 11. Jephthah first attempts diplomacy with Ammon, but after failing this defeats them (with a terrible oath). After this victory we see the first (of many) civil wars among the tribes, when Ephraim wars against the Gileadite army of Jephthah. The chapter concludes with the judgeships of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Jephthah's origin and early adulthood don't make for the typical judge, but the Scriptures love to tell us looks are deceiving.

Jephthah's foolish vow is perhaps what we know the best about him. There is a great debate as to what he did with his daughter after the vow. Leviticus 27:2-3 seems to suggest that there was an alternative to killing his daughter.

Ephraim's desire for prestige in battle leads to a defeat for them. We might recall this occurred before (Judges 8) and how ultimately Ephraim becomes the synonym of the tribes of Israel that depart from David's dynasty (Jer. 7:15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What lesson about making judgments about birth and young adulthood does Jephthah teach us?
2. What lessons on making vows does Jephthah teach us?
3. What might have caused Ephraim to wage war against Gilead?

JUDGES

CLASS 9: Samson

READING: Judges 13

OVERVIEW

Samson is perhaps the preeminent judge of Israel, both as the last one discussed and the one discussed the most. Samson and Samuel are very similar; for both their birth is auspicious, and they are both called to be Nazarites for life. The life of Samson begins when the Angel of the Lord comes to the Danite Manoah and promises them a son. He returns after their prayer to *counsel* them how to raise the special son they will be given. This Angel only declares His name as “Wonderful” (compare this with Isaiah 9:6), then vanishes into the flame of the sacrifice. To this Manoah declares “we have seen God”.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Samson and Samuel also have some things in common with John the Baptist (unusual birth, unusual lifestyles, and finality of their preaching before a kingdom comes).

The Nazarite vow was (usually) a limited time vow made by a man or woman dedicating their lives to God. Although some see Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11) and John (Luke 1:15) as lifelong Nazarites, only Samson is called such.

Manoah and his wife asked one of the most important questions any parent can ask: how do we raise our child to fulfill God’s will? Their wisdom is quite remarkable through this whole situation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What things make Samson unique among the judges?
2. Why might God have created the Nazarite vow? What might the symbolism of their life (and their hair) mean?
3. Why did Manoah think that they would die (13:22)?
4. What was Manoah’s wife’s remarkable response to this claim (13:23)?

JUDGES

CLASS 10: Samson Pt 2

READING: Judges 14-15

OVERVIEW

When Samson is grown he seeks a wife, and finds a Philistine woman (contrary to the law of Moses, Jud. 3:6) whom he finds attractive. While making arrangements he slays a lion, which later becomes a bee hive. At his wedding feast he proposes a riddle which his wife then betrays to the guests. In response to this Samson slays 30 Philistines, and his wife is given away. When he visits her again, he is enraged to find she has been married to another. He destroys their grain fields; they kill his wife & her family. He is captured by men of Judah and brought to the Philistines, whom he slays with a jawbone. Finally, God provides him a special well for his needs at Lehi (the jaw bone).

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Samson is a paradox of lessons. First we ought to consider some marriage lessons here. Samson married for looks, not for spiritual need, and it brought great shame and harm to all. Don't marry for looks.

Second, a Nazarite was not to touch a carcass, and an Israelite was not to touch the carcass of an unclean beast (Lev. 11:27). Samson seems to have taken his vow lightly (compare to Jephthah). Today we are vowed to Christ by His blood, and have made pledges of abstinence and obedience. We must avoid Samson's frivolity and take our pledges seriously.

Finally, we must ask ourselves what God DID like about Samson. The answer is not easy, but at least one point ought to be considered: Samson hated the enemies of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did God cause Samson to sin by marrying the Philistine (Deut. 7:3)?
2. What does Proverbs 31:30 tell us about beauty and charm?
3. What principles ought to be learned about finding a Godly mate?

JUDGES

CLASS 11: Samson Pt 3

READING: Judges 16

OVERVIEW

This chapter introduces Samson's great failing again – lust. He is nearly destroyed by a prostitute, then meets Delilah, a woman of Sorek. She permits the Philistine lords to bribe her to find Samson's secrets. Samson misleads her thrice, but then gives her his secret the fourth time – his power is in his Nazarite vow. His eyes are put out (many see this as an apt penalty for one who could not stop looking). Over time in prison his hair returns, and the Philistines bring him to their temple of Dagon in Gaza. There Samson petitions God for the strength to bring one last act against them, and topples the temple onto himself and slays thousands at once.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

Samson was a man of the flesh, and this was his downfall. All Christians need to remember that our strength, our success, and our blessed life is in our vow, and the commitments our vow requires. It is not just our hair that is sacred; our body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:10-20). By failing that vow the Lord departs, and we are lost. Jesus warned us that it is better to have our eyes plucked out than to be lost; Samson speaks to this literally.

There is also some consternation over the end of Samson's life. There are seven suicides in the bible (Abimelech, Saul, Saul's armor bearer, Ahithophel, Zimri, and Judas). Samson's death is the most puzzling; it is not clear if it should be classed as suicide or not, since his death was not his purpose. Yet we should still consider the deadly consequences of sin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the law of Moses in regards to prostitution?
2. Why did Samson ultimately tell Delilah his secret, despite many clear indications of treachery?
3. Why might God have heard Samson in his prison?
4. How does Samson's life parallel the book of Judges and the story of Israel?

JUDGES

CLASS 12: Micah's Idolatry

READING: Judges 17-18

OVERVIEW

We have left the stories of the judges and now find ourselves in the most unpleasant parts of Israelite history. It begins simply enough; a curse and a theft that lead to idolatry by Micah. When a Levite (who lived among Judahites) arrives Micah makes him his priest. This lays the groundwork for the events in chapter 18, when a group of Danites move north to conquer Laish (a Phoenician settlement). They see the priest, and offer him a place in their new settlement, and steal the idols and ephods. When the Danites secured the city (and renamed it Dan), they established a priesthood from men of Manasseh that we are told persisted all the way to the captivity (which captivity is not clear).

POINTS OF APPLICATION

First, consider the evil of cursing others (Jam. 3:9-10), stealing (Eph. 4:28) and building graven images as though they pleased God (Ex. 20:4). Then we see the evil of trying to establish a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5), an artificial worship.

Second, consider the constant admonition of the danger when everyone does as they please. A lesson to us of the importance of church organization.

Third, we see the dangers of the sins of Jeroboam, to establish a priesthood of unqualified leaders. It is made clear that this is not done in the absence of a priesthood (in Shiloh, 1 Sam. 1:3). Recall that Jeroboam placed his golden calves in Dan, perhaps because there was already a priestly service in place. In Psalm 78:59-61 we are told that this event (or the one in 1 Sam. 4) led to God permitting the destruction of Shiloh and the desecration of the Tabernacle (only alluded to in Scripture). Jeremiah 7:12-14 cites this desecration as a shadow of what comes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is the background of the silver significant to the story?
2. Why would this Levite have agreed to this work (consider 18:20)?
3. When the Danites came, what did they ask, and what did the priest say? Did it come true? How is that significant (i.e. can men falsely but successfully predict the future)?

JUDGES

CLASS 13: War against Benjamin

READING: Judges 19-21

OVERVIEW

This story (which likely takes place early on in the history of the Judges, per 20:28) begins with an unfaithful wife/concubine of a Levite of Bethlehem. He brings her back with kindness, but when he returns home and stays in Gibeah he is assaulted by men of Benjamin, who savagely and fatally violate his concubine. When he returns home the next day, he dismembers her body and sends it out to the twelve tribes as a call to war against the men of Benjamin. All of Israel responds, and they organize an army of 400,000 to issue an ultimatum – deliver the men of Gibeah or be destroyed. Benjamin does not, and their army (of less than 40,000) engages. The men of Israel inquire of God at Bethel, who tells them to send Judah first. They lose; they inquire of God again, who directs them to fight, but again they are defeated. The third time they go before God with a contrite heart, and Phinehas (his father was buried in Gibeah) inquires of God, who promises victory in this third attempt. They draw them out of Gibeah, then sack the city, and the army of Benjamin (with no place to withdraw) is destroyed, and the cities of Benjamin are destroyed.

But there is still another story. The men of Israel made a vow in anger not to give any daughters to Benjamin. Yet the tribe of Benjamin has been greatly reduced, and without women to marry. The men of Israel, as a gesture of peace, siege Jabesh-gilead and carry off 400 women as wives to Shiloh; then they encourage Benjamin to assault Shiloh (this is before the tabernacle was there, while it was still part of Canaan) and take the women (secretly brought) there. The story concludes as it began; pointing to the lawlessness that was present without a king.

POINTS OF APPLICATION

One might consider this story as a symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, and the penalty God inflicts on them for us (1 Cor. 10:11).

The Levite and the old man's acquiescence to the crowd is disgusting, but it reminds us of the sacred nature of hospitality.

Perhaps the most striking event is the inquiry of God that leads to failure on the first two occasions.

Finally, we are finding out why Benjamin is such a small tribe (1 Sam. 9:21), even to the time of Saul of Tarsus

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why might the Levite not be named in this record (consider all those who are named in Judges)?
2. How was the blessing of Benjamin in Genesis 49:27 a foreshadow of these events?
3. Why would Israel fail to defeat Benjamin twice even though they inquired of God?
4. Why couldn't Israel permit their daughters to marry Benjamin? How long did this last?
5. When Paul appealed to his heritage in Romans 11:1, how might this story appeal to Paul's appeal that God does not leave out his people?