

Judges 1—3.6

Introduction to Judges / Roots of Israel's Apostasy

I | INTRODUCTION / CONNECTIONS / CONTEXT

1 / **BRIEF EDITORIAL NOTE:** I have titled this lesson 'L3,' or Lesson 3, not because this is the third lesson in this 13-lesson course, but because it is the third lesson for which I have prepared these printed lesson notes. There have been a number of life events which have prevented me from preparing lesson notes for each of the lessons—or even from attending and teaching all of the lessons. But, here I am picking it back up and resuming with this one...

2 / We will introduce the **Judges** segment of this course on Joshua/Judges/Ruth. We will devote four lessons to this rather extensive and detail-laden book; so that means all we can do is break down the book into its literary sections, and then summarize the contents of each section, and show how they all fit together to manifest the narrator's theme and purpose for writing it.

II | What is a 'judge'?

What is a 'judge,' and what did the 'judges' do, and why were they called 'judges'? We need to kinda re-align our thinking from the get-go here about what a 'judge' is. They were not judges in a legal sense like we first think. They didn't adjudicate legal laws and cases. When you think of these judges, think 'liberator, savior, or deliverer.' See **Judges 2.16, 18; 3.9-10, and so throughout the book.** But, they were 'judges' since The LORD used them to lead His people into their holy wars to exact His 'judgment' and justice against their enemies. The 'judges' were Yahweh's *instruments of judgment!*

III | Span of historical / redemptive timeline of Judges

What portion of Bible history does the Book of Judges record? That is easy to answer: it is from right after the death of Joshua until just before the birth of Samuel—who, of course, would anoint David as king of Israel. See **Judges 1.1 and 1 Samuel 1.** Samuel goes down in Biblical history as the last of Israel's judges, **1 Samuel 7.6.** In that way, Samuel serves to bridge the gap between the times of the 'judges' and the kings of Israel, *particularly David.* That is also one of the significances of the phrase that is repeated four times in Judges, **"In those days, there was no king in Israel..." [17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25].** There was NO KING IN ISRAEL—YET! BUT A KING IS COMING IN THE KINGDOM PLAN OF GOD!" [*The Book of Ruth will confirm and chronicle that covenant plan!*]

IV | Approximate number of years in Judges timeline

How many years of history are covered in the Book of Judges? Probably in the range of 300-350 years according to the dates of the events we have mentioned. If you add up all the years that are recorded in the Book of Judges, it ends up being more than that—410 years. But, keep in mind, that some of these events recorded in the Book of Judges are happening in different locales in Israel and some of them are happening and overlapping each other at the same time. See the accompanying map on page 5.

V | Authorship of Judges

Who wrote the Book of Judges? Again, like the Books of Joshua and Ruth, we don't know. What we do believe is that these events were carefully recorded and kept in their historical chronicles as they happened, and then composed as an official document some time later.

VI | Some prominent themes of Judges

Why was the Book of Judges written? There are numerous theme-threads that are all woven together throughout the Book of Judges. For the purposes of this brief summary study, we will focus on one of the most comprehensive and over-arching themes as it applies to Israel: **Apostasy.** But, here are just a few theme breakdowns...

[1] The Book of Judges documents the failure of the Israelites to keep their part of Yahweh's covenant He had made with them. He was faithful to every word and promise of His covenant as the Book of Joshua says [Joshua 23.14]. But, Israel failed in every respect, even in spite of all their promises to be faithful to Yahweh [Joshua 24.14-28].

[2] Time after time in the cycles of history that are repeated throughout Judges, **“And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of The LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned The LORD, the God their fathers ... They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them ... They abandoned The LORD and served the Baals and the Ashteroth”** [Judges 2.11-13; 3.7, 12; 4.1; 6.1; 10.6; 13.1]. These introductory summaries to the various sections and cycles of Judges are Yahweh's witnesses against their apostacy from Him.

[3] And yet, Yahweh remains faithful to the covenant promises He has made to preserve His covenant nation for the purpose of bringing our Ultimate Deliverer into the world [Romans 11.25-27]. *Every time* they apostatized, they would cry out to Yahweh for deliverance, and He would raise up a judge to save them from their oppressors. For example, **“But when the people of Israel cried out to The LORD, The LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them...”** [ch 3.9]. In this case, it was the first judge, Othniel. But the same pattern is repeated throughout the cyclical narratives in the book.

[4] **Most importantly, though, here is the primary purpose for all the records of these judges in this book: this book chronicles the abject inability and failure of the people of Israel, God's Kingdom, to rule themselves in covenant obedience to Yahweh. The people repeatedly failed, and even after their God-provided human judges delivered them—those judges died, and the people returned once again to their faithlessness and covenant-breaking disobedience. The grand summary conclusion of the book “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [ch 17.6] begins to prepare us to look and long for a judge—a King, even—who will not die but will secure the obedience of His people forever! The judges point forward to the person and work of Christ, the only One who will deliver us from all our enemies, provide for our obedience, and lastingly, eternally secure our inheritance for us to enjoy...with Him!**

VII | Four-fold cycle of apostacy

So, here is the **four-fold cycle** that will be repeated and recorded all throughout **Judges**:

[1] **SIN** [faithless, covenant-breaking apostacy]: the people of Israel will sin against God and go after the gods of the nations around them...

[2] **SUBJUGATION**: their enemies will gain mastery over them, subjugating them to service to them...

[3] **SUPPLICATION**: they will cry out to God in their distress, begging Him to save them from their distresses...

[4] **SALVATION**: Yahweh will have pity on them, raise up a judge and empower that judge with His Spirit, and save them from their oppressors...

[5] **REPEAT**: and then after The LORD saves them, they will return to their sinning again, going even deeper into their apostacy...

VIII | Literary structure of Judges

What is the literary structure of the Book of Judges? The Book of Judges clearly divides itself into three broad divisions:

chs 1—3.6: The roots of Israel's apostacy

chs 3.7—16.31: The downward spiral of Israel's apostacy

chs 17—21: The depths of Israel's apostacy

IX | Judges 1 – 3.6 | The Roots of Israel's Apostacy

What we will do here for the rest of this lesson is open up this first section of Judges. Because here in **Judges 1 – 3.6**, we will find the narrator's accounts of Israel's failures to do their part of what Yahweh commanded them to do in order to completely subjugate and occupy the Land as their promised

inheritance. They failed to drive out the native inhabitants of the Land as Yahweh had commanded them to do [see **Deuteronomy 7, especially vv 1-5**]. We will break down this section paragraph by paragraph ... and briefly summarize how that paragraph establishes the primary themes that will be developed and illustrated throughout Judges [see **VI above**].

ch 1.1-22 | Judah rises as the leader-tribe [pointing to David...and on to Christ]

1 / The Book of Judges begins with “**After the death of Joshua...**” This forms the connection with the end of the Book of Joshua and continues on with the storyline of the OT without interruption. What is significant about this paragraph is that the people of Israel did what they should have done: “**...the people of Israel inquired of The LORD, ‘Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?’**” Joshua had been their leader since the death of Moses—now, who should replace him to lead them? *How did Yahweh respond? Who should be their leader? IT WAS THE TRIBE OF JUDAH!* What we see here is Yahweh’s covenant intention that their leader should be from the tribe of Judah. As we are repeatedly told here in Judges, ‘**There was no king in Israel,**’ but Yahweh will give them a King in His time, and He will be from the tribe of Judah! See **Genesis 49.10**. And, of course, God will provide his king just a few centuries later from the tribe of Judah—David. And, Christ Himself will be the ultimate King of kings and will finally and forever conquer all our enemies and victoriously lead us into our eternal rest and inheritance [see **Revelation 5.5 & 22.16**].

2 / But Judah successfully fought against the Canaanites who inhabited their portions of their inheritance. Why? Because they ‘wholly followed The LORD’! Judah was led by Caleb who was a faithful follower of Yahweh, even going all the way back to Kadesh-barnea [see **Joshua 14.6-15**]. We also need to note that in all these successful campaigns to possess the Promised Land, it was The LORD Himself who gave them the Land [see **vv 2, 4, 19, 22**]. Every tribe who trusted Yahweh to give them their Land—conquered it by the faithfulness of Yahweh to His covenant promises. The one exception in this opening paragraph is Benjamin, **v 21**. This same tribe of Benjamin will prove their faithlessness all throughout the book until we find them wholly given to apostacy and debauchery in the end of the book. *Benjamin apostatized until they became Canaanites themselves, practicing all the worst debaucheries of the Canaanites!*

ch 1.27-36 | The roots of Israel’s apostacy

1 / What follows in these verses is a listing of the tribes who failed to drive out the Canaanite inhabitants from their portions of their inheritance. They chose instead to follow the unfaithful example of Benjamin in **v 21** instead of the examples of Judah and Simeon in the other verses of **vv 1-26**. In all their conquests, they relied on the promised Presence of Yahweh, “**and The LORD was with them,**” fought for them, and delivered their inheritances into their possession.

2 / Instead, these other tribes—Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, Dan—they chose to coexist with the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. This was in blatant violation of the charge Yahweh had given them in **Deuteronomy 7**. NOTE: they didn’t fail to drive out the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because the Canaanite inhabitants were too strong for them; but rather because they would not wholly follow The LORD--fully trust Him to drive them out before them as He had promised He would.

3 / As a result, the Israelite tribes didn’t influence the pagan Canaanite peoples—it was the other way around! The Canaanites influenced the Israelite peoples, and the Israelites became like them! The Canaanites did become the servants of the Israelites. “**...they became subject to forced labor**” [vv **28, 30, 33, 35**]. But that wasn’t Yahweh’s plan or command to them. *We will not ‘manage’ our sins or peacefully ‘coexist’ with them. Either we kill our sins, or our sins will kill us! We are commanded to ‘mortify’ or ‘put to death’ the ‘members of our fleshly desires’ ‘that war against our souls’!* [Romans **8.13**; Colossians **3.5**; Galatians **5.24**; 1 Peter **2.11**].

ch 2.1-5 | Yahweh’s scathing indictment against Israel

1 / Yahweh comes onto the scene in the person of **the angel of The LORD**. This is reminiscent of the appearance of **the Commander of the army of The LORD** who appeared to Joshua in **Joshua 5.13-15**.

This **angel** identifies as Yahweh by using the first person **“I”** throughout His indictment. What Yahweh reminds them of is His impeccable and unerring faithfulness in everything He has promised them going all the way back to the promises He made with Abraham in **Genesis 12 and thereafter**. Yahweh had faithfully kept every detail of every promise He had made to them. **“I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ but you have not obeyed my voice. What is this that you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.”** And once again, Yahweh refers them back to that seminal covenant confirmation event in **Deuteronomy 7**.

2 / And so, the Book of Judges will chronicle Israel's faithless covenant-breaking alliances with all the godless nations that Yahweh had commanded them to drive out. Instead, they chose to coexist with them, and in the end, Israel learned, adopted, and worshiped their gods and followed their ways.

ch 2.6-10 | A second ‘introduction’ to the Book of Judges

1 / In this brief paragraph, the narrator return again to the death of Joshua just as he did in **ch 1.1**. Why this second reference? Because in this account, the narrator will give the historical, sociological, and theological explanation for Israel's apostacy. Israel followed Yahweh all the days that Joshua lived to lead them and remind them of Yahweh's great deliverances from Egypt. In other words, Joshua and all the other Egypt-era elders who survived Joshua kept Israel's focus on Yahweh—serving Him, trusting Him, obeying Him. But then, **“...there arose another generation after them who did not know The LORD or the work that He had done for Israel” [ch 2.10]**.

2 / This will provide the background for the over-arching trajectory of the Book of Judges: **“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” [ch 17.6]**.

ch 2.11-23 | A summary of the four-fold steps of apostacy in Judges

Again, remember that what we are reading here is the narrator's summaries of what we will read in the more detailed events that will follow throughout the rest of the book. Here is the Book of Judges ‘in a nutshell,’ or ‘the Cliff's Notes’ version of the book.

[1] **SIN**—apostacy, disobedience, faithless covenant-breaking against Yahweh...

[2] **SUBJUGATION**—Yahweh would not deliver them from the oppression of their enemies, but rather turn them over to be oppressed and subjugated by them...

[3] **SUPPLICATION**—they would cry out to Yahweh in their distresses. See v 18b: **“For The LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.”**

[4] **SALVATION**—**“Then The LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.”**

[5] **REPEAT**—**“Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of The LORD, and they did not do so” [ch 2.17]; “But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways” [ch 2.19].**

ch 3.1-6 | The nations Yahweh left in the land to test Israel's covenant obedience

1 / These verses will complete the introduction and theme-setting for the rest of the book by enumerating some of the nations that The LORD used **“for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of The LORD, which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses” [ch 3.4]**.

2 / In the next lessons, we will commence the stories of their judges with the first one, Othniel.

