

Introduction

Welcome to "Faith, Failure & a Phenomenal God" – a series of studies in the OT Book of Judges! Hi, I'm Brian Cummins and I'm glad you've joined me for this Bible adventure. Everyone loves a story. And the Book of Judges gives us some of the most unforgettable stories in the entire Bible. Familiar characters like Gideon and Samson people its pages with their captivating stories of faith and failure. But Bible stories are not simply interesting – they have great value for us today. God's principles of how He deals with people and how His people are to live in relationship with Him & with others are described esp. in **theological** terms in the NT epistles; but they are often **illustrated** in the stories of God's **OT** people ...one of the reasons that makes the OT a fascinating & valuable study for modern Christians.

Paul referred to OT people when he wrote this in *1 Cor 10:11-12*:

"All these things happened to them as examples – as object lessons to us – to warn us against doing the same things; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days as the world nears its end. So be careful. If you are thinking, "Oh, I would never behave like that" – let this be a **warning** to you. For you too may fall into sin."

- Paul's reference here is especially to stories in Exodus & Numbers, but "all Scripture [including Judges] is ...profitable" and we will find some profitable, powerful examples... and warnings... in the stories contained in this unusual book.

But these are more than stories, they are unusual theological revelations of the ways of God and man. They provide us with very significant **principles** for Christian living in our day when increasing depravity in *our cultures* threatens to overwhelm us and *our own failures* threaten to push us to despair.

The Book of Judges contains not only personal stories but prose and poetry, historical records and eyewitness accounts relating to the times of the 12 judges who appear here. In the following videos we will examine the records of people who **served God** in very difficult times, and survived, leaving us glowing examples of faith to follow. We will see others who did not survive because they **succumbed** to the wave of sin within their culture. Their records underline for us the consequences of spiritual compromise and disobedience. And throughout all the fascinating narratives of the "judges" we will see the hidden but ever-present Sovereign **God** who cares for His people even in the midst of heart-breaking apostasy.

So, fasten your seat-belt and be open to what God may want to say to you through the Book of Judges!

JUDGES SESSION 1

Welcome to Judges session 1.

First, let's set the **Context** and remind ourselves of when these stories in Judges took place.

- this book tells the history of the people of Israel between the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, and the time when kings ruled Israel
 - Judges covers about 320 years of OT history
 - that's a long period of time; but in spite of covering so many years of Bible history, this is generally a neglected book for Christian study; I think you'll be glad YOU didn't neglect it!
- this book is in direct **contrast** with the events recorded in "**Joshua**" (which is a wonderful picture of the **victory of faith** in the Christian life); Judges on the other hand shows us what happens when faith *declines*
- the KJB Bible Commentary states that "*Joshua* is a picture of the potential of **total victory** that is available to every child of God, while *Judges* is a picture of **potential defeat** which will be experienced every time one fails to totally drive out the enemy."
- ...in some significant ways, Judges gives us a graphic picture of *our times* with its stories of moral, spiritual, & ethical decline – many providing valuable principles & lessons for you and me
- take a look at the **1st & last verses** of book:

¹Judg 1:1

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel **asked the Lord**, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?"

Judg 21:25

In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in **his own eyes**.

-- *Q. What do these verses reveal about the people during the course of this book?*

...clearly something happened to Israel to produce such a rapid decline away from **dependence on God** – they “asked the Lord” what to do at the beginning – to **independence**: by the end “everyone did what was right in his own eyes”

- consequently, the times of the Judges is often referred to as the **DARK AGES** of Israel's history
- instead of the “**Victory of Faith**” seen in the previous book of Joshua, the theme of Judges is “**Failure through Compromise**”; or as Warren Wiersbe puts it, “a book of failure on the part of God's people to trust His Word and claim His power”
- keep this theme in the back of your mind as we explore this book
- as our series title indicates, *Judges* presents...
 - a) living examples of people who **SERVED** God in very difficult times, and survived
 - b) it presents people who did not survive, who **SUCCUMBED** to the wave of sin; they provide examples of the consequences of spiritual compromise & disobedience

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this Course are from the New King James version; Copyright Thomas Nelson Company.

- c) and it especially presents a **SOVEREIGN GOD** – this book recounts the exploits of people called “judges” (divinely appointed military leaders, 'saviors', or what we might call 'freedom fighters', with executive and legislative power)
- but the *focus* throughout the book is *not* on the individual judge/deliverer but on the ever-present and all-powerful **God**;) He is the real hero (spoken of 240 times!) ...and He is still sovereign today! ... watching His people, looking for faith, superintending the flow of history toward the climax He has planned from eternity past

Before we plunge into the details, let's get a quick bird's-eye view of the **structure**, which is in 3 parts:

- **Prologue:** chaps. 1 & 2; states the theme and **summarizes** the decline
- **Main Narrative:** chaps. 3 – 16; this is a selection of stories **illustrating** the theme
- **Epilogue:** chapters 17 – 21 describe 2 terrible stories **emphasizing** the theme

Warren Wiersbe suggests these useful words to summarize the outline of the book:

- **Apathy, apostasy, & anarchy**

The Prologue is in 2 parts: one gives the **history** (1:1 – 2:5); the other focuses on the **theme** (2:6 – 3:6)

- so let's begin first by looking at the **HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION:**

- this follows the typical pattern of Biblical narrative:

1. **Command** of the Lord
2. **Response** of Israel
3. **Evaluation** of the Lord

A. The **Command** of the Lord

- Judges continues right on from the story of Joshua, noting his death in the first verse ...the Book of *Joshua* recorded the conquest of Canaan under **God's command** & promise
- this conquest was not yet complete, so as Judges opens the people ask God which tribe should lead them as they go to fight the Canaanites
- God's command is that the royal tribe of Judah should go up first and lead the way: 1:2 – “And the LORD said, “Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand.”

...that was the Lord's *command*; so...

B. What is the The **Response** of Israel?

- there are **5 responses**; let's begin with the first one which focuses on **Judah** with help from the tribe of Simeon which inherited territory within the land assigned to Judah

[1:3-7...]

Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him. ⁴ Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. ⁵ And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶ Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. ⁷ And

Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather *scraps* under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

(1) Israel's 1st response to God's command is **Judah's initial faithfulness**

- there are some specific reasons for the **successes** of Judah & Simeon:

- they asked God
- they worked together
- the Lord was "with them"
- God worked on their behalf (he "delivered" the Canaanites & the Perizzites into their hand)
- they worked hard too if you look at the verbs used in the first 20 verses -- "fought", "took", "struck", "went against", "attacked", "killed", "destroyed", "drove out", "expelled"

[1:8-10...]

Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. ⁹ And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland. ¹⁰ Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron *was* formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

- again, Judah's **initial faithfulness** is seen here – they fought the enemy everywhere...in the mountains, the lowlands, around Jerusalem and down south into the desert!
- their assault to the south took them to the city of **Hebron** – this city had been identified earlier, in Joshua 20:7, as one of the cities to be set aside as a City of Refuge ...so, conquering Hebron could be a story picture of establishing **sanctuary**, or refuge (as this city had been for Abraham many generations earlier)
- now it's useful to note that this place, Hebron, was associated with **giants**
 - Num. 13:22 tells us that the 3 tribes noted here in Judges 1:10 (Sheshai, Ahiman & Talmai) are descendants of Anak – in other words, they were **giants**
 - ... consequently, James Jordan notes that "if we want to have sanctuary, we have to destroy the giants" – for example, have you found in your own life that setting aside time to meet with God, the 'sanctuary' of **devotions**, is a hard thing to do? There are 'giants' in our busy lives which will distract us and make it difficult to get to this sanctuary, this place of refuge; and we must fight them and destroy these 'giants'

[1:11-13...]

From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir *was* formerly Kirjath Sepher.)

¹² Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." ¹³ And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife.

- this is one of the Bible's romantic **love stories** (must be important; it's told twice! – the same story was told back in Joshua 15)

- the former name, Kirjath-Sepher, means the “city of **books**”
 - ...so the conquest of this place could well be a mini-picture of the destruction of their ungodly, Canaanite civilization because civilizations of any era depend on the preservation of their **books**, the ongoing media records of the values and traditions of that civilization
- we need to be aware – as Israel was – of the *importance of books & media input in our personal & family lives; TV, movies, Internet, video games, music...these are all crucial in forming the basis of our personal philosophy & values...* in the anti-God cultures in which we live, it will take godly backbone to keep some of these media influences out of our family lives, especially for the sake of our children & grandchildren
- Caleb knew that it would only be possible to conquer this stronghold of the ‘city of books’ thru God’s power
 - so in offering his daughter as an incentive he was assured of getting a Godly husband for her!
- Othniel his nephew does so – to win the bride he destroys the city
- then Achsah the daughter asks Dad for an additional wedding gift: springs of **water** (vs. 14-15)
 - ¹⁴ Now it happened, when she came *to him (Othniel)*, that she urged him to ask her father (Caleb) for a field. And she dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" ¹⁵ So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.
 - their new home was located in a desert area – water is especially essential there, of course ...these springs, therefore, make their family property a miniature Garden of Eden – result is truly a “blessing”

In session #2 we will follow Israel’s further responses – good and bad – to God’s command.