

The Book of Judges

1A. Introductory basics of the book.

What is a judge? The judges were temporary and usually non-dynastic rulers raised up by God to deliver Israel from outside invasion and oppression (cf. 2:16).

Who was the last judge? (Samson in the book of Judges but Samuel as the final judge, as we know from 1 Sam. 1-10).

What time frame can be determined for the book of judges from 1:1; 2:8-10; 11:26; 13:1; 15:20?

After Joshua 1:1

A generation beyond Joshua 2:8-10

300 years overlapping Joshua/succeeding 11:26

40 years of evil beyond the 300 13:1

40 more years of Samson 15:20

Chapter 11:26 appears to take us back to the wilderness over the 75 years of Joshua, so the book covers approximately 300 years.

From 2:7, 10 with 3:1,4 and 21:25 with 2:10; 3:7 why are the judges necessary? What is the basic cycle of events in Judges? cf. 3:7-10

7

8

9a

9b-10

2A. Literary Analysis

1B. Outline of the Book

1-3:6 Introduction

3:7-16 The grace of God to Israel over the 300 years even though each one does what is right in his own eyes.

17-21 Two cases in point of the deplorable conditions in Israel: idolatry and civil war.

The gods of Micah

The abuse at Gibeah and civil war

2B. What are some Key figures and events?

Left handed Ehud and fat Eglon 3:20

Shamgar and the ox goad 3:31

Deborah the prophetess 4:4

Gideon's 300 7-8

Jepthath and the unusual vow 11.29

Samson the Nazarite cf. Delilah, 16:21

3A. Theme

Is the theme "why the Canaanites were not completely driven from the land" (IOT, 124)?

Is it, "Failure through Compromise" in contrast with victory through faith of Joshua (Davis, 94)?

Is it, the revelation of Jehovah in his work: "His acts reveal Him as the God of mercy and judgment 'forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty' except when they cry unto him (New Bible Handbook, Manley, ed., 164).

Theme stated by combining the emphases above: *the purposes of God in grace are being worked out through the 300 year era of pervasive evil in Israel.*

We have to find our key in 2:10-3:4, especially 2:23: "The Lord had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua." The conquest could have been all at once. Joshua's calling was to secure the land as a whole but details were left for gradual accomplishment after Joshua's day. This was God's decision in order to test Israel (2:22; 3:4, "to see if they would obey the Lord's commandments"). The first word here is not that Israel was disobedient in Joshua's day but that God did not deliver all into Joshua's hands.

Thus, apparently, in the days of Joshua details left to the tribes (13:1) began to be fulfilled. [They may have disobeyed early on even before Joshua died (2:1-7) but this has to be balanced by the emphasis on the fact of their obedience throughout the lifetime of

Joshua (2:7). If 2:1-7 applies to Israel during Joshua's life time, it shows a repentant quality of life.]

Overviewing the Judges era, the author tells us that Israel fails the test, "not knowing the Lord" and "doing evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2:10-11). God then judged the nation. They would groan in oppression and call out to the Lord. Then the Lord had compassion and raised up judges to save them by judging the nations afflicting them.

What emerges here? *God is accomplishing his purpose in history through Israel, demanding obedience, judging disobedience. Thus, though the disobedience is recurrent, even spiraling in a downward direction over the 300 years, God is accomplishing his will, demanding and eliciting obedience selectively, in stages, over time.*

God is continuing to fulfill his purpose expressed to us as a promise

from the very beginning. He is keeping his promise in spite of our disobedience; even disobedience is taken up in his purpose and is countered by his judgment and compassion. Our fallenness is acutely shown in Israel's disobedience generation after generation. But God does not leave Israel to her own devices to go her own way in final disobedience. He continues to intervene in her downwardness and saves.

Salvation is truly shown to be "of the Lord." He is to be praised. This comes out in Debroah's song, Judges 5.

Singing with joy to God 3a

Praise to the Lord, 3b

Presence, 5

Righteous deeds of God (v. 11), of Sovereign judgment through his people on the nations and including Jael and the tent peg (24-27).

Thus: praise (2-3, 9) the sovereign judge who sold Israel into the hands of Jabin and Sisera, his commander (4:2-3) and who is also the Lord of mercy grace and patience (God subdued Jabin, 4:23; 5:10).

3A. Message for us

1) How is the reality of final judgment against all God's enemies testified to in the book of judges? Very graphically and painfully cf. Eglon and Sisera and the message from the Lord. cf. 3:15-23; 4:7, 17-24

2) Since we are no better than Eglon etc and are outside the chosen nation of Israel on what basis do we receive mercy? In other words, can the basis be repentance, but how would repentance be a just ground for pardon and mercy? The basis must be the covenant promise (2:1-3; to the nations, Gen. 12). The Lord does remember Israel and grieve with her in her distress due to his kindness and mercy but the basis for the resolution of justice must be the covenant promise to Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) of the seed that must be sacrificed, that is judged!

Jesus received a message of judgment from the Father; the deepest stroke that pierced him was the stroke that justice gave! This is how God is just and justifier of those who believe/repent.

3) In the NT, when the judge comes what does John the Baptist expect him to do to the nations? Matt. 3:11-12. What does the judge in fact do in this regard according to Matt. 13:3-11; 24-30?

More study questions on Judges

1. What is the theme? of the book of Judges that surfaces in spite of Israel's downward spiral?

2. What is a judge? The judges were temporary and usually non-dynastic rulers raised up by God to deliver Israel from outside invasion and oppression (cf. 2:16).

3. From 2:7, 10 with 3:1,4 and 21:25 with 2:10; 3:7 why are the judges necessary?