

Bible Study Course

Judges

Introduction

Judges belongs to the second section of the Bible, called in the Hebrew canon “The Prophets”, and in ours “The Historical Books.”

Judges is almost a complete contrast to Joshua. In Joshua we see the people of God inheriting, but in Judges we see a continual cycle of declension, division, defection, disorder, confusion, and then repentance and deliverance. There seems to be no progress of real worth, unless we look upon the book of Ruth as part of Judges. It is a wearying cycle, even though in all the failure of God’s people, we find the mercy and faithfulness of God. In God’s revelation of His purpose, however, the book of Judges is another step forward. We begin to see the need for authority emphasized. Apart from the Tabernacle at Shiloh, there was no central authority, spiritual or civil; in Israel – “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Any loyalty that did exist was tribal, rather than to the entire nation. In this state of disorder, there was not only disunity and fragmentation, but the people of God became vulnerable to the inroads of pagan religion, and intermarriage.

Authorship and Date

No one knows the author, and there are many conflicting views, but Jewish tradition ascribes it to Samuel. According to Jewish tradition, Samuel wrote Judges, Ruth and part of 1 Samuel. The style throughout the book suggests that one person was the author, although it would also appear that he used older records.

It seems apparent from the phrase “in those days there was no king in Israel,” that it was not written before the first monarchy (Saul). See Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25. From Judges 1:21 and 2 Sam 5:6-10, it seems obvious that it was written before Jerusalem became capital (1000BC.) These facts could well argue for Samuel’s authorship of this book.

We can therefore say that Judges was written some time between 1400BC and 1000BC. It covers the period between the death of Joshua, after the conquest of the land, to the times of Eli just prior to the introduction of the monarchy in Israel, a total of about 300 years.

It ought to be remembered that these “Judges” are not necessarily consecutive. Some may have been contemporary. The two stories in chapters 17-21, and Ruth can be dated with the earlier part of Judges.

Especial Note:

The Rabbinic chronology for this period was formed on the basis that one generation equaled forty years. Hence

1 generation in the wilderness	=	40 years
8 generations of the Judges	=	320 years
1 generation of Eli	=	40 years
1 generation of Samuel	=	40 years
1 generation of David	=	<u>40 years</u>
Total	=	480 years

Key to the Book

We ought to note that the writer gives us three reasons in Judges 2:20-3:6, for this phase of Israel’s history.

1. To visit their disobedience 2:20-23
2. To prove Israel 2:22; 3:4
3. To teach them to war. 3:2

Thus we see the record of failure and deliverance throughout this book. It is the story of failures leading to deliverances only because of the mercy and faithfulness of God. We see also, the Lord taking the defeat, the failure and the misery of His people, and using it all to instruct them and us, and to work out His own purpose. Indeed, finally to provide a king.

We need also to recognize that Judges is a book of “causes and effects.” All defeat declension etc. as well as all revival and renewal is traced to some simple beginning. In principle it is always to do with either the rejection of God’s authority or the recognition of it. See Nehemiah’s prayer, Neh 9:24-27, which is an enlightening commentary on this.

The key to this book is contained in Judges 17:6; 18:1, 7; 19:1; 21:25. It is the absolute necessity of divine authority. All is traced to this, to either its presence or its absence. The Hebrew word translated “Judges” from which we get the title for this book, simply means “judge,” “lawgiver,” “governor.” These Judges represent divine authority and government. It is therefore instructive to note that this authority leads to deliverance. They are called “Saviours” or “Deliverers”. See Judg 2:16, 18; 3:9, 10, 15. Cp. Neh 9:27. How interesting it is to note that the New Testament opens with the presentation of Christ our Saviour as King.

It is instructive to note that if Ruth is part of Judges, it leads to the provision of a king – Ruth 4:22 We ought also to note that there are 12 Judges, a highly significant number in Scripture, representing government, or authority.

Outline of the Book

The book of Ruth has often been closely connected with Judges, and certainly there are some interesting points to consider. Whatever the truth of the matter is, Ruth has been placed after Judges in our Bible.

The outline of Judges is very simple:-

- I. An Introduction 1:1 - 3:6
- II. The Deliverances of the Lord 3:7 – 16
- III. An Appendix 17 – 21, and perhaps Ruth

I. Partial Possession – the cause of defeat and failure 1:1 – 3:6

- a) What Israel did not drive out 1:1 - 2:10
- b) The result 2:11 – 15
- c) The Lord’s reaction 2:16 – 3:6

II. The deliverances of the Lord 3:7 – 16:31

We ought to note: -

- 1. That all these deliverance begin with God finding a person who will do His will. E.g. Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9 – 10. The measure in which that man or woman is given to, and obedient to the Lord, governs the depth and duration of the deliverance.
- 2. We have the record of seven periods of apostasy and declension, and the Lord’s deliverance, in answer to the cry of His own people.

1) First Apostasy

3:7 – 11	Locality:	South Israel
	Punishment:	8 years’ subjection to Mesopotamia

First Deliverance

Deliverer:	<u>Othniel of Judah</u>
Peace:	40 years

2) Second Apostasy

3:12 – 31	Locality:	Central Israel
	Punishment:	18 years’ subjection to Moab (helped by Ammon and Amalek)

	<u>Second Deliverance</u>	Deliverer:	Ehud of Benjamin and after him Shamgar
		Peace:	80 years
3)	<u>Third Apostasy</u> 4:1 – 5:31	Locality: Punishment:	North Israel 20 years' subjection to the Canaanites.
	<u>Third Deliverance</u>	Deliverer:	Deborah of Ephraim, Barak of Naphtali
		Peace:	40 years
4)	<u>Fourth Apostasy</u> 6:1 – 8:32	Locality: Punishment:	Central Israel 7 years subjection to Midian (helped by Amalek and the children of the East)
	<u>Fourth Deliverance</u>	Deliverer:	Gideon of Manasseh
	Note:-		
	1. The character of his leadership.		
	a) The call of Gideon 6:11 – 24 (Conscientiousness, humility, the burnt offering – all consumed)		
	b) Utterness of his devotion 6:25 – 32		
	c) The confirmation 6:36 – 40 (its meaning – the Cross)		
	2. The character of corporate pioneering		
	a) The large number cut down to three hundred 7:4 – 8 (Mark the way many were eliminated)		
	b) The essential way of victory 7:15 – 23 (Trumpet, Pitchers, Torches – the essentials in overcoming)		
	c) Wrong attitudes 8:1 – 21		
	1) Men of Ephraim		
	2) Men of Succoth		
	3. The end of Gideon 8:22 – 32		
	a) His humility		
	b) The Ephod and the result		
	c) Abimelech		
	Peace:		40 years
5)	<u>Fifth Apostasy</u> 8:33 – 10:5	Localities: Punishment:	Central Israel and East of Jordan 3 years under Abimelech (son of Gideon)
	<u>Fifth Deliverance</u>	Deliverers: Peace:	Tola of Issachar, Jair of Gad 45 years
6)	<u>Sixth Apostasy</u> 10:6 – 12:15	Locality: Punishment:	East of Jordan, North and Central Israel 18 years' subjection to Philistia and Ammon
	<u>Sixth Deliverance</u>	Deliverer:	Jephthah of Gad

	Note: -	
1.	He understood history 11:12 -28	
2.	He made a foolish vow 11:29 -31	
3.	He was devoted to the Lord, but not fully according to truth. There was a mixture in him 11:22 – 40	Ibzam of Judah, Elon of Zebulun Abdon of Ephraim
	Peace:	31 years
7) <u>Seventh Apostasy</u>		
13:1 – 16:31	Locality:	?
	Punishment:	40 years' subjection to the Philistines.
	<u>Seventh Deliverance</u>	Deliverer:
	Note: -	Samson of Dan
	1.	A Nazirite – the first recorded one.
	2.	The burnt offering 13:15 – 20
	3.	The weakness and strength of Samson
	4.	His end
	Peace	20 years

III. An Appendix – confusion and the grace of God. 17 – 21, Ruth

Three stories that reveal the condition of the land, (one from the North, one from Central Israel, one from the South.) The first two reveal a sad state of confusion, evil and depravity as a consequence of falling away from the Lord. The last reveals the grace of God, shining through all the misery and disorder.

- a) A picture of unfaithfulness to the Lord 17 – 18
- b) A picture of depravity among the people 19 – 21
- c) A picture of purity and faithfulness; God sovereignly fulfilling his purpose – Ruth

In all this we notice one thing which is clearly brought out in these last three stories – authority is the key to stability, unity and progress.

Message of the Book

The Land or, to use the New Testament phrase, “The Heavencies,” is the sphere of the spiritual experience of God’s people in Christ. Possessing the Land is to enter in to what is ours in Christ, to make what is potential, actual in our experience. It is a stern and long-drawn out battle with the enemy, (cf. Eph 6:10-18). The book of Judges reveals some of the perils which can beset the people of God as they seek to possess their possessions. E.g. compromise, disunity, defection, isolation, disorder, allowing enemy strongholds to remain, etc. etc. The fact is that whatever is undealt with in our personal lives, or corporate life, becomes our undoing. The enemy sees to that. All these matters are only dealt with when the King comes into His place of authority. The only answer is His absolute Lordship and our total obedience.

The authority of God’s Christ is absolutely essential to stability and security. Where the kingship of God’s Christ is not recognized, or recognized only in name, the result is always disorder and confusion, whether personal or corporate. We need, afresh, therefore, to recognize the kingship of Christ. Then we need to see how that authority is vested in men. In the midst of all the failure and the tragedy of unsettled issues, God’s way is to deliver and to answer, by a fresh recognition of His authority on our part, and a fresh committal to it. Then, and then alone, do we know peace and rest; we enter into the fullness and reality of our so great salvation.

Recommended books

Joshua, Judges

Judges and Ruth

Israel in Canaan under Joshua & the Judges

John Garstang

A. Cundall & L. Morris

A. Edersheim

Halford House Tapes

BS 4

Judges

Bible Study Course
Books of the Bible: Judges

Questions

1. State the purpose for which God raised up different Judges, and state why it was necessary that these judges be raised up.
2. Sum up in one or two sentences, the contrast between the message of the book of Joshua, and that of Judges.
3. What are the reasons for God's raising up of nations to try Israel? (See Judges 2:16 - 3:7)
4. What are the main lessons you have learned from the life of Samson? Can you find any likenesses to Christ from his life?
5. Write, in your own words, about half a page on what you have learned about the need for authority from the book of Judges.
6. What do you learn about the state of the morals and religion in Israel from the Appendix of the book of Judges? Which verses in these chapters were given as a comment upon the situation?
7. How many of the names in Judges can you find in Hebrews 11? Why were they included in that chapter?
8. In what way does the book of Judges show us God working out His purpose?
9. What do you learn about leadership and corporate pioneering from this book of Judges?
10. State in one or two sentences the supreme facts about God which you have learned from the book of Judges.