

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Judges

Theme: Joshua is the book of victory; Judges, the book of failure. The verses of chapter 2:7-19 sum up the story of the book. After Joshua's death, the new generation of Israelites made alliances with those nations that the old generation had left in the land, and the result was a lapse into idolatry and immorality. This brought upon them the judgment of GOD in the form of servitude to those nations which they should have subdued. Upon their crying unto GOD, a deliverer was sent unto them, during whose lifetime they remained faithful to GOD but after whose death they again relapsed into their old sins. In the last few chapters of the book, the writer gives us a close-up view of those times of apostasy and anarchy, and explains it all by the fact that "**In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.**" The story of the book may be summed up in four words: Sin, Servitude, Sorrow, Salvation.

Author: According to Jewish tradition the author was Samuel.

Scope: It covers the period between the death of Joshua and the Judgeship of Samuel.

CONTENTS

- I. The Period After Joshua (Chapters 1 to 3:4).
- II. Israel's Apostasies, Captivities, and Deliverances (Chapters 3:5 to 16).
- III. Israel's Anarchy (Chapters 17-21).

I. The Period After Joshua (Chapters 1 to 3:4)

- 1. The incomplete victory of the tribes (chapter 1).
- 2. Visit of the angel (Chapters 2:1-5).
- 3. Review of events leading up to Israel's apostasy (Chapters 2:6 to 3:4).

Notice that chapter 1 records that which was the beginning of Israel's fall - their failure to conquer the Canaanites, and their subsequent alliance with them (2:12). Though contrary to His will that the Canaanites dwell in the same land with Israel, what use does the Lord make of them (2:21-23)? What else did He use for the same purpose (Deuteronomy 8:2-16)?

II. Israel's Apostasies, Captivities, and Deliverances (3:5 to chapter 16)

Let the student make a list of all the judges, giving the following facts connected with each:

1. From whom did he deliver Israel?
2. How long was he in office?
3. What were the important facts concerning him?

Note that there were twelve judges (excluding Abimelech who was a usurper).

What does that suggest to you (Matthew 19:28; Isaiah 1:26)?

Three important facts concerning the judges should be noted: they were called of GOD, endued with special power, and most of them belonged to that class described by Paul as "**the weak things of the world . . . the base things of the world**" (I Corinthians 1:27, 28).

Jael's action in killing Sisera, and Deborah's praise of the same, has called forth criticism from some quarters. Two things should be taken into consideration here. First, that although Deborah and Barak glorify the act, the Bible does not endorse or commend it; it simply records the fact. On the other hand, we must take into account the fact that the age in which Jael lived differed from ours in regard to customs and standards. We quote from an English commentator:

"Jael by her righteous and courageous act saved her life, defended the honor of her absent husband, her own honor, and that of many hundreds of her sex (5:30). By going into the woman's tent, Sisera was guilty of a most cruel action and it was a very base return for the hospitality and kindness shown to him. He well knew that the Desert Law condemned to death a woman into whose part of the tent a man entered. She could only save herself by, if possible, putting him to death. Such was the Law of the Desert; and Jael was a daughter of the Desert, and not of Israel."

How did the angel of the Lord address Gideon (6:12)?

Was that Gideon's estimate of himself (6:15)?

Was Gideon conscious of unbelief in asking for a sign (6:39)?

Why did GOD want to deliver Israel with only a few men (7:2)?

What law does 7:3 refer to (Deuteronomy 20:8)?

What can be said concerning the weapons of Gideon's band (II Corinthians 10:4, 5; see Chapter 4:6).

We now come to a question which can hardly be passed in a study of the book of Judges ; namely, Did Jephthah really sacrifice his daughter? Since scholars are divided on the question, we can but give what each side has to say on the subject and let the student judge for himself. Some believe, that since human sacrifices were forbidden by law (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5), the offering of Jephthah's daughter must have taken the form of a dedication of the girl to perpetual virginity (11:36-40). Others believe that he actually sacrificed his daughter in the conscientious belief that he was bound by his oath (verses 31, 35, 39).

Who was it that Samson's parents saw (13:17, 18, 22; cf. Genesis 32:29,30)?
What was Samson from his birth (13:4, 5)?
Whom did he resemble in this respect (Luke 1:13-15)?
Was he to be separated unto the Lord (13:5)?
Did he always remain separated (14:1-3)?
What was the secret of his strength (13:25)?
Did he always walk according to the Spirit (16:1-24)?
How strong was he (14:5-7)? How weak was he (16:1-17)?
What caused his fall (16:19; 13:5)?

III. Israel's Anarchy (Chapters 17-21)

1. Anarchy in religious life (17, 18).
2. Anarchy in moral life (19).
3. Anarchy in national life (20,21).

The first half of the book of Judges gives us a short sketch of some of Israel's apostasies during the 450 years the judges ruled. Chapters 17 to 21 give us a close-up view of one of those periods. The last (verse) of the book offers an explanation for the terrible conditions that prevailed during that time.

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