



Judges

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:26

The book of Judges. So remember, after Joshua led the tribes of Israel into the promised land, he called them to be faithful to their covenant with God by obeying the commands of the Torah. And if they do this, they will show all the other nations what God is like. So Judges begins with the death of Joshua and basically tells the story of Israel's total failure.

The book's name comes from the type of leaders Israel had in this period. Before they had any kings, the tribes were all governed by these judges. Now, don't think of a courtroom; these were regional political, military leaders, more like a tribal chieftain. And you need to be warned. The book of Judges is very disturbing and violent. It tells the tragic tale of Israel's moral corruption, of its bad leadership, and basically how they become no different than the Canaanites.

But this sad story is also meant to generate hope for the future, and you can see this in how the book is designed. There's a large introduction that sets the stage for Israel's failure as they don't drive out the remaining Canaanites. Then the large main section of the book has stories about the growing corruption of Israel's judges. And the progression here shows how Israel's leaders go from pretty good to okay to bad to worse. The concluding section is really disturbing and shows the corruption of the people of Israel as a whole. So let's dive in, and we can explore each part a bit more.

Chapters 1-2

01:26-02:59

The opening section begins with the tribes of Israel in their territories in the promised land. And while Joshua defeated some key Canaanite towns, there was still a lot of land to be taken and lots of Canaanites living in those areas. And so chapter 1

gives a long list of Canaanite groups and towns that Israel just failed to drive out from the land. Now remember, the whole point of driving out the Canaanites was to avoid their moral corruption and their way of worshipping the gods through child sacrifice. God had called Israel to be a holy people, and that does not happen.

Chapter 2 describes how Israel just moved in alongside the Canaanites and adopted all their cultural and religious practices. And it's right here that the story stops. For nearly a whole chapter, the narrator gives us an overview of everything that's about to happen in the body of the book. This part of Israel's history, the narrator says, was a series of cycles moving in a downward spiral. So Israel became like the Canaanites, and so they would sin against God. So God would allow them to be conquered and oppressed by the Canaanites, and eventually the Israelites would see the error of their ways and repent. So God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, from among Israel, who would defeat the enemy and bring about an era of peace. But eventually, Israel would sin again, and it would all start over.

This cycle provides the literary design and flow for the next main section of the book. It gets repeated for each of the six main judges whose stories are told here.

Chapters 3-16

03:00-05:37

Now, the stories of the first three judges, Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah, they are epic adventures. They're also extremely bloody stories. Either the judge themselves or people who helped the judge, they defeat their enemies and deliver the people of Israel.

The stories about the next three judges are longer, and they focus in on the character flaws of the judges, which get increasingly worse. So Gideon, he begins pretty well. He's a coward of a man, but he eventually comes to trust that God can save Israel through him, and so he defeats a huge army of Midianites with only 300 men carrying torches and clay pots. But Gideon has a nasty temper, and he murders a bunch of fellow Israelites for not helping him in his battle. And then it all goes downhill from there. He makes an idol from the gold that he won in his battles, and then after he dies, all Israel worships the idol as a god, and the cycle begins again.

The next main judge is Jephthah, who's something of a mafia thug living up in the hills, and when things get really bad for Israel, the elders come to him begging for his help. And Jephthah was a very effective leader. He won lots of battles against the Ammonites, but he was so unfamiliar with the God of Israel he treats him like a Canaanite god. He vows to sacrifice his daughter if he wins the battle. This tragic story, it shows just how far Israel has fallen. They no longer know the character of their own God, which leads to murder and to false worship.

The last judge, Samson, is by far the worst. His life began full of promise, but he has no regard for the God of Israel. He was promiscuous, violent, and arrogant. He did win brutally strategic victories over the Philistines, but only at the expense of his own integrity, and his life ends in a violent rush of mass murder.

Now, a quick note here. You'll notice a repeated theme in the main section of the book that at key moments, God's Spirit will empower each of these judges to accomplish these great acts of deliverance. Now, the fact that God uses these really screwed up people doesn't mean he endorses all or even any of their decisions. God is committed first and foremost to saving his people, but all he has to work with is these corrupt leaders, and so work with them he does.

This whole section is designed to show just how bad things have gotten. You can't even tell the Israelites and the Canaanites apart anymore—and that's just the leaders.

Chapters 17-21

05:38-07:10

The final section shows Israel, as a whole, hitting bottom. There are two tragic stories here, and they are not for the faint of heart. They're structured by this key line that gets repeated four times at the close of the book, "In those days, Israel had no king, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes."

The first story is about an Israelite named Micah, who builds a private temple to an idol, and that gets plundered by a private army sent from the tribe of Dan. So they come and they steal everything, and then they go and burn down the peaceful city of Laish and murder all of its inhabitants. It's a horrifying story. When Israel forgets its God, might makes right.

The final story of the book is even worse. It's a shocking tale of sexual abuse and violence, which all leads to Israel's first civil war. It's very disturbing, and that's the point. These stories are meant to serve as a warning. Israel's descent into self-destruction is the result of turning away from the God who loves them and saved them out of slavery in Egypt, and now Israel needs to be delivered again—from themselves.

The only glimmer of hope in this story is found in this repeated line in the last part of the book. It actually forms the last sentence of the story, "Israel has no king." And so the stage is set for the following books to tell the origins of King David's family (the book of Ruth) and also the origins of kingship itself in Israel (the book of 1 Samuel).

Conclusion

07:11-07:27

But the story of Judges has value as a tragedy. It's a sobering explanation of the human condition, and ultimately, it points out the need for God's grace to send a king who will rescue his people. And that's the book of Judges.