



The Historical Books

Session 2 - Judges

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Theme of Judges

- What do you think the overriding theme is
- Why is this theme important
- What does it mean in our lives

Judges

- Introduces us to some of the most colorful characters in the Bible
 - A decisive woman who leads the people to victory
 - A boy who becomes a mighty warrior
 - A strong man who can destroy a temple with his bare hands
- These are just a few of the “Judges” of Israel – Deborah, Gideon and Samson
- Each were given gifts by God to lead the people and lead they did!

Judges

- The Judges were not judges in the sense we think of a judge – they didn't operate purely in a juridical sense
- They were leaders in every sense we can imagine, and they settled disputes
- They led during a time (about 300 years) when Israel had no earthly King
- They were above all, holy women and men whom God called to lead the people

Judges

- Each of the Judges has something a bit out of balance – something that makes them less than a complete model of faith; no matter how bold or brave they are
- There are exceptions – Deborah for instance
 - She speaks for God
 - Her associate Barak is chosen to lead Israel but needs her to win the battle
 - When they win, they sing a song together (Chapter 5) to celebrate the victory – brought by God (v. 23)

Judges

- Notice that when there is a Judge the people try to be faithful but without one, they stray
- God spoke to Gideon through an angel on the other hand was a great leader but allows success to go to his head
 - He fights Midian but with an army that God reduces (7:2-8)
 - He collects part of the spoils and makes an ephod – a vestment - sort of a way to claim credit
 - It helps to lead the people to backslide, once again

Judges

- When Gideon dies the country suffers because he gave more attention to himself than to God
- He owed all his success to God but claimed part of it himself
- The people forget Yahweh and worship Baal
- Samson is the other great Judge and we probably all know his story, at least the part about his beloved and dangerous Delilah

Judges

- Despite his strength, Samson cannot resist the beautiful distractions in his life – like Delilah
- He finally gives in and tells Delilah the secret of his strength
- Samson only returns his focus to God when disaster strikes
- He has the strength for one last mighty deed but gets himself killed in the process

Judges

- After Samson, things really go downhill for Israel
- Instead of uniting in a common effort against their enemies they end up fighting each other
- At the end of the book
 - They lack leaders and every man does as he pleases
 - They need to learn to focus on God first or else there will be a cycle of death and destruction
 - Their claim on the Promised Land continues to grow weaker – as they separate themselves from God

Judges

- Judges has 21 chapters
 - 1 – 16 Israel struggles to survive under leaders
 - 3 Othniel and Ehud
 - 4 - 5 Deborah and Barak
 - 6 - 8 Gideon
 - 9-10 Abimalech, Tola, Jair
 - 11-12 Jephthah
 - 13-16 Samson
 - 17 – 21 Israel is still in need of a real leader

Judges

- When does it take place
 - Settlement in Canaan c. 1250 BC
 - Judges defend Israel c. 1250 BC - 1050 BC

Judges

- Interesting points
 - **Judges** – are not judges in the ordinary sense of the word – they are temporary rulers over Israel, chosen by God to defend the people from the enemies
 - **A Fable** – can be found in 9:7-15, presenting the danger of royal power. The trees look for a king, all candidates are happy where they are. In desperation the trees turn to a bramble (with nothing to offer and a lot to gain)
 - **Women of Substance** – Deborah of course but also Jael strikes the enemy and the daughter of Jephthah who dies for the sake of the people

Judges

- Interesting points
 - **A Refrain** – Again and again we hear, “In those days there was no King in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” The people do have a King, Yahweh, the God of Israel but they chose to ignore God and go their own way
 - **Song of Deborah** – one of the ancient parts of the Bible dating back to perhaps 1200 years BC. The entire book describes real social change and struggles between Israel and Canaan. It is most likely the product of writers after David’s time; later revised by editors following the exile to stress lessons of the exile

Lessons from Judges

- Anyone, no matter how good, bad, complete or incomplete can be a heroine or hero for God
- True courage is measured by loyalty to the values of heaven, not earth, country or humans
- Personal ambition can interfere with service to God

Judges

- Points for consideration
 - Why did the people of Israel choose to serve other divinities instead of God
 - What kind of person is Deborah? What actress would be good as Deborah?
 - What changes take place in Gideon as time goes by?
 - What kind of person was Jephthah's daughter?
 - How successful was Samson as a judge?
 - What do you think about the tribal conflicts?
 - We hear there was no King; what is the author saying?

For Next Week (Thursday)

- Read the Book of Ruth
 - There are 4 Chapters (no excuses!)
 - What is your initial impression of Ruth?
 - What do you think of her at the end of the book?
 - How is God involved in the book?
 - What are the signs of emptiness in the first chapter and what are the signs of plenty in the final one?
 - What are the parallels (if any) between Ruth's story and life today?

For Next Week (Thursday)

- Read the Book of Judith
 - Nebuchadnezzar means “May the god Nabu (god of wisdom) protect my kingdom. What does this contribute to the book?
 - What is your initial impression of Achior? Does it change?
 - How do you picture Judith?
 - What do you think about Judith’s address to the rulers in Judith 8:11-27?
 - How ironic is the dialogue between Judith and Holofernes in chapters 11 and 12?