

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



WHEN THERE WAS NO KING

JUDGES

There are not many Biblical situations that can rival the terrible and repetitious failings of the book of Judges. The preacher Jerry Vines called this book the smelly armpit of the Bible. Moving from Joshua to Judges is the account of a nation that has moved from national public victory to national moral defeat.

The book of Judges gets its name from a series of leaders God raises up to guide his people out of their moral depravity. Some of these judges are well known, and some have hardly more than a sentence written of their rule, but all the same, they were God's chosen leaders who would become a guiding light to lead God's wayward people out of their moral darkness.

Over a 350-year period, the book of Judges continues a nauseating cycle of Rebellion against God, Retribution from God, Repentance before God, and Restoration of God. Fourteen times, from the beginning of the book to the end of the book, you will read this cycle.

Furthermore, in introducing the book of Judges, it is important to know that this is one of the few books in the Bible that gives a mission statement as to the purpose of the book. **Judges 21:25** says, *"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

We will discuss this in greater detail in a moment, but this book serves as a warning to any nation that would be tempted to go the way of this one.

How to Think about Judges

Judges is all about recognizing the great moral cost that comes with God's people allowing the culture to change them, instead of God's people changing the culture. Just watch the moral spiral downward as we take a look at these chapter divisions.

Ignoring God's Word (Judges 1-2): Chapter 1 is where we find the catalyst for Israel's downfall. In Judges 1:28, we find that Israel did not drive out all of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, and in some places, certain tribes were even pushed back altogether. As a result, Israel thought it was easier to make a league with the remaining inhabitants than to do what God said. By the time you reach chapter 2, Israel had been rebuked by an 'angel of the LORD' (Judges 2:1) for ignoring His command.

Then, you have a little bit of back story about how the people began to possess and settle in their respective lands of inheritance, but it isn't long when you read this words in Judges 2:11, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim."

Just imagine. Baalim didn't remove them from Egypt, God did. Baalim didn't provide for them in the wilderness, God did. Baalim didn't cause victory in their newly settled land, God did! In fact, Baalim didn't do a single thing for the children of Israel, because Baalim wasn't real! He was a false idol. A fake. And this is who this new nation decided was more worthy to receive worship than God Himself.

Igniting God's Wrath (Judges 3-21): This section is really broken up into two categories. And the first category has to do with God's mercy. Before you get into chapter three, there are some words that you need to pay attention to. After a detailed account of how wicked and terrible God's people had become, and after they were given over to God's wrath by way of surrounding nations taking them over, Judges 2:16 says, "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them". Their failure was great... nevertheless, God rescued them.

That is how we get into the first division in this section:

Running from Consistency (3-16)— What becomes completely obvious in chapters is that God's people have absolutely no desire of being consistent. They continually lose the battle with the culture and must be rescued over and over again.

Running to Collapse (17-21)— Nearing the end of this 350-year period, the second division has to do with Israel's complete unwillingness to change. What happens in the end of the book are exaggerated forms of the two centuries prior. Now watch the order in which this collapse happens:

1) God was Irreverent (17-18): In these chapters, you read a story about a man named Micah who was very wealthy. And in using his wealth, just to cover all of his 'religious bases', he built a 'house of gods' that he hoped would bring him even more fortune. Well, as providence would have it (so he thought), Micah came across a young man who was a Levite. This young man was supposed to be a consecrated preacher for God. However, Micah persuaded him to be a private priest— another 'collector's item' among all of his other religious possessions. Micah was actually quite happy with his new purchase and at the end of chapter 17 he said, "Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." This story ends with members of the tribe of Dan stealing everything that Micah had (including his priest) and created their own 'house of worship' and their own idol worship services. God, as the true God, became completely irrelevant as far as the nation was concerned.

2) Morality was Unimportant (19): In this chapter, you read the story of a 'certain Levite' and his concubine. As the story progresses, you find that after a brief time of his concubine running away to her father's house, the Levite retrieves his wife, and as they are making their return journey back home, they had to stay in a place called Gibeah. Once at this location, the men of the city knocked on the door of the house in which they were lodged and demanded a sexual encounter with the Levite. The lord of the house refused but offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine. The story then moves to the concubine being given over to this perverted mob and they both sexually and physically abused her all night, insomuch that she died from the encounter. The narrative ends with the Levite taking a knife and dividing her up into twelve pieces, and sending her to all the coasts of Israel as a message. As you can see, morality had no bearing on the way these people lived their lives.

3) Government was Ineffective (20-21): Once the 'body part message' was received all of Israel set themselves up for battle against the tribe of Benjamin and demanded that the offenders for the crime against the concubine be handed over so that they could be put to death. However, the tribe of Benjamin refused and decided instead to become battle ready and set themselves against the other 11 tribes. This led to a violent civil war and ultimately ended with the defeat of the Tribe of Benjamin; however, not before the loss of heavy casualties on both sides.

You can see the progression, can't you? First, the nation's problems came when God was abandoned. Then, this viral way of thinking spread to the moral condition of the people. This affected the home, it affected civility, and it the purpose of sexuality and justice. This then moved in for the final blow to the government. The government was not effective in the least and soliciting a response from their own brethren, which then led to an all out war. This was nothing short of anarchy.

What to Look for in Judges

Like the book of Numbers, the book of Judges stands as an ugly reminder of what happens without the absolute standards of God. However, there are rays of light that shine through every once in a while that let us know that though we are completely unworthy, God chooses to work with us and through us in spite of ourselves.

Key Characteristics—

Compromise: The most glaringly obvious characteristic that defines this book is the word “Compromise.” And this all happened because God’s people did not follow God’s instruction and eject all of the inhabitants of the land. We have mentioned this previously, but please understand the weight of the situation. Because the children of Israel were given over to disobedience in this way, it led to intermarriage. Intermarriage then led to ungodly influence, which then led to idolatry. The result of this led to a nation that was almost unrecognizable compared to the people that were first led into this land by Joshua.

Slavery: Over and over again, you see these words, “And the LORD sold them into the hands of...” or “... and the LORD delivered them into the hands of...” This is an indication and a literal illustration that your decisions dictate whom you will serve. There is a real bondage that comes from sinfulness. The children of Israel were taken over by foreign nations and forced into slavery.

Repentance: Throughout this book, after God would give his people over to other nations, they would decide that slavery was not for them. They would cry out to God in repentance, and God would graciously rescue them.

Key Individuals—

Othniel (Judges 3:9): This was Israel’s first judge who came after the Mesopotamian king had taken them over. Othniel was actually Caleb’s brother and after God had used him to defeat this powerful kingdom, Israel experienced forty years of peace.

Ehud (Judges 3:15): This man had some interesting characteristics written about him. The Bible says that he was the son of Gera, was a Benjaminite, and that he was left-handed. This judge was the man whom God used to deliver Israel out of the hand of the king of Moab after Israel had been enslaved for eighteen years.

Deborah (Judges 4:4): Deborah, the Bible tells us, preceded the judge named Shamgar, and we further learn that she was a prophetess. God used this woman, along with a military leader named Barak to destroy this army and bring about a great victory against Jabin, king of Canaan. In fact, they were so awestruck by what God had done, the whole of chapter 5 is dedicated as a song to God for what had been accomplished.

Gideon (Judges 6-8): Gideon is Israel’s famed, fifth judge who was allowed by God to gain a victory over the Midianite army.

Abimelech (Judges 8:31): This man was Gideon’s son and by himself, announced that he was king of Israel and went on a family killing spree trying to sure up this reality.

Jephthah (Judges 11:1): God rose up this judge to deal with the Ammonites.

Samson (Judges 13:24): Besides Gideon, this is probably the most famous judge in the history of Israel. This man was born as a Nazarite from birth and possessed great, super-human strength. Though there was a great moral tragedy in his life, God used Samson to defeat the Philistine kingdom.

What to Gain from Judges

Proverbs 14:34 says, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” The message of Judges is a warning as to what can happen to a nation when God is taken out of the equation. We are led into a completely different atmosphere

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from that of the book of Joshua. From victory there is defeat. From freedom there was slavery. From progress there was decline. From joy there was sorrow.

Justice and integrity depended on simply who you met; because it was stated in this book, "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes."

Any serious Christian in America doing any comparing and contrasting with what happened to Israel here and what is happening now in our nation should begin to weep, pray, and get involved with the civic processes of this nation, or else the warning from the book of Judges will turn and instead become our accuser.



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