

Judges Intro

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[0:00] The book of Judges. Baba Bathra, which is a very fun thing to say,! Baba Bathra, which is an ancient rabbinical text,! holds the tradition that Samuel wrote it,! But being uninspired, we can't be entirely sure that this is the case.

But the ancient rabbinical tradition, they thought that Samuel wrote the book. But for this reason, if I refer to the author, I will simply say the author of Judges.

Now, second, as to its date and occasion, we also are not given dates of authorship or stated occasion for the writing of this book.

It records the time following the conquest work that was led by Joshua. It's a sequel to the preceding book of Joshua. If you are familiar with the Exodus story, you may recall that Moses led the people of Israel out of servitude in Egypt.

God destroyed the Egyptian army that pursued them after the Israelites safely crossed the parted Red Sea. God brought them to encamp at the base of Mount Sinai, where he gave them the law.

[1:11] And then, they were meant to go into Canaan and conquer it, but because of their fear of the people and their faithlessness in God's promise, the generation that followed Moses out of Egypt was required to wander in the wilderness for 40 years and not enter into the land that had been promised to them.

So, Joshua was an assistant to Moses who was given leadership after the passing of that generation, and he began the work of conquering the land that God had promised his people. He led them across the Jordan, and they began that work. You may remember the story of the city of Jericho, but as we will see, that work was not completed, again, due to Israel's unfaithfulness. They were told to drive the people out of the land. It was their land, and they were meant to take it, and they did it with varied success. So, note with me the double introduction of Judges.

The first introduction begins in chapter 1 and verse 1 and goes through chapter 2 and verse 5, and the second introduction begins in chapter 2 and verse 6 and goes through chapter 3 and verse 6.

[2:32] It's a bit like the beginning of the book of Genesis, twice told the way things start. The beginning of each introduction mentions the death of Joshua, which should get our attention and highlight this double introduction.

When you see something repeated, it's not that the writer lost his way. He doesn't forget where he was in the narrative. There's something being emphasized, some reason we should go, wait a second.

So, in Judges 1 and verse 1, the author writes, after the death of Joshua. The people of Israel inquired of the Lord, who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? So, this first introduction tells of successful campaigns led particularly by the tribe of Judah. And there'll be a little bit more on this later.

That's on into chapter 1. And then focuses its attention on the failure of the people to obey God's commands conquering the land.

[3:43] You can see one account of that in its entirety in Judges 1, verse 27 and 28. There the author records, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shion and its villages, or Tanakh and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Il-bi-om and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land.

When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely. So, they're commanded to do a thing that they did not do. And then we see this repeated stanza on beyond that in chapter 1. And Ephraim did not drive out. Zebulun did not drive out. Asher did not drive out. Naphtali did not drive out. So, a failure to do what they were commanded to do.

We also see in this initial introduction that there's a leadership vacuum that is yet to be filled. This question is being asked in verse 1, Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?

[5:06] The second introduction, as stated, begins at chapter 2 and verse 6, which we'll read in just a moment. While the first introduction focuses on Israel's failure to obey, the second sets up the pattern of the narrative and focuses on God's faithfulness to his people.

You can see the unfaithfulness focus of the first introduction and God's faithfulness focus in the second. Judges altogether is not a happy book. It is full of tragedy. But the discerning reader will notice God still at work, still being gracious and merciful, still preserving people for his praise, a people that very clearly do not deserve to be preserved. You ought to conclude a reading of this book with amazement that God persists to love such a stubborn people and be encouraged that God persists with you. Judges concludes its record, setting the stage for the ministry of Samuel, which leads to the establishment of the monarchy. Perhaps that you forgot that we're still talking about the date and the occasion of the book.

[6:30] That's where it passes off into the ministry of Samuel, which we see recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel. I'll spare you the details, but this time period recorded in the book of Judges covers roughly 300 years.

So this is a significant account of a period of time in Israel's history. Now, I am going to read all of chapter 2 in a moment and make some comments as we work through it. But before I do, I want you to have a couple of interpretive lenses to peer through for this chapter and for the book in total. Number one, a judge should not be thought of merely as an arbiter of the law, like today. You don't want to picture some court TV picture of a judge, but rather as a regional ruler. As they've come into the land, as was given to them, they've been divided up amongst the land, all the tribes. And there's various battles. There's various kings. There's lots of commotion going on across the promised land. And these judges are raised up over particular areas at particular times.

[7:47] Secondly, Judges is not written chronologically. You get very confused if you try to read it chronologically. In fact, that 300-year timeline gets all blown out of proportion if you do.

It is a book of history. So it's recording real events that really happened, but it is structured to make a theological point. It's very cool the way that it's structured. I mentioned that in chapter 1, the first introduction, we see that there is a leadership void after the death of Joshua. This is a theme developed in a repeated phrase toward the end of the book, and that is that Israel needs a king. If you want to put a big, large theme over the entire book of Judges, Israel needs a king. So this repeated phrase, we see it in Judges 21, verse 25, also in chapter 17, and verse 6, in the exact same words. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And the phrase, in those days, there was no king in Israel is also found in chapter 18, verse 1, and in chapter 19, verse 1.

[9:07] There's no king, so everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Now, you may say to me at this point, I'm making the case, right?

Israel needs a king. You may say, but I thought that their first king, Saul, was given to them as a judgment. That they shouldn't have wanted a king. God should have been their king. They should not want a king. And so, they were given Saul as a judgment. And I agree with that statement. God gave Israel, in Saul, the king that they deserved.

They did not wait for the king that he had promised. But in Saul, he did not give them the king that they needed. The king that they needed, temporally, was David.

King David was the king that they were meant to wait for. And David was meant to point their thinking and ours to the ultimate king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10:13] There are no plan B's in the Bible. It's all plan A. David always was meant to be the king and he was meant to show us something of Christ.

Let me show you this from the text. Most of you probably don't care, but some of you may be shaking your fist at me right now. In Genesis 49, this is verses 8-10, before Jacob's death, he's blessing his sons and he blesses Judah in this way.

So now I'm not talking about the tribe of Judah, I'm talking about the actual man Judah from which the tribe comes. This is Genesis 49 beginning in verse 8 and following. Judah, your brother shall praise you.

Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. your father's son shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He stooped down, he crouched as a lion and as a lioness. Who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

[11:27] This blessing is fulfilled again temporally and typologically in David and then fully and finally in Jesus Christ.

So I'm arguing to you that Israel needs a king and they should have been looking for a king like David and then ultimately a king like the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I said Judges is structured to make that very theological point. And it's structured by doing this. The telling of the stories move, again, not chronologically, but they move geographically away from Judah.

The further the story gets from Judah, we see the tribe of Judah's success in chapter 1, the further it gets, the worse off the people are.

When you see this structure, it helps us anticipate the king that will come from the tribe of Judah.

It's very brilliantly structured in that way.

[12:38] So, Judges chapter 2 with some comments. I remind you that the first five verses are the conclusion of the first introduction.

The chapter breaks don't really serve us well in this case. This is the conclusion of the first introduction. Judges chapter 2 beginning in verse 1. Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bokim, which means weepers.

And he said, 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 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.

As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bokim and they sacrificed there to the Lord.

[13:46] Now I read that part of it, right? We're going to see some of that repetition in the next part of the second introduction, but I wanted you to see that transition happen. So we've already read chapter 1 and verse 1.

Now chapter 2 and verse 6. When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.

As long as those who were alive along with Joshua, his generation, they were faithful. Verse 8. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years.

And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-Hares, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work he had done

for Israel.

There's a whole new group now and they had not seen it happen and oh, you would hope that it had been told to them. Speaking of the gospel, theologian once said one generation believes the gospel, the next generation assumes the gospel, and the next generation forgets the gospel.

[15:20] So there had been some failure it would seem on their part but nonetheless we've got a new generation now that has forgotten how good God had been to them.

So, verse 11, and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the, and I think that this word is properly pronounced Baals, but I'm going to say Baals because I think it's simpler for all of us.

And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the people who were around them and bowed down to them and they provoked the Lord to anger.

They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashteroth which is just another pagan god. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them and he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies so they could no longer withstand their enemies.

Whenever they marched out the hand of the Lord was against them for harm as the Lord had warned and as the Lord had sworn to them and they were in terrible distress. Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

[16:35] 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.

Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them the Lord was with the judge and he saved 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 afflicted and oppressed them.

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.

So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he said because this people have transgressed my covenant that I have commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died in order to test Israel by them whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did or not. So the Lord left those nations not driving them out quickly. I stated that the second introduction sets up the pattern of the narrative and focuses on God's faithfulness to his people.

[17:52] So here's that pattern I want you to note it and it repeats again and again as you see these different accounts of the judges. The first thing that happens is that the people rebel.

They turn away from God and God's ways. They turn to the idols the gods of the land. So we see in verse 13 of chapter 2 they abandon the Lord and they serve the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

Those things that they could see and bow down to. And because of this God's anger is kindled verse 14 tells us.

So the second step in the pattern is that God hands them over to the people of the land. Verse 14 says that he gave them over to plunders and plunders are going to plunder.

So that's what they do. They plunder them and he sells them into the hand of their surrounding enemies so they can no longer withstand their enemies. And you see this Exodus pattern repeated again and again.

[19:00] Right? What's happening to them here? They're being sold into slavery. Right? And they're going to be set free by a judge. Moses typologically is like the first judge in this sense.

So the people rebel. God hands them over to the people of the land. But thirdly God shows them mercy by raising up a judge. And we see early in the book the people cry out to him.

They're in distress. Chapter 2 tells us he has pity on them because of their distress. But as the book proceeds, they stop crying out. Yet God still shows them mercy and raises up a judge who delivers

them from this oppression.

So the first part of 16 says, then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of those who plundered them. Fourthly, the judge, by God's help, delivers the Israelites and they have rest.

The Lord raised up the judges who saved them out of hand of those who plundered them and they rest. And there's these periods of years that go by in the region of Moab that there's rest for the people of Israel.

[20:19] And then we're going to see those time periods get shorter and shorter as the book goes on. So the people rebel, God hands them over to the people of the land.

God shows mercy by raising up a judge. The judge by God's help delivers them and they have rest. There are a total of 12 judges recorded in this book, six major and six minor, which simply means that there's more significant time given to six of them.

Very short record of some of them. That's the same way we treat the prophets, major and minor.

The major prophets are Othniel, Ehud, Debrus, Slashberic, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.

The minor, some of these names you may have never heard before, are Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzon, Elon, and Abdon.

If you take the time to study all of these judges, you will notice that these judges are a mixed bag of faithfulness. We have very little detail about some of them at all.

[21:31] Some of them, we have no record of their particular faithfulness, but you begin to see this kind of devolving weakness in their faith as the narrative progresses.

So, as a whole, they leave something wanting in a ruler, a longing for a better ruler for the land. So, that cycle, people rebel, God hands them over to the people of the land, God shows them mercy by raising up a judge, the judge by God's help delivers the Israel, and the people return to wickedness. 300 years, cycle, cycle, cycle.

Verse 19, chapter 2, 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.

It just seems to spiral worse and worse and worse as the book goes on. So, it's making this theological case. Israel needs a righteous ruler who possesses the power of an indestructible life.

[22:43] The judges die. They die, and then everything devolves again. Then one's raised up, sets free, and then they die again and again and again.

Israel needs a righteous ruler, a perfect ruler who possesses the power of an indestructible life. And I'm not saying that that's King David, but King David is foreshadowing for us the Lord Jesus Christ. So, the narrative continues to follow this pattern, right? There's five steps, ever descending spiral. And so, let's look together at two of the judges in brief.

And we're just going to read one major, I'll make some comments, and one minor. I just want to kind of juxtapose those two and show you how simple some of those minor records can be.

And so, I thought we would look at Judges chapter three. E, this is the major judge Ehud, or Ehud if you prefer, but I'm going to say Ehud. I picked this one, not for grand significance, it's right there, it's close, it's also just a fascinating story.

[23:53] This book is full of some very, very interesting stories. Next week I have a plan for another interesting story to be sure.

So let's look at, see if we can see this pattern. Judges three, beginning in verse 12. And the people of Israel, again, did with evil in the sight of the Lord.

And the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So God raises up a king, regional, think regional, an Eglon, who's going to be a judgment.

For the people and for their disobedience. Of interest, his name translated means literally little calf. As we're going to see in just a bit, he's a really large man. This could be, because he's the king of Moab, this might be the king when the famine hits and Naomi and Ruth are coming back to Moab.

[25:04] That's happening. Perhaps because things are going well in Moab, this could be that king and he's receiving tribute from the Israelites.

Possibly this is the guy.

So it's a big guy named Tiny, king of Moab, against Israel because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Verse 13, he gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites and went and defeated Israel and they took possession of the city of Palms.

And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab 18 years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gerah the Benjaminite, a left-handed man.

The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. Now, why is it recorded that Ehud was a left-handed man?

In a moment we're going to see that he hides a sword on his right side. And I think that the reason for this, and I don't think this because I'm brilliant, but I read other people who think this, is the point is to say that he's a trained warrior.

[26:17] There's some record of whole battalions of soldiers that were all left-handed, and what we think that means is they could fight with either of their hands. So I'm right-handed, I'm extremely right-hand dominant.

If you ask me to throw a ball with my left hand, it's laughable what that ball will do. I don't have a great right arm either, but I can at least get it somewhere.

I think what they're saying is that this guy could fight with either of his hands. Okay? So, verse 16, and Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes.

So, now notice there's likely so much oppression here, he can't go and buy a weapon for himself, but he has to make one for himself. And we see a lot of the judges fighting with abnormal weapons. Shamgar in chapter 3 fights with an ox goad. He kills many people with an ox goad. Here, Ehud makes for himself a sword, and he puts it on his right thigh under his clothes.

[27:26] And the suggestion is that in a pat-down, they would have checked his left hand side for a sword to be drawn with the right hand, but perhaps not the other side. Either way, he sneaks the sword in to the presence of the king under his clothing.

Verse 17, and he presented the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. Now, Eglon was a very fat man. And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute, but he himself turned back at the idols in Ogirgal and said, I have a secret message for you, O king. And he commanded silence, and all his attendants went out from his presence. And Ehud came to him as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and Ehud said, I have a message from God for you.

And he arose from his seat. And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. So he drives the sword.

This is the message from God, two-edged, interestingly, right, into the belly of tiny calf. And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade.

[28:43] For he did not pull the sword out of his belly, so he just plunges it all the way in and leaves it behind. And then there's a very interesting word, which we're not totally sure what it means in Hebrew, but the translators say, and the dung came out.

Perhaps his intestines, there's some contextual clues as to why they translated it this way. So gross, I know, sorry, but interesting, all the same. So, then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them.

So he locks little calf in the room. When he had gone, the servants came, and when they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, surely he was relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber, and they waited till they were embarrassed.

But when he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them, and there lay their Lord, dead on the floor. He had escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Sarai.

When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, so it's a victory trumpet.

Then the people of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was their leader. And he said to them, follow after me, for the Lord has given your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands.

[29:59] So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and did not allow anyone to pass over. And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men.

Not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest for 80 years. So there you see that pattern, right?

The wickedness, right? They're given to and judgment to the people of the land, but God and his mercy raises up for them a judge who delivers them and gives them rest.

And then the narrative rolls on, and we're going to see Ehud passes from the history, and we see once again the Israelites act wickedly.

Then you can see a minor, Judges chapter 10, verse 1 and 2. This is Tola. Now, just because we don't get all the details, I think we should still understand the pattern to hold.

[31:01] So I don't intend to preach any of the minor judges, but as you perhaps are reading through this narrative, you'll see it. So here we see, after Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola, the son of Pua, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shemir in the hill country of Ephraim.

And he judged Israel 23 years. Then he died and was buried at Shemir. That's all we know about Tola altogether.

Yet, I believe, the pattern is embedded in there because we've seen the pattern in other places and it's explicitly laid out for us in chapter 2.

So this book is designed to leave us in great anticipation of a savior king. Israel needs a righteous king.

Notice that pattern again and again and again. What do they do? They devolve into unrighteous. They devolve into idolatry. Regardless of how God shows them mercy, they're still yet not able to keep his commandments and to please him.

[32:18] They keep falling apart and we are just like them. We so often read them so judgmentally. How could they possibly have forgotten? Think about the things they saw. Think about the things that they were delivered from and we are just the same.

So very quick to be forgetful, to return to the idols of the land and so we need the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, given to us.

His robes for mine, him taking on our sin and rightly receiving the punishment that was due our sin. And we need a ruler, one who will reign forever on our behalf, that has a power over death, has an incorruptible life.

We as the church see the full realization of what they should have been longing for and I fear sadly weren't. But as we look at this book together, we get to see it, we get to draw our minds forward, through the temporal reign of David to the eternal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33:33] Let's pray together.