

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
1-3-24

Overview Book of Judges

Real heroes are hard to find these days. Modern research and the media have made the foibles and weaknesses of our leaders very apparent; we search in vain for men and women to emulate. The music, movie, and sports industries produce a steady stream of “stars” who shoot to the top and then quickly fade from view.

Judges is a book about heroes— 12 men and women who helped rescue Israel from its oppressors. These judges were not perfect; in fact, they included an assassin, someone who doubted God, and a sexually promiscuous man. But they were submissive to God, and God used them.

Judges is also a book about sin and its consequences. Like a minor cut or abrasion that becomes infected when left untreated, sin grows and soon poisons the whole body. The book of Joshua ends with the nation taking a stand for God, ready to experience all the blessings of the Promised Land. After settling in Canaan, however, the Israelites lost their spiritual commitment and motivation. When Joshua and the elders died, the nation experienced a leadership vacuum, leaving them without a strong central government. Instead of enjoying freedom and prosperity in the Promised Land, Israel entered the dark ages of her history.

Simply stated, the reason for this rapid decline was sin— individual and corporate. The first step away from God was incomplete obedience (1:11– 2: 5); the Israelites refused to eliminate the enemy completely from the land. This led to intermarriage and idolatry (2: 6 – 3: 7) and everyone doing “as they saw fit” (17: 6). Before long the Israelites became captives. Out of their desperation they begged God to rescue them. In faithfulness to his promise and out of his loving-kindness, God would raise up a judge to deliver his people, and for a time there would be peace. Then complacency and disobedience would set in, and the cycle would begin again.

The book of Judges spans a period of over 325 years, recording six successive periods of oppression and deliverance, and the careers of 12 deliverers. Their captors included the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Philistines, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites. God used a variety of deliverers— from Othniel to Samson— to lead his people to freedom and true worship. God’s deliverance through the judges is a powerful demonstration of his love and mercy toward his people.

As you read the book of Judges, take a good look at these heroes from Jewish history. Note their dependence on God and obedience to his commands. Observe Israel’s repeated downward spiral into sin, refusing to learn from history and living only for the moment. But most of all, stand in awe of God’s mercy as he delivers his people over and over again.

VITAL STATISTICS

Purpose: To show that God’s judgment against sin is certain, and his forgiveness of sin and restoration to relationship are just as certain for those who repent

Author: Possibly Samuel

Original Audience: The people of Israel

Setting: The land of Canaan, later called Israel. God had helped the Israelites conquer Canaan, which had been inhabited by a host of wicked nations. But they were in danger of losing this Promised Land because they compromised their convictions and disobeyed God.

Key Verse: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (17: 6).

Key People: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelek, Jephthah, Samson, Delilah

Special Feature: Records Israel’s first civil war

THE BLUEPRINT

A. The Military Failure Of Israel (1:1– 3:6)

1. Incomplete conquest of the land
2. Disobedience and defeat

The tribes had compromised God’s command to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Incomplete removal of evil often means disaster in the end. We must beware of compromising with wickedness.

B. The Rescue Of Israel By The Judges (3:7–16:31)

1. First period: Othniel
2. Second period: Ehud and Shamgar
3. Third period: Deborah and Barak
4. Fourth period: Gideon, Tola, and Jair
5. Fifth period: Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon
6. Sixth period: Samson

Repeatedly we see the nation of Israel sinning against God and God allowing suffering to come upon the land and the people. Sin always has its consequences. Where there is sin we can expect suffering to follow. Rather than living in an endless cycle of abandoning God and then crying out to him for rescue, we should seek to live a consistent life of faithfulness.

C. The Moral Failure Of Israel (17:1– 21:25)

1. Idolatry in the tribe of Dan
2. War against the tribe of Benjamin

Despite the efforts of Israel’s judges, the people still would not turn wholeheartedly to God. They all did whatever they thought was best for themselves. The result was the spiritual, moral, and political decline of the nation. Our lives will also fall into decline and decay unless we live by the guidelines God has given us.

MEGATHEMES THEME:

Decline/ Compromise

Explanation: Whenever a judge died, the people faced decline and failure because they compromised their high spiritual purpose in many ways. They abandoned their mission to drive all the people out of the land, and they adopted the customs of the people living around them.

Importance: Society has many rewards to offer those who compromise their faith: wealth, acceptance, recognition, power, and influence. When God gives us a mission, it must not be polluted by a desire for approval from society. We must keep our eyes on Christ, who is our Judge and Deliverer.

Decay/ Apostasy

Explanation: Israel's moral downfall had its roots in the fierce independence that each tribe cherished. It led to everyone doing whatever seemed right in his own eyes. There was no unity in government or in worship. Law and order broke down. Finally, idol worship and man-made religion led to the complete abandoning of faith in God.

Importance: We can expect decay when we value anything more highly than God. If we value our own independence more than dedication to God, we have placed an idol in our hearts. Soon our lives become temples to that god. We must constantly regard God's first claim on our lives and all our desires.

Defeat/ Oppression

Explanation: God used evil oppressors to punish the Israelites for their sin, to bring them to the point of repentance, and to test their allegiance to him.

Importance: Rebellion against God leads to disaster. God may use defeat to bring wandering hearts back to him. When all else is stripped away, we recognize the importance of serving only him.

Repentance

Explanation: Decline, decay, and defeat caused the people to cry out to God for help. They vowed to turn from idolatry and to turn to God for mercy and deliverance. When they repented, God delivered them.

Importance: Idolatry gains a foothold in our hearts when we make anything more important than God. We must identify modern idols in our hearts, renounce them, and turn to God for his love and mercy.

Deliverance/ Heroes

Explanation: Because Israel repented, God raised up heroes to deliver his people from their path of sin and the oppression it brought. He used many kinds of people to accomplish this purpose by filling them with his Holy Spirit.

IMPORTANCE: God's Holy Spirit is available to all people. Anyone who is dedicated to God can be used for his service. Real heroes recognize the futility of human effort without God's guidance and power.