

THE BIG READ (31)

Jesus in Judges

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The Law (of Moses) contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

3. The book of Judges is the second book of the Prophets.

This part of the Old Testament known as the prophets is usually is divided into two parts:

The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) gives us God’s perspective on the history of Israel from the conquest of the Promised Land until their exile from it.

The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve) explains why the history of Israel turned out the way it did.

Key to understanding the Prophets section is recognising that all the characters and events are evaluated according to the terms of the covenant listed in Deuteronomy.

B. Getting Started with Judges

1. In Deuteronomy 7 the people of Israel were given some clear instructions about what the people of Israel were to do once they entered the land.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you – and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-2)

The 12 tribes together entered and conquered Canaan.

Once the land was allocated, Joshua gave the responsibility of destroying the remaining Canaanites to the individual tribes.

Joshua before he died warned them about what would happen if they failed to do this.

"The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no-one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God. But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you." (Joshua 23:9-13)

Israel continued to be faithful to God's Word after Joshua's death.

"Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel." (Joshua 24:31)

2. The book of Judges picks up the story where the book of Joshua left off.

It begins by recording how the individual tribes got on with destroying the remaining Canaanites who lived in the Promised Land.

"After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?" (Judges 1:1)

The first tribe chosen was Judah who had some success.

"The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country." (Judges 1:19)

They were only ones.

"The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites." (Judges 1:21)

The people of Israel did not completely destroy the Canaanites (see 1:27, 29, 30, 31, 33).

Soon they begin to worship the gods of the Canaanites.

"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the people around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths." (Judges 2:10-13)

In response, God kept His Word, and these nations became a thorn in Israel's eyes.

"In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress." (Judges 2:14-15)

Yet in His mercy, God raised up judges to rescue them.

"Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders." (Judges 2:16)

3. Who were the Judges?

The title 'Judge' is a bit misleading for our modern ears.

When we hear the word 'Judge' we need to have in our minds a saviour, a warrior, a military leader, or a champion.

Twelve are mentioned in the book of Judges: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah & Barak, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson.

Chapters 3:6-16:31: The failure of the Judges

Chapters 17:1-21:25: The failure of the Levites

2. In Judges 1:1-3:5 we see that one reason why Israel needed a godly king to rule over them was because of the failure of the tribes to destroy the Canaanites living in the land.

This section provides an introduction to the book in two parts.

The first part (1:1-2:5) deals with the failure of the tribes to destroy the Canaanites and how instead they allowed them to stay in the land.

"The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you." (Judges 2:1-3)

The second part (2:6-3:6) shows how allowing the Canaanites to remain in the land led to idol worship and introduces the repeated pattern of rebellion, retribution, rescue and rest.

"Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the people around them." (Judges 2:11-12)

Israel needed a king who, unlike the tribes, would lead the people into battle against their enemies.

3. In Judges 3:6-16:21 we see that another reason why Israel needed a godly king to rule over them was because of the failure of the judges to bring lasting peace and security.

This section records the exploits of the various judges, and records how God used each of them to save Israel.

"He too saved Israel." (3:31)

Of the 12 judges, six have a major role in the book: Othniel (3:7-11); Ehud (3:12-30); Deborah and Barak (4-5); Gideon (6-9); Jephthah (10:6-12:7); Samson (13-16).

The narrative of these judges follows the pattern of rebellion, retribution, rescue and rest.

"The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs." (Judges 3:7)

"The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years." (Judges 3:8)

"But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him." (Judges 3:9-10)

"So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died." (Judges 3:11)

The other six judges have a minor role in the book: Shamgar (3:31); Tola (10:1-2); Jair (10:3-5); Ibzan (12:8-10); Elon (12:11-12) and Abdon (12:13-15).

Their accounts are much briefer.

"After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad. He too saved Israel." (Judges 3:31)

In the case of each of the judges, the rescue they brought was temporary and lasted only their lifetime.

Israel needed a king who, unlike the judges, would provide lasting peace and security in the land.

4. In Judges 17-21 we see that one more reason why Israel needed a godly king to rule over them was because of the failure of the Levites to enforce the Law of Moses.

This section provides a conclusion to the book, and describes one of the worst periods in Israel's history.

Without a leader, the Levites were responsible for providing spiritual leadership for the people of Israel and ensuring that the people were obeying the Law of Moses.

"He teaches your precepts to Jacob and your law to Israel." (Deuteronomy 33:10)

But they failed to do this.

In Judges 17-18 we have a picture of the spiritual mess Israel was in, with idol worship rife.

In Judges 19-21 the focus is on the moral mess Israel was in.

Israel needed a king, who unlike the Levities, would keep and enforce the Law of Moses.

5. Ultimately King David would not be the King they needed.

But a King would come from the tribe of Judah and the line of David who would be.

D. Jesus in Judges

1. Jesus is the Saviour the people needed.

One who is raised up by God.

One who is filled with God's Spirit.

One who rescues us.

One who fights for us and defeats our enemies.

One who provides for us lasting peace and security in the land God has promised.

One who keeps the Law of Moses and can lead us to obey it.

One who is the King.

2. Jesus is the Saviour the people longed for.

One who was not flawed.

One who was the best of all the judges put together.

ⁱ Adapted from David Murray's Old Testament Introduction Lecture Notes