

Judges 2:1-21:25

Judges is a book that describes the transition of Israel from a blessed nation by God, as He delivers His enemies into their hands as they take possession of the Promised land, to a nation that comes under God's judgment for forgetting how God delivered them as they turn to other gods.

The first couple of chapters go into some of the conquests of different people's in the land including the Canaanites, the Perizzites, along with the inhabitants of Debir.

However, many of the peoples of the land were not driven out and we are told that these people either became forced labor for Israel, or they continued to fight against Israel as a thorn in their sides.

But as time went on the angel of the Lord came to Israel and pronounced judgment because they did not drive out the inhabitants but instead covenanted with them as they continued to live in the land, even influencing Israel with their gods.

Judges 2:1-3 ^{NAU} 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 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? 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.'"

Joshua had led the people into the Promised land under the hand of God, but Joshua was now dead at the age of 110 and over time the original people who came into the land after wandering in the desert for many years, were no longer around. The next generation simply forgot or chose to reject the God who delivered them and God continues to judge them.

Judges 2:10-13 ¹⁰ All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

¹¹ Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from *among* the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they

provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

But because Joshua was a powerful leader whom God raised up for Israel, after his death there was left a vacuum of leadership in Israel. But God, being rich in mercy and grace, raised up more leaders called the judges.

Judges 2:15-16 ¹⁵ Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed. ¹⁶ Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.

And so, on the one hand, God is the one who has brought severe distress on Israel as a result of Israel's rebellion, and yet on the other hand He is also the one who lifts His hand to bless Israel with leaders who deliver them from those same enemies.

But as we see in most of the history of Israel, the people called out by God continually turn away from God as they reject Him as their Lord and Savior in favor of other gods.

Judges 2:17 ¹⁷ Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as *their fathers*.

And this is the theme throughout this entire book as it recounts how God in His mercy brings them judges to lead them to Himself and how Israel continues to reject those judges that God brings them.

Judges 2:18-23 ¹⁸ When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. ²⁰ So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, ²¹ I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he

died, ²² in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." ²³ So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

Chapter 3 gives us a short list of those nations that God allowed to stay in Israel as a way to test Israel.

Judges 3:1-4 ^{NAU} Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (*that is*, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; ² only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). ³ *These nations are:* the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴ They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.

And so, this merry-go-round of disobedience, judgment, crying out to God, mercy and grace from God in delivering Israel, Israel forgetting their God, and judgment again, is what we see all throughout the book of judges.

The first judge given by God who is mentioned is Caleb's younger brother.

Judges 3:9 ⁹ When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Does anyone remember who Caleb was and what he accomplished for the Lord?

Numbers 13:30-31 ³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."

Numbers 14:24 ²⁴ "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, is charged by God to lead Israel and deliver them from their enemies. And this he did for 40 years.

Judges 3:10-11 ¹⁰ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. ¹¹ Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

**So, here we are on the blessing side of the merry-go-round.
Any guesses as to what part of the ride comes next?**

They forget God and rebel against Him once again.

Judges 3:12-13 ¹² Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. ¹³ And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.

The next Judges are Ehud and Shamgar, And then we come to the first female judge in Israel.

Judges 4:1-5 ^{NAU} Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. ² And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. ³ The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. ⁴ Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.

And Deborah's time of judgment was 40 years, (one generation), of blessing for Israel

Judges 5:31 ³¹ "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

The next judge is also another we are familiar with and this would be Gideon.

Judges 6:11-12 ¹¹ Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save *it* from the Midianites. ¹² The angel of the

LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

By the way, what is interesting here is that the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah.

Does anyone remember another encounter with the Lord where He sat under the oaks with another child of God?

Genesis 18:1-3 ^{NAU} Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. ² When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, ³ and said, "My lord, if now I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.

Here we have what is called a Theophony, a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God to a human being, in this case, Gideon. And so, it is likely that Gideon saw what appeared to be a man who was going to meet with him to discuss his future leadership role in Israel. But of course, this was no man, this was the angel of the Lord, which is one way in which the Lord is described as appearing before His people.

Gideon was faithful to serve the Lord, but toward the end of his rule he did something that certainly appeared to be out of character for him.

Judges 8:24-28 ²⁴ Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." (For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) ²⁵ They said, "We will surely give *them*." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. ²⁶ The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which *were* on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that *were* on their camels' necks. ²⁷ Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household. ²⁸ So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon.

The ephod that Gideon had constructed out of the captured gold may have been some sort of amulet that Gideon used to remind

Israel how God had delivered them out of the hands of the Ishmaelites and how the Lord allowed them to plunder them.

But, both Israel and Gideon place this ephod above their God and Deliverer and use it as a focal point for worship, thus playing the harlot with it, and in this way it became a snare to Gideon and his household. But it would also be the springboard upon which the nation of Israel would again swing back to rebelling against God.

Judges 8:33 - 35 ³³ Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god. ³⁴ Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; ³⁵ nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (*that is*, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

From here the history of Israel continues on its up and down relationship with God as many judges are placed in a position of authority over Israel until we come to Samson during a dark time in Israel.

Judges 13:1-5 ^{NAU} Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. ² There was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no *children*. ³ Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no *children*, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. ⁴ "Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. ⁵ "For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

This angel of the Lord would speak to both parents of the child one last time before He ascended back to heaven.

Judges 13:19-25 ¹⁹ So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. ²⁰ For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw *this*, they fell on their faces to the ground. ²¹ Now the angel of the LORD did not appear to Manoah or his wife again. Then Manoah knew that he was the

angel of the LORD. ²² So Manoah said to his wife, "We will surely die, for we have seen God." ²³ But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear *things* like this at this time." ²⁴ Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. ²⁵ And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Samson would grow and the Lord would use Samson to deliver Israel from the Philistines since the Philistines were now ruling over Israel.

Samson was given incredible strength from the Lord and the Lord miraculously enabled him to perform feats of strength to destroy thousands of Philistines. But there came a day in which he fell in love with a woman by the name of Delilah.

Judges 16:1-4 ^{NAU} Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. ² *When it was told* to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "*Let us wait* until the morning light, then we will kill him." ³ Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron. ⁴ After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

It is this Delilah who would ultimately be the downfall of Samson as she would conspire with her people to destroy him.

Judges 16:5-6 ⁵ The lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength *lies* and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver." ⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you."

Despite his love for Delilah Samson was no dummy and he seems to delight in playing the game that Delilah has engaged in and he seems to deliver up the secret to his strength.

Judges 16:7-9 ⁷ Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I will become weak and be like any *other* man." ⁸ Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. ⁹ Now she had *men* lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered.

This is an amazing thing as Samson is fully aware of what Delilah is trying to do and yet as we shall see it is Delilah who takes offense for Samson deceiving her.

Judges 16:10 ¹⁰ Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me how you may be bound."

Twice more Delilah will try to get Samson to tell her of the source of his great strength and twice more Samson will deceive her. It makes one wonder why Samson would continue to put up with a woman who is trying to kill him and yet she always turns the tables on Samson and blames him for the deception.

Judges 16:15 ¹⁵ Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is."

She was probably one of the most persistent women in all of history and Samson has had enough, but instead of putting a stop to all of this he finally succumbs.

Judges 16:16 ¹⁶ It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.

He must have really loved her. But it will be the end of him because of it?

Judges 16:17-21 ¹⁷ So he told her all *that was* in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I will become weak and be like any *other* man." ¹⁸ When Delilah saw that he had told her all *that was* in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all *that is* in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. ¹⁹ She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair.

Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. ²⁰ She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. ²¹ Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.

What is interesting about the life of Samson is that it is a snapshot of the entire history of Israel. They were sought out by God, chosen to be a special people for God and for a time they were. But the love of the world always overcame them and the Lord would leave them, judge them and cause them to finally see their need for God.

Samson finally was allowed one more chance to turn to the Lord in one last act of defiance against the Philistines and thus ends the life and the rule of Samson among Israel.

Judges 16:28-31 ²⁸ Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." ²⁹ Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. ³⁰ And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. ³¹ Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years.

What fascinates me in all of this is that despite Samson's lack of judgment, love for godless women, and lapses of faith in God, the Lord was faithful to keep Samson to the end and he actually shows up in the saints' hall of faith in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:32-34 ³² And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, *Samson*, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

All I can say is, praise God for His faithfulness to us despite our unfaithfulness to Him at different times in our lives. He is a gracious and merciful God.

The rest of the book of Judges makes note of different people in Israel who continued in their rebellion as there was no king in the land in those days. This passage pretty much sum up what was happening in Israel in those days.

Judges 21:25 ²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.