

Dark Times. Broken People. FAITHFUL KING.

Judges - Week 1

Judges 1-2

The study of the book of Judges is a daunting endeavor. Perhaps nowhere in Scripture do we read page after page of disobedience and rebellion resulting in such devastation. Were it not for the overwhelming, overarching theme of the FAITHFULNESS of God despite the UNFAITHFULNESS of His people, we would wilt with despair. But fear not, beloved. Our God is faithful!

Warren Wiersbe provides insights,

The Promised Land was filled with many nations and many "petty kings" who ruled over smaller territories. Joshua had led the nation collectively in great victories over the major enemies; the way had now been paved for each tribe to go in by faith and claim the allotted inheritance. Whereas the Book of Joshua is a record of united efforts, Judges records a divided nation no longer devoted to the Lord, forgetful of the covenant that they made at Sinai (*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*).

The first two chapters of Judges present a sort of double introduction, repeating the results of Israel's disobedience and decline after Joshua died. Chapter One mentions nine of the twelve tribes in less than stellar ways. We can assume the three tribes not mentioned likewise failed to win a total victory. The Israelites failed to completely rout the enemy "so the Canaanites persisted in living in the land" (Judges 1:27). Apparently, not one tribe was able to possess the land God had promised to His chosen people. Chapter Two recounts for a second time the summary of Israel's spiritual decline after the death of Joshua and makes first mention of the sin cycle that will dominate Israel's history for the next 300 years or so.

I. Change in Leadership - Judges 1:1-2:9

Joshua had been mentored by Moses and led the people into the Promised Land, being only one of two men in the whole generation rescued from Egypt who had remained faithful to the Lord. He distributed the land among the tribes of Israel and "the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua" (Judges 2:6-7). But then Joshua died.

The book of Judges opens with the death of Joshua. Without a doubt, Joshua's death greatly impacted God's people. Any type of change in leadership substantially impacts the follow-ship. This is the natural consequence of change on any level. The Bible says, "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 26:31, Mark 14:27). It appears the people may have failed to place their allegiance in their God and had rather pledged it to Joshua. At his demise, their faith floundered and ultimately failed.

For all his leadership skills and his sterling faith-walk, it appears Joshua did not mentor anyone in preparation for his dismissal or death. The background for what appears to be shortsightedness on his part is not documented in the Scriptures, so I fear to do more than make an observation.

II. Compromise in Lordship - Judges 2:10

Joshua died at the age of 110. The death of his peers followed, possibly in rapid succession. "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers, and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Congruent to his tenure as Israel's leader, the people were not consistently and intentionally handing down their living faith to the next generation.

Tim Keller explains,

The generation after Joshua's "knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel" (v.10). The word "knew" probably does not mean that they did not know about the Exodus, the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan, and the walls of Jericho falling, but rather that the saving acts of God were no longer precious or central to them. They had not learned to revere and rejoice in what God had done. In other words, they had forgotten the "gospel" that they were saved from slavery in Egypt and brought into the promised land by the gracious mighty acts of God. Put simply, they forgot (*Judges for You*).

The next generation forgot God. Can the blame for this negligence be laid squarely at the feet of the parents for failing to pass its faith to the next generation or do we blame the second generation for hardening their hearts and snubbing their parents' efforts to impact them for the Lord? Whose fault is it? The answer is most likely both must bear part of the responsibility.

Keller observes, Mistakes made by a Christian generation are often magnified in the next, nominal, one. Commitment is replaced by complacency and then by compromise (*Judges for You*).

At the death of Joshua, the consequences of these significant realities in the nation of Israel, a void in leadership and complacency towards the holy things of God, were manifestly evident and the results were devastating.

III. Corruption in the Land - Judges 2:11-23

"Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them, thus they provoked the Lord to anger" (Judges 2:11-12).

The children of Israel disobeyed the Lord. They failed to drive out the Canaanites and, in time, became so accustomed to the sinful ways of their pagan neighbors that their idol worship no longer repulsed them. In fact, before long they engaged in their pagan neighbors' godless religious system. Thus, began the seven sin cycles of Israel during the period of the judges.

Wiersbe notes, "The cycle of disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance is seen today whenever God's people turn away from His Word and go their own way" (*Be Available*, p. 28). The book of Judges records with evenhandedness under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Israel's failures and God's faithfulness. May the experiences of Israel cause us to examine ourselves for signs of disobedience and rebellion and cause us to seek after the Lord with a whole heart of devotion.

Dark times. Broken people. FAITHFUL KING!