

Judges 1:1-2:23

Introduction

1. **Author and Date:** not stated in the book but most scholars hold that it was penned by Samuel, the last and final judge somewhere around 1000 B.C.
2. **Time Period:**
 - a. Covers the time period between the books of Joshua and 1 Samuel, from the death of Joshua up to the judgeship of Eli, Samuel and the beginning of the monarchy with King Saul
 - b. Due to issues with the chronology of Judges, exact beginning and end dates to this time period are difficult to pin point but most evangelical scholars believe the time spans approximately 250 years from around 1310 or 1300 B.C. until 1150 B.C. However, this cannot be nailed down with certainty.
3. **Chronology:** as mentioned above, the chronology of Judges is difficult
 - a. 1 Kings 6:1 only allows for 480 years from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon's reign
 - b. We are fairly certain on the number of years from the Exodus to the Conquest
 - c. We are also fairly certain on the number of years for the judgeships of Eli and Samuel, as well as the reigns of Saul and David.
 - d. The problem is that when we add those up, and add up the number for years given for oppression and judgeships in Judges it adds up to over 600 years.
 - e. Most evangelical scholars believe this issue is resolved by understanding that not all the years in Judges are to be taken sequentially, but rather with some overlap
 - f. This is possible because the judges served in different regions of Israel and some may have ruled at the same time just in a different region
4. **Theme:** the overriding theme of the book is God's deliverance through the hands of the judges. Throughout the book, Israel is described as going through a cycle—apostasy, oppression, crying out to God and deliverance. God's response mirrors this cycle with anger, punishment, compassion and deliverance.
5. **Structure:** the book can be broken down into three sections:
 - a. Israel's failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land (1:1-3:6)
 - b. Israel's cycle of apostasy, oppression, calling out to God and deliverance (3:7-16:31)
 - c. A depiction of Israel's religious and moral corruption (17:1-21:25)

A. Israel fails to drive the inhabitants out of the land (1:1-26)

1. Israel petitions the Lord for direction on finishing the conquest (1:1-2)
2. Judah and Simeon obey and conquer their territories by driving out the inhabitants—these are the two southern tribes and conquer the south and coastland (1:3-21)
3. The remaining tribes (considered the northern tribes) disobey and do not drive out the inhabitants (1:21-36)—only seven of the tribes are mentioned by name:
 - a. Benjamin: (21): **“But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.”**
 - b. House of Joseph (22-29)

- 1) Manasseh (27-28): **“but Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in the land.”**
 - 2) Ephraim (29): **“Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them.”**
 - c. Zebulun (30): **“Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor.”**
 - d. Asher (31-32): **“Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land for they did not drive them out.”**
 - e. The same is said of Naphtali (33) and Dan (34-36)
 - f. Reuben, Gad and Issachar are not mentioned, but it can be assumed that they failed to obey as well
4. There are two repeating themes in the verses above:
 - a. The failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land
 - b. And that the inhabitants lived among the Israelites
 5. With exception of Dan above, it appears that most of the tribes were able to take control of the territories and chose to enslave the inhabitants rather than drive them out. Why? They did not heed God’s warning:
 - a. Exodus 23:23-33, esp. 33
 - b. Numbers 33:50-56

B. The Lord rebukes Israel for their disobedience (2:1-5)

1. The Lord reminds Israel of how He delivered them from Egypt and into the promise land (1): **“Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you...’”**
2. He reminded them of the conditions for inheriting and possessing the land (2a): **“and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars...”**
3. He rebukes them for their disobedience and disregarding His commands: (2b): **“but you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?”**
 - a. The implication by asking, “What have you done?” is that Israel had not simply failed to drive out the inhabitants, but actually made covenants with them and failed to tear down their religious altars and high places
 - b. This implies direct and willful disobedience on Israel’s part
4. He informs them of the consequences of their disobedience (3): **“Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’”**
 - a. God had warned the Israelites of this through Moses

- b. The Canaanites and their religious practices were indeed a snare throughout Israel's history and were the leading cause of Israel's constant disobedience
 - c. This is not only mentioned in the rest of Judges, but over 80 times in the OT, 40 of which are in the books of Kings and Chronicles
 - d. The Lord uses this for good, however: 20-23 and 3:1-2:
 - 1) He would use the Canaanites to test the Israelites to see if they would keep His ways (20-23)
 - 2) That the succeeding generations might learn to conduct war (3:1-2; they were going to need it because they would face constant opposition and oppression in the years to come)
5. The author sites why this happened in the following verses:
- a. Verses 6-10 are a flash-back to Joshua's death (i.e. it is not sequential to the current verses)
 - b. Those that lived during Joshua's life-time, and during the life-time of the elders who survived Joshua, all served the Lord (6-10)
 - c. However, after those generation died, the following generation "**did not know the LORD, nor yet to work which He had done for Israel**" (10)
 - d. Apparently, while the parents of Joshua's generation lived a life of faithfulness, they failed to pass along that heritage to their children
6. What about the Church? Are we like Israel?
- a. Today, it's estimated that 80 percent of high school students leave the Church after graduation with less than 30 percent returning
 - b. Are we, like Israel, not only failing to pass along a heritage of faith in God and commitment to Jesus, but creating the next generation of idol worshippers?

C. Israel's cycle of apostasy, oppression, calling out to God and deliverance described (2:11-23)

1. Israel forsakes the Lord (11-13):
 - a. They "**did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,**" (12) and "**the Ashtaroth**" (13)
 - b. They "**followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them**"
 - c. They "**forsook**" the Lord (2x, 12-23)
 - d. Who were the Baals and the Ashtaroth (both are plural)?
 - 1) Baal was the god of fertility and agriculture
 - 2) Ashera, or Ashtart, was his sister and sexual partner/wife
 - 3) The fertility of the land depended upon Baal and Ashtart having sex; the more sex, the more productive the land was
 - 4) The Canaanites would worship Baal by engaging in sex with temple prostitutes (the man playing the role of Baal and the prostitute playing the role of Ashtart) as a way of encouraging Baal to do the same
 - 5) They would also sacrifice their children to Baal as a way to appease him, a practice known as passing them through the fire.
 - 6) The Israelites adopted and engaged in these pagan practices in their worship of both God and Baal
 - 7) Read Psalm 106:34-40
2. The Lord's anger burns against Israel and He gives them into the hands of their enemies (14-15):

- a. God responds to their apostasy with anger that **“burned against Israel”**
 - b. He **caused** their enemies to plunder them
 - c. His hands **“were against them for evil”**
 - d. **So that** they **“were severely distressed”**
 - e. They were warned of all this ahead of time!
3. However, the Lord relents and raises up judges to deliver them from their enemies (16):
 4. But, Israel refuses to repent and continues to commit apostasy and the cycle begins again (17-20):
 - a. Notice the complete lack of repentance:
 - 1) **“Yet they did not listen to their judges for they played the gar lot after other gods and bowed down to them”** (17)
 - 2) **“But it came about when the judge died , they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers...they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways”**(19)
 - b. In fact, God’s deliverance is purely motivated by his compassion when he heard their cry ; it is not a result of their repentance: **“for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who opposed and afflicted them”** (18b)

Conclusion

1. In one respect, the book of Judges represents the sad and tragic pattern of Israel’s sin we see throughout their history—something that began almost as soon as they entered the promise land
2. On the other hand, it presents the amazing and overwhelming compassion, grace and mercy of God as He constantly rescues Israel over and over again from their own self-induced misery and oppression...in spite of their refusal to repent
3. This is the epitome of unconditional love and the actions of a God who loves His people with an intense and powerful jealousy
4. It is why He gets angry and chastises them when they rebel against Him, and yet hears their cries when they are afflicted
5. It is this same God who sent His Son to die for us **“while we were yet sinners”**
6. And this same God who disciplines us when we need it, all because He is jealous for us