

OpenTheo

Judges Introduction



Judges - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an introduction to the book of Judges, which he suggests was likely written by tradition rather than by Samuel. He discusses the political and religious structure of Israel at that time, noting that the people were led by God rather than a king. Gregg also touches on the 13 judges mentioned in the book and highlights some disturbing stories, such as Samson's multiple sins and the lack of true worshipers among the people of Israel.

Transcript

We now come to a new book that we have not yet studied together, and that is the book of Judges. And so we will have an introduction to this book as we do generally before we get into the actual text and start going verse by verse. And as you know, one of the concerns I always have in approaching a book of the Bible is, if possible, to know who wrote it.

Now, many of these historical books of the Old Testament, nobody knows for sure who wrote them. You remember when we talked about Joshua, I mentioned that there's a Jewish tradition, that Joshua wrote it. And probably he did.

I mean, there's no evidence of anybody else doing it. And there is evidence that it was written in his lifetime. And there is reference to him writing something, though not necessarily a statement that he wrote the whole book.

But these things being so, it means that the tradition really, by default, would seem to stand as the most credible theory. And so we move from that presumption, since we don't have any other evidence for any other alternative. The same is kind of true about the book of Judges.

There is a tradition among the Jews that it was written by Samuel the prophet. Now, you might think Samuel would have written the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, but that's not the case. He is a character in them, but he is not the author of them.

Actually, Samuel himself dies in the story in 1 Samuel. And obviously, there's another

part to that called 2 Samuel. He obviously didn't write it all.

But he could well have written Judges and Ruth, and that is the Jewish tradition. Ruth, I mention now, because she also lived during the time of the Judges. We're told that in the opening line of the book of Ruth, it says, And now in the days when the Judges reigned, there was a certain so-and-so.

And it goes and tells the story. So the book of Judges and the book of Ruth belong to the same period of time. And so the question is, could it be Samuel? Now, the Jews would not have said it was if there weren't some reasons to believe it.

I mean, it's not just an arbitrary decision. But it's not necessarily possible to prove who wrote it any more than it is possible to prove who wrote Joshua. And therefore, the tradition, being a reasonable one, will stand unless it is overthrown by evidence.

I don't believe there is evidence against it. But there are evidences of the time during which it was written. And they point, I think, to more or less confirm Samuel, because it is his time that we're talking about.

For example, there are references in the book of Judges from the standpoint of the writer that tell us that the ark and the tabernacle apparently were no longer in Shiloh. Now, we read about the tabernacle being set up in Shiloh in the book of Joshua. And we read about it still being there in 1 Samuel.

And it is in 1 Samuel, when the boy Samuel is brought to live at the tabernacle, that we find that the tabernacle is in Shiloh. And yet, it is destroyed in a war against the Philistines in the book of 1 Samuel. In apparently Samuel's youth, when he was still young, the Philistines captured the ark and it was never again in Shiloh.

And they apparently destroyed the tabernacle at that same time. And it was never again erected in Shiloh. So, the fact that the book of Judges indicates that it is written after the ark and the tabernacle are no longer in Shiloh, puts it at least there's a minimal early date.

It could not be before. The book could not have been written while the ark was in Shiloh. And in Judges 18, verse 31, it says, So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image, which he made all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Now, the author is saying, it remained there as long as the tabernacle was in Shiloh. He couldn't say that if the tabernacle, in fact, was still in Shiloh in his own day. And he didn't know whether, you know, this idol would be set up there too at the same time.

So, he's talking about the house of God being in Shiloh as a past thing, not a continuing thing in his own time. Also in chapter 20, in verse 27, it says, So the children of Israel inquired of the Lord, and it says in parentheses, The ark of the covenant of God was

there in those days. Meaning there in Shiloh it's talking about.

So, in those days the ark was in Shiloh. Obviously in the days of the author that isn't the case. He's describing to his own generation, his own readers, that there was a situation in those days that obviously was not current when written.

So this is our first hint of the timing of the writing of the book. It was at least after the ark and the tabernacle were no longer in Shiloh. However, we have other indicators.

There are four times in the book of Judges that it says, There was no king in Israel in those days. Now this is hardly a statement that would be made unless the circumstances had changed. Because if a person was writing this book before any kings were in Israel, they might not think to mention there weren't kings in those days in Israel.

After all, they might not even know there ever would be kings in Israel. It is made very clear to an audience who is familiar with there being kings in Israel, that the stories took place before such a time. And those statements are found in chapter 17 verse 6, which says, there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

But also in chapter 18 verse 1, it says, in those days there was no king in Israel. And in chapter 19 verse 1 it says, it came to pass in those days when there was no king in Israel. And then of course the last chapter ends with the statement in chapter 21 verse 25, in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

So four times we are reminded that this happened when there was no king in Israel, but the author is writing from a different political situation. Where he and his readers clearly did know of kings in Israel. There were kings in Israel in his time.

So we know that it is written after the destruction of Shiloh. It is also written after the appointment of Saul to be king. However, it is before David conquered Jerusalem.

Because in chapter 1 verse 21, we are told that the city of Jerusalem was still under the control of the Jebusites. In Judges 1 verse 21 it says, but the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites, thank you very much, you can use that, who inhabited Jerusalem. So the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

To this day means to the time that the writer lived in. He lived at a time when the Jebusites still remained not driven out of Jerusalem. Now we know that they were driven out at the very beginning of David's reign.

When he first became king he made it his first order of business to capture Jerusalem and take it from the Jebusites. And he did so successfully. So what do we know? We know there was a king in Israel when this was written.

It must have been king Saul or at least the very opening days of David's reign. Because there was only one king before David. And David conquered Jerusalem at the very beginning of his reign.

So almost certainly it was in the reign of Saul. And that is the time frame when Samuel lived. It doesn't mean that Samuel wrote it, but it means that the tradition that Samuel wrote it is of credible tradition and it certainly is written, the author gives indicators that it's written in the time that Samuel lived.

Because he died during the reign of Saul. And yet he lived at the time that Shiloh was still the religious center. But he lived to see it no longer be.

So the historical standpoint of the author is that at least of a contemporary of Samuel, if not Samuel himself. Now there is one verse that kind of throws a wrench in this theory. And that is Judges chapter 18 and verse 30.

Because it says, Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image. And Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests in the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. Now some scholars think that this reference to the captivity of the land is a reference to the time when the Assyrians took the northern kingdom into captivity in 722 BC.

That would be much later than Samuel's time. In fact it would be much later than David's. And you know it's hundreds of years after Samuel's time.

So if this is referring to that captivity, then it must be that it was written much later than Samuel's time. This is the only thing that would indicate that. And that is only an argument on the assumption that it is the captivity in 722 that it's talking about.

The book of Judges however speaks of a number of captivities as it were. There's a number of times when the enemies came in and oppressed and held Israel as their captive so to speak. So it may be that this is not talking about 722 BC, but it could be talking about almost any of the times when invading armies came in and occupied and oppressed the land.

Particularly any of them that may have affected the tribe of Dan. Okay so we're going to just say that the tradition is credible and there's nothing at all to suggest an alternative author to the book of Judges. So we're going to allow for that.

Now the period that is covered is about 325 years. It is from the death of Joshua which is thought to be around 1425, maybe 1424 BC. And it goes until the time of the end of Samson's ministry, if we could call it that, at right about 1100 BC.

So that would be 325 years approximately. Now this is a little problematic, but not seriously so. Because if you add up all the years that it talks about that Israel was

oppressed by this group for this many years and oppressed by these people for this many years.

And then you add up the years also, add to that the years that the judges judge. 40 years in one case or many cases. 80 years in another case.

23 years in another case. You take all the numbers of the years and you add them up and it comes to 410. Now 410 cannot be the length of the period because we know from the book of 1 Kings that from the exodus to the building of the temple was said to be 480 years.

From that number you have to take the full reign of David which is 40 years. And the reign of Saul which is 40 years. And the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness before the judges period began.

Right there you've got 120 years that you take away from the 480 years. And you're going to end up with less than 410 years. So how is it that all these dates add up to 410 years when the period must be at least 100 if not more years less than that? Well it is agreed by virtually all scholars that these judges did not all reign sequentially.

Some of them reigned simultaneously in different parts of the country. Remember Israel was not a united federation. It wasn't like our union.

Our 50 states have one federal government over them. This was really like, as I mentioned before, an Amphictyon which is a loose coalition of tribes that govern themselves. And they have some relationship with each other especially a religious shrine that they share and that they maintain and protect.

But they don't have many political alliances with each other that are official. They have friendship with each other, they share a culture, they share a religion. But they're independent tribes.

And so it would be possible of course for certain tribes to come under oppression with others being unaffected. And so there could be a judge judging in the northern region and a different judge in the southern region. Scholars agree pretty much that the book of Judges is not giving us necessarily a chronology of which judges were reigning contemporaneously with others or subsequently to others.

But it is clear that many of the judgeships must have been simultaneous in different parts of the country. And that's just how we solve the problem. The period was only about 325 years.

But if you add up all the numbers it comes to 410 which means there's like 85 years or something like that that must have overlapped somewhere, different judgeships. Now the political character of Israel at that time was different than at a later time and

different than at a previous time. Because previously they were headed by a prophet, Moses.

And then by another prophet, Joshua, who served no doubt as judges also. That is Moses certainly judged the people. We read about that in the book of Exodus how the people would line up to see him with their disputes.

And his father-in-law advised that he distribute some of that responsibility to others so that he doesn't wear himself out. But Moses did serve in that position as one who was a judge and a prophet. Joshua, we're never told that Joshua was a judge.

We know he was a prophet and a deliverer and he probably served as a judge. Though we're not told. But Joshua was specifically appointed to be the successor of Moses.

Joshua died however and left no successor in place. And there was no successor so there was no one in charge. And so the reason for that is because Israel didn't need a king.

They had God as their king and he could rule directly over them all over the country. He could be paying attention to people anywhere in the country at the same time. And they didn't need to have a central government that was trying to control everything.

Now a theocracy still has people who kind of lead because God is invisible. And he doesn't speak out loud very often where you can hear him with his audible voice. So he had people who spoke for him.

Sometimes they were prophets and of course the high priest also had a role in leading because he had the unction and the thyme and he could determine what the will of God was about certain things. And then there were the judges. The book of Judges mainly focuses on the judges.

But it mentions, it doesn't mention the high priest but we know that they were around. Because the earlier books indicate there was a succession of high priests all the way through Israel's history. So that means during this time there were high priests too.

It's interesting that they're never mentioned in the book of Judges. Apparently they didn't play a role as important or as worthy of mention as those of the judges. But there were some prophets.

Deborah who is one of the judges is also said to be a prophetess. And also in chapter 6 and verse 8 it mentions a prophet coming and speaking to the people of Israel. Also Samuel lived during the period of the judges although he's not in the book of Judges.

His life was still lived in the period of the judges. And he was said to be a prophet. Obviously in 1 Samuel 3 20.

So we have God ruling his people through prophetic men. Through the priesthood and

also through ad hoc deliverers. Who also served to lead during their lifetime after delivering the people from trouble.

They did not in other words have a central federal government. They did not have a king that ruled over everybody. Instead it was understood the people knew the law of God.

If they didn't know it well they'd hear it read to them out loud every 7th year at the Feast of Tabernacles. The whole law was read to the entire nation. And knowing the law of God they were supposed to live by it.

Therefore everyone did what was right in his own eyes we're told. Because there was no king. Now I've commented on this particular statement in a previous lecture.

We were having an introduction to the historical books. But I might just say it again. In case anyone was not here for that.

When the Bible says there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. It is almost always seen as a negative statement. That is preachers always speak about that as if that's bad.

But of course there was a reason there was no king in Israel. And that's because God didn't want them to have a king. So the circumstance was not bad.

When they finally decided they wanted one God was upset with them. Because if I'm their king why are they rejecting me? It was understood that God was their king and they didn't need another king. And that's why everyone had to do what was right in their own eyes.

There wasn't someone telling them what to do. Other than God of course. Now the reason that it is sometimes said it's wrong or bad at least.

A bad situation when people do what is right in their own eyes. Is that too often what is right in their eyes is not the same thing that is right in God's eyes. But apparently God still thought it was better to let people do what their conscience dictated.

Than to have them all do what one man's conscience, a king would dictate. Because that man might be a bad man. At least when there is liberty and people can act before God according to their conscience.

Although many will do the wrong thing. Those who want to do the right thing are free to do so. They don't have some oppressive king telling them they have to do the wrong thing.

And that often happened later on. Because when the kings of Israel came to be. They were almost all wicked.

And a lot of them promoted idolatry and other evil. In the days of Ahab and Jezebel. She actually commanded people not to worship Yahweh and she killed the prophets.

That kind of oppression from a bad king is not better. Than a situation where everyone is free to do what is right in their own eyes. At least the bad people can't make the good people do the bad things.

When there is liberty. Of course when there is such liberty there is always the danger people will do the wrong thing. Because they are free to do what they want to do.

And the book of Judges gives many examples of how the people did the wrong thing. But you see when God is the king. He is the one who takes that matter into his hands.

And he did. When his people were rebellious against him. He sent in oppressors.

He sent in judgment upon them. He lowered the boom on them. Just like a king might.

If he has got rebellious servants. He will attend to that. So God is quite capable of attending to his own concerns.

He basically set up a kingdom. Where people were free to obey their king according to their conscience. And some no doubt did.

Unfortunately very many did not. And God had to come in and you know. Clean up the mess.

But that is what he apparently preferred to do. Rather than appoint an earthly king. And make everyone do what he said.

That is what the king said. An earthly man. So I do not know that we can say it is a bad situation.

When there is no king in Israel. And everyone does what is right in his own eyes. It is bad for those who do the wrong things.

But as a general system of government. It is what God preferred. Because he could have appointed a king anytime he wanted to.

In fact if he did not want to appoint a king. He could have just appointed another prophet after Joshua. You know like Moses.

He did not even do that. Instead he opted for a situation. Where there was no continuous leader over the whole nation.

And it gave people the opportunity to show what their true colors were. Unfortunately they were often bad colors. And he had to clean up.

You know he had to judge them for it. But it still was the case that. Freedom allows people to show who they are.

And that might be a good thing in the long run. You know a lot of Christians of my generation. Have seen a transition.

In the way that homosexuality is viewed. In the public sector and so forth. Certainly when I was young.

We did not hear a lot about homosexuality. There were homosexuals. But they just were not out in public that much.

They were in the closet. But in our lifetime we have seen that change. They have come out of the closet.

And that has alarmed a lot of Christians. They say well this is a bad thing. Look how visible these homosexuals are.

Well they were there all the time. Presumably. They just were not visible.

You just did not know who they were. Is it a bad thing that people can show their true colors. So you know what you are dealing with.

I mean there were closet homosexuals in those days. Who would hide in public restrooms. And do things to little boys.

And things like that. Which I was warned about. By my junior high coach.

In fact they took all the boys out of the PE class. Once just to tell them. You have got to watch out for this.

We did not know who the homosexuals were. Because they were not free really. To manifest who they were.

When they do. For those of us who are not that sympathetic. To that lifestyle.

And who think it is wrong. That becomes alarming. See wow look at these people coming out.

You know publicly. And saying who they are. But if they are that person anyway.

Even when they are not saying so. I do not know if it is worse. To know who you are dealing with.

I mean having freedom to express yourself. Means that you actually. Are known for what you are.

The Israelites if they were. Held under the fist of a king. Who did not let them do the wrong thing.

Might have been just as evil people. In their hearts. But it would never manifest it.

But by giving people freedom to express themselves. They did horrible things. And God had to deal with them.

Because he was their king. And so that is apparently how he preferred it. Rather than have some.

You know some human authority. Forcing people to outwardly. Comply with the behavior that God's law.

Said he. God could take care of his own rebellions. And put them down.

Now in addition to being a theocracy. Which basically is saying that God was their king. I have mentioned that it was.

Israel's Amphictyony. Which is a loose coalition of tribes. Sort of like a republican confederacy.

Where. Individual cities. Or individual tribes.

Have their local leaders. Which they appoint. According to however they want to.

They recognize the authority of the elders. Or of what is in the. King James version called princes.

The new king James calls them leaders. But there are mentioned in the book of. Judges.

On some occasions of these leaders. And of the elders of various cities. Or tribes.

That act in concert with each other. Apparently although there is no king. And there is no central government.

The individual communities. Recognize authorities among themselves. Just as for example.

Protestants do not recognize a central authority. In the church in the pope. As Catholics do.

But most churches have their local church leaders. Elders and such. There is not some kind of a translocal authority.

Where all the churches submit to one guy. Who sits in Rome or somewhere else. But rather the individual churches.

Govern themselves. As they wish. And God is seen as the overall lord.

And king of all of them. That is really the way. It is apparently supposed to be.

That is the way God set things up. For Israel. And no doubt how it is intended to be.

A paradigm that the church can learn from. And is supposed to follow. Now when we talk about judges.

The word is. Shofetim. In Hebrew.

A shofet is a judge. But what are we talking about. When we talk about judges in our country.

We are talking about men who sit on a bench. In the courthouse. And in a sense the judges were that.

They did that kind of thing. At least sometimes. For example we read in Judges chapter 4. That is what Deborah did.

In 4 verses 4 and 5. It says. Now Deborah a prophetess. The wife of Lapidoth.

Was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree. Of Deborah.

Apparently named after her. Between Ramah and Bethel. In the mountains of Ephraim.

And the children of Israel came to her. For judgment. That is for her to arbitrate.

In legal disputes. That is what judges do. And I think these judges did that too.

Although most of the judges in question. Are the ones that come to our attention. They.

Arise to their position apparently. Through a different kind of activity. And that is by being military leaders.

And even Deborah. Served in that role. They.

They arise as God. Puts his spirit upon them. And therefore they are like gifted.

Spiritually gifted leaders. That arise. For the occasion.

Unlike a monarchy. Where the leaders are simply in power. Because their father was the leader.

And after he dies they inherit the position. In the period of the judges. As God apparently preferred things to be.

There would be long periods of time. Where there was no. Highly influential leader.

And then as the need arose. And as God wished to do it. He would bring a charismatic leader.

He put his spirit on somebody. And they would become. The ones who rectify all the wrongs.

For their generation. And the people would follow them. Now there is actually no evidence.

That these leaders. Demanded people to follow them. These people did not wield.

Really what we call political authority. They wielded moral authority. More or less.

That is people. Felt these guys were right. This man is sent from God.

He is the one whose God is going to use to lead us. So let's rally behind him. And drive out these Midianites or whatever.

And then of course once that was done. The very fact that God had used him. Had given him the credentials.

For them to bring their disputes to him. For the rest of his life. And have him judge them.

He was obviously God's chosen representative. Now some of the judges don't fit that paradigm. At least we don't ever read it.

For example Samson. Doing these particular things. He never led an army.

He is sort of like a one man army. Like Rambo or something. You don't need an army.

When you got a man like that. But we don't know that he ever really sat. And judged cases for example.

He might have. I mean the fact that he is called a judge. Might be reason to deduce.

That though it is not recorded. He actually spent some of his time judging cases. If so.

He might be the kind of person. That Jesus would say. Let him that is without sin.

Be the first to cast a stone. Who are you to judge. Because Samson was not a well behaved man himself.

But that is true of a lot of the judges. It is clear that they were chosen. Not because of their moral character.

In some cases. Although the early judges. Seemed to be people of high character.

Some of them. Well they all have flaws. All people do.

Even the good guys in the Bible. Seem to have flaws. But some of them like Samson.

Apparently were not known for their virtue at all. He almost had like a hereditary. Position.

Although his parents were not in a position. He was chosen before he was born. And he was born to the position.

That God had him. And that is an unusual situation. Samuel was the same way.

And he was a judge later on. So the judges were in many cases. Military leaders initially.

And it is not like they drafted people. They were not like a king. Who could send out draft notices.

And if you do not come. They send out the police and put you in jail. For draft evasion.

These guys would just kind of rise up. With the spirit of God on them. And the people would recognize.

This is the leadership of God. That he is appointed. And so they would rally.

So it was like a moral authority. Rather than a political authority. And likewise afterward.

After he delivered them. He did not hold an office of king. Where people had to obey him.

But the people recognized. This is the man who will speak to us for God. And since they are a nation governed by God.

Having men who speak to them for God. Convincingly. Authoritatively.

Was a good thing. How many judges are there? In the book of Judges. It is not clear how to count them.

There are 12 men. Who are obviously judges. There is a woman too.

She is also called a prophetess. But she also judged Israel. So I don't know if her primary title.

Would be that of a judge. Or a prophetess who also judged. But she does do.

Apparently the same things a judge does. So there would be 13 judges. Including Deborah.

Now there is another leader. For three years during that time. Abimelech.

But he was a usurper. The spirit of God did not come upon him. He did not deliver his

people.

He actually was a usurper. Who made himself a tin horn monarch. Tyrant type of guy.

And he came to an evil. Harsh end. After three years.

So he was kind of an interruption. He was not legitimate. But he might be listed among the leaders.

Because he did lead for three years. As a usurper. So we could find 14.

There if we included Abimelech. And Deborah. Among the judges.

And Deborah should be included. Abimelech probably should not. We also have in the book of Samuel.

Some more judges. Before the period of the judges ended. We got Eli.

He was high priest and judge. And then we have Samuel. Who was a judge and a prophet.

And it was Samuel who. Shepherded the nation. In the transition from.

The judges to the transition. Of the monarchy. Samuel is considered to be.

The last of the judges. Although it does say. That he set his sons up to be judges.

But that didn't last long. Because the people didn't like his sons. And so they didn't really.

Hold position very long. Apparently when he set his sons up to be judges. That's when the people came and asked for a king.

So they never really ended up judging. And they weren't really. That would have been like a hereditary thing.

And that was not. What materialized. Samuel is the last of the judges.

Usually considered the first of the prophets. Although there are people called prophets before him. He was the first to organize.

An order of prophets. And to set up companies of prophets. In various towns.

It's called the sons of the prophets. And so there was. Forever after that Israel.

Well not forever but for a long time after that. Israel had a series of prophets. That spoke to them.

And Samuel was the one who is seen as the founder of that order. But he's not in this book. But his story.

Picks up at the end of this book. And he is also a judge. So there are.

Thirteen judges. Including Deborah in the book of judges. There's a bin like.

And then there's two more judges. Eli and Samuel. Found in first Samuel.

In the early chapters. Now the structure of this book. It's outline and so forth.

Is pretty easy to identify. There's an introductory section. And there's appendices at the end.

And there's a main body of the book. In the middle. The introductory section is.

Roughly chapters one through three. But. I'm sorry.

One through two. But includes the first. Six verses of chapter three.

That's how I read it anyway. Because in chapter three verse seven. You begin to have the story of Othniel.

And the cycles of the different judgeships. So. The first two chapters.

And the first six verses of chapter three. Are the introductions. I say introductions.

Because chapter one. Up through chapter two. Verse five.

Seem to give an introductory to the book. But it's just a preliminary introduction. There's another introduction.

The introduction starts over again. In chapter two verse six. Goes back to Joshua's time.

Chapter one verse one. Begins with the word now. After the death of Joshua.

So it starts talking about things. That happened after the death of Joshua. And I think those things go all the way.

Up through chapter two verse five. And then it's as if. You hit the restart button.

And say well I really want to introduce. This book differently than that. Let's start again.

Let's start with Joshua's. Passing again. So verse six of chapter two says.

When Joshua had dismissed the people. The children of Israel. Went each to his own inheritance.

To possess the land. So the people served. Lord all the days of Joshua.

That tells of his death again. As it did in chapter one verse one. So we have two introductions.

And this second one runs from chapter two. Verse six. To chapter three verse six.

And so those two introductions together. Provide the introductory. To the main body of the book.

Which is a series of six cycles. Of judgeships. Now I said there's like thirteen judges.

Why are there six cycles and not thirteen? Because many of the judges. We aren't told. That they rose up in the same manner.

Or in the same circumstances as others. There are six times. When it says.

Again Israel departed from the Lord. And that begins a new cycle. And that cycle goes.

Six times. The people depart from the Lord. They worship other gods.

God needs to dismiss them. So he sends in an oppressor. Who oppresses them for a certain number of years.

Then the people finally cry out to God. And he raises up a judge to deliver them. The judge leads them in the military.

Conquers of their enemies. Provides liberty for them. And then serves as their judge for the rest of his life.

And that's the end. That's a whole cycle. Then the next cycle is.

And again Israel departed from the Lord. And it gets to be like a broken record. You hear it again and again.

I mean that's the most obvious thing. About the book of Judges. Is how this pattern repeats.

And repeats and repeats. And there are six cycles like that. In the midst of that.

Usually in one cycle there's one main judge. Although in the case of Deborah and Barak. They were both judges simultaneously.

But usually it's one guy. Who rises up. As the high point of the cycle.

Of disobedience. And repentance. And deliverance.

Othniel is the first of them. Ehud is the second. But there's also a judge named Shamgar.

Who is mentioned briefly. In chapter 3. Verse 31. We know nothing about him except his

exploit.

Of killing 600 men of the Philistines. With an ox goad. But it says he also delivered Israel.

But in what way. Is unknown. It says that he.

Some people believe that he was. Just kind of acting on his own. Sort of clearing the highways.

Of brigands. That most people. Didn't want to travel the highways.

Because roaming Philistines and brigands. Would attack you and steal from you. And maybe even kill you.

So people were taking the byways. And not the highways. So he stood up there.

And took on the Philistines as they came. And killed 600 of them. Maybe not all at once.

My impression is that Samson killed. 1000 Philistines at one time. In one battle.

With a jawbone of an ox. We're not told if Shamgar did it all at one time. But he may have simply.

Encountered them as they came along. And killed them. So that he kind of cleaned up the neighborhood.

So that it was safe for Israel. To travel on those roads. That's how some commentators see it.

But he didn't. He wasn't part of a cycle. Like these others.

He just kind of rose up. And did some stuff. Then there's Deborah and Varick.

Varick is the third cycle. And then Gideon. And Gideon is the main judge of that cycle.

But also his son Abimelech. Is the one who usurped position. Made himself a king briefly.

Until he died. And then we have mentioned in chapter 10. Verses 1 through 5. Of Tola and Zeir.

Which we don't know much about. Just a few verses mention them being judges. But they don't arise in the cyclic way.

That the others do. And then we have Jephthah. And then Samson.

So there are six primary judgeships. And there are some lesser ones. Mentioned as corollaries to it.

These lesser ones. We don't know if they were contemporary. For example.

It is possible that Tola and Zeir. Were contemporary with Gideon. Not successors.

That is not coming afterwards. It's possible that Shamgar did what he did. Around the same time that Ehud was judging.

And that would explain why. We say that the judges. Were sometimes simultaneously.

Judging different parts of the country. You don't necessarily add all the numbers up. As a complete chronology.

After the main body of the book. Which is chapter 3 verse 7 through chapter 16. You have at the end.

Five chapters. Chapters 17 through 21. Which are.

Properly seen as appendices. Each one is a separate appendix. One is.

About Micah. And the tribe of Dan. This is in chapter 17 and 18.

And then the other one. Another independent story. Is of the Levite and his concubine.

And the trouble with the Benjamites. And the reduction of the tribe of Benjamin. To almost nothing.

As a result. That's in the final story. Chapters 19 through 21.

Now these two stories. Are disturbing. Actually there's other things.

Disturbing in the book. But these two. Especially the last one.

It seems like they say. The best for last. You know.

It does seem. That the writer of judges. Is trying to get across the idea.

That things were pretty bad. In Israel in those days. And these two stories.

Are examples. Of how religiously compromised. And how morally compromised.

The people were. The first story of Micah. And the tribe of Dan.

Probably is an illustration. Of how religiously compromised. They were.

And then the Levite. And his concubine. That story certainly shows.

How morally and ethically compromised. The nation was. And so that's the state of the nation.

In the time of the judges. Now. I might just identify some of the.

Main lessons of the book. That I would take from it. I don't know if you would have found others.

In your study of the book of judges. But there are some themes. And some.

Messages for us today. From the book. And some of them that I identified.

As I was preparing this yesterday. Are here on your notes. And one was that Israel had.

What we call a utilitarian attitude. Toward their God. Toward religion.

He's useful. He's a useful guy. To have around when you need him.

They did not have a love for Yahweh. With all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Or else they wouldn't have defected from him.

As soon as they could. They did continuously. Defect from God.

They did so as much as they felt. They could get away with. Their religion restricted them.

Only as much as they felt. They had to be restricted by it. And they'd get away with as much as they could.

Which meant that when the judge would die. They could get away with a lot. When he was alive.

They kind of behaved themselves. And they would reject God. As soon as the judge's body had cooled.

In the grave. And they'd just go off after other gods again. And they would ignore God.

Until God got their attention again. By bringing an oppressor in. That made life miserable for them.

Over a period of years usually. And finally someone in the country got the idea. You know we really ought to.

Maybe turn to God. And so people would start to cry out to God. Because they needed him.

And God would come to their aid. What's interesting is that God was willing to cooperate with this. I mean God is patient.

God is loving. And again and again. They keep rejecting him.

But it's like Jesus said. If your brother sins against you seven times in one day. And seven times comes to repent.

You should forgive him. I mean that's quite a chronic pattern. If he sins against you seven times in one day.

Each time repenting. Serially. And yet he says on that seventh time.

And eighth time. You're still forgiven. So even though there's a pattern of.

Not appreciating the last time you were forgiven. Not appreciating the last time God came to rescue you. God takes a new.

A new instance of repentance at face value. Even though he might say. Listen I know where this is going.

You know. I've seen this pattern before. But he just.

And we're supposed to be that way. The way we forgive other people. Even if the guy has sinned against you six times earlier.

Today. And repent each time. If he does it again and repents.

Well forgive him again. Seems rather extreme. Some might even say that Jesus is using a hyperbole there.

Because it's I mean. It's just really extreme to try to forgive somebody. After they've sinned in one day against you that many times.

But we see God. Having that same. Attitude.

He forgives them. But the interesting thing instructive to us. Is that there is always that danger.

Of people to take God as something useful. To themselves. When they need him.

And not to serve him for the right reason. We serve God. We should serve God because we love him.

Because we trust him. Because we have gratitude toward him. But.

Instead people. Who put themselves at the center of their lives. And their own interests at the center.

They'll just see God as yet another thing to use. When it's handy. When he's needed.

You see our natural state from birth. Is to put ourselves at the center. We use our parents.

We use our siblings. We use every opportunity we can. To make ourselves pleased.

To make ourselves happy. That's what our orientation is. As we grow older.

Even if we don't become Christians. We usually become a little wiser. That we can't just exploit people completely.

And still be popular. So we learn to be popular by being more selfless. In certain situations.

Making certain sacrifices. But still everything is calculated. To put us in a position we want to be in.

And to bring ultimate. You know. Our own plans about it.

Our own pleasure. And then when people come to God. They sometimes see him as someone that can actually.

Enhance their lives even more. You know. It's nice to have a big brother out there.

Who can thump your enemies when they give you trouble. And a father figure who can. You know.

Provide for you. So people. They come to God.

And they're still thinking about themselves. Not him. It's just they love themselves.

But they find God. Someone they can use. And that's a utilitarian approach to God.

But true conversion is when you. Take your own interest. Out of the center of your concern.

And put those as subordinate. To God's concerns. Because you love him.

You put him first. You make his concerns your real concerns. You die to yourself.

You deny yourself and take up your cross. That's what becoming a Christian involves. And that means that.

You're just not using God. He's not just someone you turn to. When you need him.

But your whole life is concerned about bringing him pleasure. Rather than you. And he's not seen as someone who is there to please you.

But you're there to please him. Israel clearly did not have that attitude. So they called on God.

And served him when it was convenient and necessary. And when it would serve their

interest. But the fact that they didn't continue to do so.

As soon as they were comfortable again. Means that they never really cared about God. Some of them may have.

But the nation as a whole. Apparently lacked that. And that becomes a pattern not only in the book of Judges.

We see it throughout the remainder of their history. In the period of the kings. Which followed the period of the judges.

And that's why they eventually. The northern kingdom had to be wiped out permanently. The southern kingdom had to be taken into captivity.

For 70 years. Because God had to teach them to. To put God first.

So that's one lesson. We see in the book of Judges. Very clearly in these people.

Another is that God preferred. To allow people to do what was right. In their own eyes.

Rather than to impose a monarchical authority. Now how this applies. To the Christian life.

Would apparently mean. That we have to give people the liberty. To be what they're going to be.

That doesn't mean what they're going to be is okay. But it means that we're not in a position. To rule over them and make them.

You know. Jump. When we tell them to jump.

Or conform to what we impose upon them. We can tell them what's right. And we should.

And we can. Urge them to do what's right. But we cannot make people behave.

Human beings cannot make people. Other human beings. Really righteous.

A king can make people conform. By laws and by disciplines. And by you know.

Threats. But no one can make somebody righteous. That's something that has to be from the heart.

And God seems to prefer. A system of religion. Which is not law.

But is grace. Where people who are of. Who do have the right heart toward him.

Who do serve him for the right reasons. Can do so with liberty. Where the spirit of the Lord is.

There's liberty. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3. 17. And so.

Where law is. There's no liberty. Where the spirit of the Lord is.

There is liberty. The spirit of the Lord is the way that God governs his people. Since the coming of Christ.

The law was the way he governed them before. But by not having a monarchy. During this time.

It sort of illustrated the principle. That everyone does answer to God alone. And not to some central authority.

And God apparently preferred that. As we said earlier. Even though there was the risk.

That people would make the wrong choices. And they often did. He still preferred the system.

That they had the right to make their choices. Another lesson is that God will discipline. His own children when they need it.

There was no king in Israel. Who could bring them back under the law. If God had appointed a king.

He could have done that. The problem is. Once there were kings later on.

They very seldom did bring people back under the law. Josiah tried to. Hezekiah did.

But most of the kings actually led people astray. But we shouldn't worry. That people have liberty.

Because God can take charge of the situation. If he wants to. We might say.

If there is no powerful leader of the church. Who is going to keep the church from going wild. I guess God will have to do that.

You might say. But God hasn't prevented that. Obviously people in the church do sin.

Well the church does need to have discipline. The whole church as a whole. Like in Israel.

They had local elders. They had local leaders in the cities. To no doubt.

Keep people from being criminals. But there was nobody there. To make them pious.

There was no one there to make them true worshipers. Because no one can do that. To another person.

That is something that has to come from the heart. And God. Is the one who is the

shepherd of our souls.

He is the one. Who is the one who can. Shepherd our hearts.

And if our hearts are wrong. He knows how to discipline and so forth. And he disciplined Israel.

When they went the wrong way. But he didn't do so by giving them a king. And he didn't choose to do that.

Another lesson that we see in the book. Is that God works through men. Upon whom the spirit rests.

And through the spirit's gifting. There are I think. If I'm not mistaken.

Four of the judges that specifically says. The spirit of the Lord came upon them. And.

Like Samson's feats. Were done when the spirit of God came upon him. It says the spirit of the Lord.

Used to move upon him. At a certain time. And when the lion attacked him.

It says the spirit of the Lord came upon him. And he killed the lion with his bare hands. We sometimes think of Samson.

As a man of great physique. You know like a. Mr. Universe kind of a body. But we don't know that he really had.

An unusually strong body. His supernatural strength was just that. Supernatural.

It was not natural. He could have had an ordinary. Unimpressive physique.

But when the spirit of God came upon him. He did things that could not otherwise be done. Demons can give people that kind of strength too.

Think of the man of the tombs who broke chains. We're not told that he was super muscular. It wasn't his muscles that broke the chains.

It was the demon. Likewise someone who is filled with the spirit of God. If God gives them that kind of strength.

And we don't know of many cases. Where that's been the particular manifestation of the spirit. But that was a gift of the spirit.

That God gave to Samson. Well. Look at him you couldn't tell.

Remember the Philistines were puzzled. Where is he getting this strength? They had to hire. Delilah.

To try to figure out what the secret was. Now if the guy looked like. The incredible Hulk.

No one would be guessing. No one would be saying. What's the mystery here? How can he be so strong? Just look at the guy.

It's obvious. In all likelihood he had a much more ordinary appearance. And not necessarily huge and impressive muscles.

As we might picture him. It's not like Hercules. But he's a man.

Upon whom the spirit of God comes. And he does supernatural things. And his feats of strength were supernatural.

It doesn't matter how strong you are. You can't pull down the pillars of a building. With your hand.

You know. This was God's strength. It was not by might.

Nor by power. But by God's spirit. That these people delivered.

And so it is that God. Wishes to work. He doesn't wish to work in the church.

Through a hereditary hierarchy. Of popes and bishops. And so forth.

And people who are appointed to positions. Through some kind of a mechanism. Of succession.

But rather he wants to raise up. When he wants to and where he wants to. Those people who he puts his spirit upon.

And gives them the gifts that are necessary. For the leadership of the church. In their generation.

Then they die. And then maybe no one is there. For a while like that.

And he'll raise someone else up like that. So the way that God. Intended to lead his people.

Was through. Individuals upon whom the spirit came. We call them charismatic.

Although we. Unfortunately when we think of charismatic. We think of a particular.

Style of worship or church today. The charismatic movement or something. But the word charismatic.

Comes from the word charis. Which is grace. And charisma.

The longer word is gift of grace. It's the word that Paul used in the New Testament. For

the gifts of the spirit.

He called them charismata. And so when you talk about a person. Who's charismatic it means they're gifted.

And even in the world. They speak about someone being a charismatic. Leader or charismatic.

Speaker. They're not talking about gifts of the Holy Spirit. They're just talking he's gifted.

He's got something about him that. That grabs people in ways that they. Can't really explain.

It's just a gift. Well in the church. It's a gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And so that's a charisma. These men had. And women.

And judges had spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit came upon them. And they were charismatic.

Thus we call them charismatic leaders. But the other lesson we have. The final lesson I want to bring out.

In this is that charismatic men. Although they're gifted. Are often flawed.

Personally. And Samson is a really good example of that. And there have been many examples of that.

It's confusing in fact. If we lived in Samson's day. We'd be confused.

Why is God using this man when he's. Immoral. And he's not keeping the terms of his Nazarite vow.

And he's just. Seems to be living a reckless. Ungodly life.

And yet the Spirit of God comes upon him. I cannot tell you why that is. Certainly God prefers to.

Work through godly people. When the Bible says that. Elders should be appointed in church.

The qualifications have to do with their personal godliness. And character and good reputation and so forth. Obviously it's God's desire.

That godly. Righteous people. Lead the church.

And presumably. He would prefer that. People not only have charisma.

But also have character. That they be not only gifted in the Spirit. But have the fruit of the Spirit.

That they be spiritual people. But see what this tells. Is that a person might be.

Have a charisma without being a spiritual person. Samson was not spiritual. He was carnal.

But God's Spirit came upon him in a gift of power. To use him. And why God does this we're never told.

And it is perplexing. Because I know that even. People known to me.

Personally known to me. Have had amazing spiritual gifts. Sometimes they've been able to heal the sick.

Sometimes they've been able to preach the gospel. With such power that. It was almost impossible for sinners to resist.

You know. Responding. They're just amazing gifts that people have had.

And yet. Some of these people. They just really never became sanctified.

I remember speaking about one person. That a mutual friend and I. Both knew. That third guy.

A very visible Christian leader at the time. In the Jesus movement. And I remember saying.

That person is an enigma to me. Because I've never seen anyone. Who has the power of the Spirit on so much.

And yet never gets sanctified. Never really grows holier. It's not the way it should be.

But you might think that. Since it's not the way it should be. That God could just refrain.

From putting his Spirit on someone who's not worthy. And maybe the fact that. He does that once in a while.

Is simply a way of reminding us. That the gifts of the Spirit are of grace. His desire.

And his requirement. Of people who have the Spirit. Is that they live a spiritual life.

But if they don't. That doesn't necessarily mean. That he doesn't use them.

And so we find that these men. Well all the men in the Bible really. Even the apostles.

Were spiritually gifted. But had flaws. Very few had the flaws that Samson had.

But we see that it was a time. Of you know. Relatively spiritual darkness.

And moral darkness in the nation. And some of the leaders seem to be. Product of their times in that respect.

And yet. God would use them. God can give gifts to people who don't.

Qualify we could say. I mean he even gave. His Spirit at times briefly.

To people like King Saul. When he was persecuting David. Or Balaam or something like that.

And Jesus said many will say to me that day. Lord, Lord we prophesied in your name. And cast out demons in your name.

And did many mighty works in your name. And I will say I never knew you. People who weren't even saved.

That apparently powerful. Gifts were manifest through them. But of course Jesus said.

Not in that passage. He said not everyone who says to me. Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.

But he that does the will of my Father in heaven. So behaving spiritually is required. But if one doesn't.

That doesn't mean that God cannot give them. Even if they're not saved. God can put a gift upon them.

God can do whatever he wants to. And sometimes we just don't know why. He does the choices he makes.

But that's what he has done. In some of these cases. In the book of Judges.

Alright we'll take a break. And then we'll get into the first chapter. Thank you for watching.