

Outline of Judges

“I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah...”

Hebrews 11:32

- I. **Intro: Genesis 15:13-16:** God reaffirms His promise to Abraham and tells him that from his line...
 - a. A nation would arise
 - b. Who will be held in bondage for four hundred years (Egypt);
 - c. But that the Lord will punish that nation (The Plagues) and deliver and prosper His people (The Exodus);
 - d. And the Lord will use His community as an instrument of judgment against those living in the land of Canaan, whose rebellion and inequity had reached a critical mass (Duet.20:16-18);
 - e. And the Land will be given to His people to dwell in and live in holiness with the Lord as their king (Joshua).
- II. **Background: The Book of Judges**
 - a. *It's title is misleading:* The “Judges” were not primarily judicial officials (although they did do that at times), rather they were military leaders and clan chieftains who were raised up by God during a time of great crisis to *deliver* Israel from her enemies hands, and to bring God’s people out of idolatry and into genuine worship. So keep in mind Judges=Deliverer.
 - b. *It covers about 300 years of Israel’s history:* Judges records Israel’s history from roughly 1375 all the way down to 1075 B.C. They were the dark ages for Israel and they stand in sharp contrast to the years just before under Joshua’s leadership.
 - i. In Joshua the people experience amazement and achievement; in Judges the people experience sorrow and suffering.
 - ii. In Joshua the people experience strength; in Judges the people experience weakness.
 - iii. In Joshua the people experience victory upon victory; in Judges the people experience defeat upon defeat.

- iv. In Joshua the people experience Unity; in Judges the people experience Disunity and anarchy.
 - v. In Joshua the people experience Freedom; in Judges the people experience bondage.
 - vi. In Joshua the people experience the sweet taste of faithfully following God; in Judges the people experience the bitter taste of unfaithfulness, and running away from God.
- c. *It presents a stark contrast:* Judges presents a grim picture on human failure and yet a stunning picture of God's faithfulness.
- III. The Nature of the Downward Spiral-→ Taken from *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, Longman III & Dillard.
- a. The way Judges presents the theme of Human Failure and God's Faithfulness throughout the book is best seen as a series cyclical events that unite the various accounts, but its not just cyclical in nature, it's a downward spiral, as there's a deterioration in the quality and effects of the judges leadership, as the nation continues down the spiral and ends in the abyss, into chaos and despair.
 - b. So the cyclical downward spiral takes on this pattern:
 - i. The children of Israel do evil in the eyes of the Lord (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1;10:6; 13.1).
 - ii. Although the nature of this evil is rarely spelled out, their sin prompts the anger of God and results in oppression at the hands of some foreign nation (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:9). The nature of the evil Israel commits is summarized in 2:10-3:5 as idolatry and intermarriage. Because of their sin, the Israelites are not only unable to expel the Canaanites, but they themselves fall before foreign powers.
 - iii. During their oppression, the Israelites cry out to the Lord (3:9,15; 6:6-7; 10:10).
 - iv. The Lord hears their cry and raises up a deliverer, one of the judges (2:16; 3:9,15; 10:1, 12). The deliverer is chosen and empowered by the Spirit of the Lord (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19).

- v. This deliverance is often followed by submission of the enemy and a period of peace during which the deliverer judged Israel, followed in turn by the death and burial of the judge (3:12-11; 8:28-32; 10:2-5; 12:9-15).

IV. Walking Through Judges

- a. **Judges 1:19-21; 27-36:** The Israelites failed to drive out the inhabitants of the Land as they were instructed.
 - i. The Israelites were apparently satisfied with a comfortable home in a productive land and were not zealous to achieve God's full purpose for their life.
 - ii. Ask yourself, "What pursuits, challenges and opportunities is the Lord calling me into to fulfill His purposes in me and through me that I'm unwilling to do because it would make me uncomfortable?"
 - iii. Far too often, we, like them, settle for comfort over commitment and don't pursue the full measure of God's purposes for our lives.
- b. **Judges 2:** The Lord disciplines His people and tells them the consequence of their disobedience---they would never experience the full freedom that the Lord intended, in fact, they would always be entangled by the Canaanites through intermarriage and idolatry.
- c. The Israelites intermarriage led to idolatry and infidelity to God....and so the Lord raises up Othniel as the first judge to deliver them from their enemy *and* from their idolatry.

V. Othniel (3:7-11)

- a. The description of Othniel is:
 - i. Raised up by God (v9)
 - ii. Empowered by the Holy Spirit (v10)
 - iii. Fights successfully on behalf of Israel (v10)
 - iv. Leads the people into rest
- b. He's the quintessential judge; he's the model of what a judge should be...but then he dies and the downward spiral continues as Israel commits apostasy again.

- II. **Ehud (3:12-30):** The LORD hears the Israelites cries, delivers them from oppression and gives them peace...this time for 80 years until Ehud dies and then the cycle begins again.

III. Shamgar (3:31)**IV. Deborah (and Jael) (chapters 4-5)**

- a. Deborah is described as:
 - i. A Prophetess, (v4) which meant she received His words of instruction and declared them to the people.
 - ii. A Wife of Lappidoth, which meant she had responsibilities at home.
 - iii. A Judge, hearing and settling disputes...in our day and age, a woman in a high position such as Deborah doesn't seem strange to us, but imagine the response of the people thousands of years ago in a culture that left very little room for women in community leadership of any kind....it makes Deborah all the more impressive.
- b. It's a good reminder for us that God will use unexpected people at unexpected times for His good purposes...the only qualification is a willingness to serve God in whatever way He chooses, and thankfully Deborah did!
- c. Sometimes we think the Lord couldn't possibly use us because we don't fit the profile, or we aren't the most qualified, or we don't have much experience, but these women remind us that God can and often times does, use unexpected people in unexpected circumstances to fulfill His purposes and bring Him much glory.

V. Gideon (6-8): Gideon is seen as a reluctant deliverer (Jdg 6:15-23) who delivers Israel...

- a. Out of idolatry (6:25-32);
- b. From the hand of their enemy, the Midianites (6:33-7:25);
- c. Into idolatry (8:25-27).

VI. Abimelech's (Gideon's Son) Power Grab & Jotham's Fable, chapter 9

- a. "In spite of the good that Gideon did for Israel, his son becomes not a deliverer but an oppressor, not a servant to the nation but a murderer of Israelites and of his own family."

VII. Tola & Jair, (10:1-5)

VIII. Jephthah (10:6-12:7): Jephthah is described as:

- a. A mighty warrior (11:1).
- b. An outcast (11:2-3). He was the illegitimate child (son of a prostitute) who was expelled from a prominent family by his brothers.
- c. Leader of a group of men (11:3) who delivers the nation from the Ammonites, yet makes a stupid vow that costs him his only child (11:30; 34-40)

IX. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (12:8-15)**X. Samson (13-16): A picture of what Israel had become.**

- a. Samson is an image of what Israel had become: Like Israel, he was a shadow of what he was supposed to be. He was aware of his separation to God, and yet his disregard for it, his fatal attraction to foreign women, his willfulness, his unfaithfulness all hold up the mirror to the behavior of Israel itself. So too does his fate, Samson dies...Israel doesn't die and yet they're in the Promised Land and because of their unfaithfulness they're still in bondage!
- b. Samson's life, like Israel's was complex, they both had seasons of obedience, which were marked by unbelievable victory, but for the most part they both lived in continued unfaithfulness, and never reached their potential.

XI. Religious and Moral Deterioration (17-21): Key expression repeated 4 times in these chapters is, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." The people sought what was right in their own eye rather than what was right in the eyes of the Lord and the bitter fruit of their disobedience is religious and moral decay.**a. Religious Deterioration (17-18): Micah's Idols & the Wandering Levite**

- i. The tribe of Dan goes to Micah's house to take the shrine, ephod and idols, not to destroy them, but to worship them!
- ii. Israel's apostasy and religious deterioration is so deep that it's affected the most revered household in Israel, the house and line of Moses.

b. Moral Deterioration (19-21): The Levite, his Concubine and Civil War

- i. Israel has fallen to the level of sins that we saw in Sodom and Gomorrah---because they didn't concern themselves with what was right in God's eyes, only with what was right in their own eyes---they were morally bankrupt!

- ii. The book of Judges which opens with a nation united, closes with a nation deeply divided, at war with one-another, as their rebellion led to their ruin.

XII. Closing: Human Failure & God's Faithfulness

- a. Ask yourself, "How is the Lord faithful to such unfaithful people?" Does His commitment to the nation of Israel somehow cause Him to overlook their sins? Not at all. We see the Lord's faithfulness in...

- i. **Disciplining them for their sin:** He doesn't overlook their sin, but as a loving Father He disciplines them for their sin with the purpose being greater faithfulness.

- 1. The fact that they're under discipline is actually a great thing because it means God hasn't removed His hand from them. Hebrews 12:5-6 says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son."

- ii. **Restoring them after their sin:** We see the Lord not only disciplining them for their sin, but then after the discipline restoring them and granting them victory and peace ...and the Lord does the same for us. Hebrews 12:11 says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness *and peace* for those who have been trained by it."

iii. Paying for all of their sin—as the Ultimate Deliverer!

- 1. Jesus is the true and greater deliverer who didn't fail, but rather who fulfilled every aspect of the Law, and was completely obedient to the Father, and willingly went to the Cross to pay the penalty for all our sins.
- 2. Therefore, God can be both a righteous Judge and merciful Savior because on the Cross God judged all the sin and rebellion of the world, and through the Cross He offers the complete forgiveness of sins through His Son's sacrifice.

XIII. Supplemental Thoughts on the Destruction of the Canaanites. (Taken from *ESV Study Bible, Introduction to Joshua*, pg. 390, 391)

The account in Joshua presents the sensitive reader with a deep problem, namely, the apparently wholesale slaughter of the indigenous Canaanite population in order to allow the people of Israel to occupy their land. How did Israel have any right to seize that land? And how can it be God's will for them to spare none of those who resisted them in defense of their own land? Could this be a level of barbarism that God tolerated in the OT but now forbids in the NT?

Certainly people hostile to the Bible decry ancient Israel for its "ethnic cleansing," and many sensitive Christians find this deeply troubling as well. To handle the topic thoroughly would take a longer essay, but the discussion here can guide thoughts for fuller reflection.

One must begin by acknowledging that the questions are legitimate. Christians rightly condemn this kind of behavior in other circumstances, and there is no warrant today for nations to destroy other nations in order to take their land. But there are special features of the command to Israel that both make it unique (and therefore not open to be imitated) and allow it to be seen in a moral light. This command is one reason why Exodus records the call of Moses in such detail (Ex. 3:1–4:17; cf. Num. 12:1–15): Moses is God's unique choice to be the lawgiver for his people, and the commands given through Moses come from God's own mind (cf. Deut. 18:15–20). Believers accept God's appointment of Moses to speak his will. Without this command from God as delivered through Moses, Israel would have had no right to the land.

A second point to clarify is that the Pentateuch sets out laws of warfare, distinguishing between battles fought against cities outside the Promised Land (Deut. 20:10–15) and those fought against cities inside the land (Deut. 20:16–18). It is only the latter case that requires Israel to spare no one ("you shall devote them to complete destruction"); see the notes on Deuteronomy 20:1–20 and 20:16–18. The law appears to be unconditional and implacable. With these clarifications, one can now outline why this command is not an unsolvable "problem."

(1) A fundamental OT conviction is that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the Creator of all there is, and therefore the owner of all lands. He has the right to distribute territories according to his good and holy will (cf. Ex. 19:5; Ps. 24:1). As the universal Creator, he is also the universal

Judge, to whom all people everywhere are accountable: cf. Genesis 6–8 (the flood story affects all kinds of people); Genesis 11:1–9 (the Tower of Babel); Exodus 12:12 (judgment on the gods of Egypt); the prophetic oracles about the nations (see chart). The NT shares this basic conviction: cf. Acts 14:15–16; 17:24–31. This means that God has the ultimate rights over the land of Canaan, and that he has the right to bring the Canaanites to judgment for their moral condition and deeds.

(2) Since all people are sinners, all are rightly subject to God’s judgment. The Pentateuch gives a moral rationale for the removal of the Canaanites, seeing it as divine judgment for their iniquities (see note on Gen. 15:13–16; cf. Lev. 18:24–30; Deut. 9:5). This action against these peoples, then, is an expression of God’s judgment on them through the agency of Israel. This judgment therefore announces the moral nature of God to the whole world for their instruction (that announcement in all its clarity is itself part of the blessing that Israel is to bring to the whole world). In ways that are not entirely clear, the faithful will participate with God in carrying out the final judgment (1 Cor. 6:2; cf. Ps. 149:6–7), and Israel’s bringing of judgment on the Canaanites foreshadows that great responsibility as well (see note on Josh. 6:17).

God’s judgment allows no double standard: he did not base his choice of Israel on any merit of theirs (Deut. 7:6–9), and he calls them to embrace his love faithfully. Unfaithfulness will lead to judgment upon Israel itself, whether at the level of the individual (Ex. 22:20) or the whole people (Josh. 7:11–12; Mal. 4:6; cf. Lev. 18:28). This cannot be called “ethnic cleansing,” since the treatment is just, regardless of ethnicity.

(3) Further, the Sinai covenant sets Israel up to be a “theocracy,” a unique combination of what is now called “church” and “state.” Membership in the people is both political and religious, and thus “citizens” are under obligation to be faithful in observing the covenant. Those who carry out egregious violations must be removed (e.g., Deut. 13:5; 17:7; etc.), and if Israel were to allow unrepentant Canaanites to remain in the land, they would drag the whole people down into idolatry, injustice, and evil (e.g., Deut. 7:4; 12:29–31), which, sadly, is just what happened. Christians are not to carry out this kind of warfare, because the people of God are no longer identified with a particular nation-state.

(4) Finally, even though the laws about destroying the Canaanites are stated in an uncompromising and unconditional way (in keeping with the rhetoric of ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts, which allows for this kind of unqualified statement), the way Israel applied those laws apparently made room for some of the Canaanites to surrender and survive, particularly if they professed faith in the one true God (see note on Josh. 2:9 for Rahab and her whole family; see note on 9:1–27 for the Gibeonites; cf. 11:19). This means that the appearance of implacability in these laws is just that, an appearance, and there is an implied allowance for exceptions. This is another point showing that, strictly speaking, the command given to Israel is nothing like “ethnic cleansing,” since ethnicity itself is not the reason for the action.

These factors—God’s right to allocate land and judge the world with perfect justice; the need to protect the purity of the Israelite theocracy; and the provisions for even Canaanites to be saved—all illustrate the justice that lies behind these provisions. At the same time, it is also clear that the practices known as genocide and ethnic cleansing are indeed evil, and the Israelites were not commanded to commit them. These factors were a unique part of Israel’s mission; no people today have any right to use them as a warrant to support injustice.