

## Preview of Judges

The history detailed in this book covers the interval between Joshua and Samuel. It is presented in a series of seven cycles, each beginning with Israel's apostasy and sin, followed by punishment, and resulting in the people's return to God in repentance.

This history is an inspired account of one of Israel's darkest eras. It contrasts vividly to the times of Joshua. In the Book of Joshua we see victory and conquest; in Judges we see compromise and defeat.

The Book of Judges provides an insight into the basic tendencies of the human heart. Man is prone to sin. As men compromise with evil, their necks are bent under the bondage of sin—"sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). Time after time, the Lord responded to Israel's need by extending mercy and deliverance. His judgments were designed to bring His people to their senses so that they could again enjoy His favor.

The events in the Book of Judges fall into three main divisions:

- 1.** The introduction (1:1-2:10). This portion relates the state of affairs in Israel at the time of Joshua's death. Chapter 2:6-10 is a revealing summary of Israel's gradual decline into the sins recorded in the remainder of the book.
- 2.** The history of the judges (2:11-16:31). This portion is introduced in 2:11-23. These thirteen verses recount the spiritual history of the times. The remainder of this portion, which is the main body of the book, pictures seven major lapses into apostasy and the ensuing judgments. In the seventh instance (chapter 13), we have no record of Israel crying for mercy or of complete deliverance.
- 3.** Additional accounts from the period of the judges (17-21). The events recorded here seem to have happened during, not after, the period of the judges. The clause "there was no king in Israel," which occurs four times in these chapters, provides a clue as to why these accounts are included—they illustrate the lawless nature of this era.

## Lesson 1      29 January 2012

### Israel's Apostasy

**Lesson Scope:** Judges 1:1-3:7

#### Lesson Focus

The Book of Judges opens by mentioning the death of Joshua, who died at age one hundred ten, approximately forty years after Israel entered Canaan. Some of the events leading up to Judges 2:6 may have occurred before his death. The vacancy left by his death likely contributed to Israel's further failure and decline.

Joshua had led the tribes of Israel into the land of Canaan. He had directed in subduing the major kingdoms in the land. But the individual tribes were responsible to drive out the local heathen inhabitants. God had promised to help the tribes drive them out, but when the Israelites failed to do their part, God sent His angel to tell them that the heathen remaining would be left there to test them. The generation that arose after Joshua totally failed this test. Instead they "mingled among the heathen, and learned their works" (Psalm 106:35).

The Book of Judges gives us a graphic portrayal of how people of spiritual privilege can drift away from God. In every generation we must actively resist our inherent tendency toward neglect, complacency, and failure.

God calls and enables His people to "Fight the good fight of faith." When God's people fail to drive out the enemy and to possess the land, the deadly force of apostasy is at work in their lives.

Israel lost the faith by associating too closely with her worldly neighbors and by failing to transmit spiritual vision to the next generation. For some of God's direct commands to Israel regarding faithfulness, read Deuteronomy 6:1-7:6.

**Lesson Aim:** To identify the course of apostasy.

**Theme Verse:** Hebrews 10:38. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

## **Lesson Text:**

### **Compromise**

**Judges 1:1-2** Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

**Judges 1:19** And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out *the inhabitants* of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

**Judges 1:28** And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.

**Judges 2:1-3** And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. <sup>2</sup> And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? <sup>3</sup> Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be *as thorns* in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

### **Idolatry**

**Judges 2:7-8** And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. <sup>8</sup> And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.

**Judges 2:11-12** And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: <sup>12</sup> And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

**Judges 2:14** And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

### **Rebellion**

**Judges 2:16-17** Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered

them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. <sup>17</sup> And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.

**Judges 2:20-22** And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; <sup>21</sup> I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: <sup>22</sup> That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.

## **Questions for Study**

### **Compromise**

1. Could Israel have had complete victory?
2. Why was it wrong for Israel to "put the Canaanites to tribute"?
3. Explain the deceptive aspects of compromise.
4. What lessons can we learn from the angel's message?

### **Idolatry**

5. How did the Israelites fail in transmitting the faith?
6. How can we help the next generation gain spiritual vision?

### **Rebellion**

7. What actions of the Israelites roused God's anger?
8. How is God merciful to the rebellious today?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

"Could not drive out" (Judges 1:19) could just as well be rendered "did not." It does not mean that God could not drive out the Canaanites but that the Israelites failed to avail themselves of God's power.

The "chariots of iron" (Judges 1:19) were reinforced with metal or armored. These were the elite military armaments of the day, and they offered a strong psychological advantage. These chariots operated best in an open area.

The Israelites "put the Canaanites to tribute" (Judges 1:28) at times when they were stronger than the Canaanites. But they did not choose to employ

their military advantage to totally drive them out, possibly because they wanted the capital such tribute provided.

The "angel of the LORD" (Judges 2:1) spoke from the perspective of the Lord Himself. This was the Lord's first appearance since approaching Joshua near Gilgal. It summarized Israel's experience in the interim.

"They went a whoring" (Judges 2:17) describes how God viewed Israel's pursuit of other gods. Marriage typified Israel's relationship with God. She committed spiritual adultery by departing from Him.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Compromise**

1. Those who hesitate to engage the enemy are in spiritual danger (1:1). Godly individuals must be willing to take the lead in engaging the enemy on a personal level. We must crucify our native desires for an easy Christian life. The pressures of apostate Christianity around us necessitate that we develop strong convictions on the issues of separation and stand firm against innovation.

2. Partial success does not excuse stopping short of full obedience (1:19). God is looking for complete victory, and He will provide strength to attain it if we are diligent and faithful. A strong relationship with the Lord enables us to obey all His commands and to live in spiritual victory.

3. Apostate people seek what they believe to be advantageous alternatives to obedience (1:28). They seek new ways of interpreting the Scriptures and thereby make room for fleshly desires. They might replace traditional clothing and veiling patterns with something less distinctive. They put a primary emphasis on individual experience and less emphasis on discipleship and submission to the church. These practices look attractive but are not in complete obedience to the teaching of the Scriptures.

4. Failure to appreciate God's faithfulness and blessing leads to apostasy (2:1). The land of Israel flowed with the milk and honey of God's provisions, but the Israelites failed to recognize them as God's blessing. God has faithfully blessed us with a rich spiritual heritage. If we fail to pass an appreciation for this heritage on to the coming generation, it will set them on a course of apostasy. Many of the tests the Israelites faced are the same for us today. Can we by the power of God do better than they did?

5. Apostasy involves disregard for the clear commands of God (2:1-2). The

Scriptures speak plainly on the issues of discipleship. To disregard the applications of the church on these issues starts us on the path of spiritual decline. Continued disobedience robs us of God's power, making failure inevitable. Repentance is the only way back to victory.

6. Failure in separation amplifies exposure to corrupting influences (2:3). When the Israelites failed to keep safe boundaries between themselves and the Canaanites, the Canaanites led them into idol worship. Associating too closely with the world today will lead to a breakdown of our practice of separation. When we are in public, we should appear as God's people and not blend in with worldly styles. Casual clothing taints the godly witness we should leave. Christian men should be ashamed if they blend with the world while expecting their wives to be distinctively attired. Parents, let us help our families live in a way that shows we are separated unto God.

### **Idolatry**

7. Apostasy is inevitable when older people fail to instruct and inspire the younger generation (2:7, 10). We want to establish an appreciation for our conservative lifestyle and traditional church life in our young people. Their vision is too short to grasp the meaning of deviation even in small areas. We should be alert to these dangers and live to inspire them to serve God faithfully.

8. To forsake the Lord is to choose another authority (2:12). There is no neutral ground spiritually. To abandon God's authority means we accept another authority. Our choices in life either take us closer to the Lord or closer to the world.

9. Apostasy brings defeat, degradation, and loss (2:14). The spiritual losses of apostasy are especially heart-rending in the rising generation. So quickly the Biblical practices of separation are lost. So quickly children and youth grow up knowing little of their wasted heritage and being deprived of its blessings. Furthermore, the effects of apostasy have eternal consequences. Those caught in the trap of apostasy need to "repent, and do the first works."

### **Rebellion**

10. The Lord leaves to their own devices those who persistently resist His efforts to help them (2:16-17, 20-22). God withdrew His protection, and Israel lost her power to overcome her enemies. God withdraws His presence from the disobedient, and they no longer have spiritual victory. Instead

they face God's wrath and judgment.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Those who hesitate to engage the enemy are in spiritual danger (1:1).
2. Partial success does not excuse stopping short of full obedience (1:19).
3. Apostate people seek what they believe to be advantageous alternatives to obedience (1:28).
4. Failure to appreciate God's faithfulness and blessing leads to apostasy (2:1).
5. Apostasy involves disregard for the clear commands of God (2:1-2).
6. Failure in separation amplifies exposure to corrupting influences (2:3).
7. Apostasy is inevitable when older people fail to instruct and inspire the younger generation (2:7, 10).
8. To forsake the Lord is to choose another authority (2:12).
9. Apostasy brings defeat, degradation, and loss (2:14).
10. The Lord leaves to their own devices those who persistently resist His efforts to help them (2:16-17, 20-22).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Could Israel have had complete victory?

Yes. Israel could have had complete victory. The words "could not" in 1:19 could as well be translated "did not." Judah focused on the chariots of iron instead of on the Lord. The work of complete victory looked too hard for the Israelites.

2. Why was it wrong for Israel to "put the Canaanites to tribute"?

God had commanded them to completely destroy the people of the land of Canaan. It was a direct disobedience to God. It broke down the separation between the Canaanites and the Israelites and led to Israel's downfall. Israel was not able on their own strength to control their enemies.

3. Explain the deceptive aspects of compromise.

Israel could not control the influences of her heathen neighbors. Compromise is not so painful to the flesh and therefore looks easier. But we cannot avoid the reality that sin cannot live in a believer's heart. God does not bless a compromise that disobeys His commands.

4. What lessons can we learn from the angel's message?

God clearly speaks even to disobedient people. God's commands are specific. God will punish disobedience, and He does not overlook sin.

5. How did the Israelites fail in transmitting the faith?

The Israelites failed to pass on the vision and inspiration of Joshua. The younger generation did not have the commitment needed to live for the Lord. The accounts of the Lord's deliverance in the past were forgotten.

6. How can we help the next generation gain spiritual vision?

We need to keep our own faith alive and growing. We need to review the Lord's past faithfulness and help our young people develop a strong faith in God. We work to build respect for our church leaders and others in authority. Parents help their families by solidly supporting the Christian day schools. We want to keep our priorities in the right order.

7. What actions of the Israelites roused God's anger?

Israel turned to idols, and God allowed their enemies to oppress them. God raised up a judge who delivered them, but in the process of time Israel turned again to idols. Israel's repeated transgressions roused God's anger.

8. How is God merciful to the rebellious today?

The way of the transgressor is hard. God places stumbling blocks in the sinner's road to remind him where he is headed. God calls the sinner through His Spirit. God allows time to continue and temporarily withholds the sinner's judgment

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

The generation surrounding Joshua failed to inspire their children with a spiritual vision. This began the pattern of apostasy that lasted for generations. May we take the example and lesson to heart and pass the torch of godly inspiration on to our families.

### **Research Guide**

It might be interesting to study the age of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. Some references that relate to this are Exodus 17:9; 33:11; and Numbers 14:26-39. A Bible Dictionary entry under Joshua may also be helpful.