

Conquering the Land (1400 – 1100 BCE)

Apostasy and the Judges

Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar

Readings: *Judges 2:7, 10-23; 3:1-31*

Reflections:

- Here in Judges we will see how bad it gets. We will see this replicated with the story of the Kings as well. The people are in a continual cycle of rejecting God, being punished, repenting for a short time, and then rejecting God again. It shows generation after generation that the law does not bring internal or lasting heart change.
- Here are a few key verses to understanding Judges: “The people served the Lord through the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals....Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of the raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshipped them.” This is a simple summary of Judges.
- The role of the judge was like a judge today. They would make righteous decisions for disputes. There were priests who represented the people to God and God to the people. Judges made decisions based on the law. Without an apostolic leader like a Moses or a Joshua over the whole nation, these series of judges provide crisis leadership.
- This is all setting the stage for the nation wanting a king which in turn will only show yet again that these human structures simply don’t work to change the human heart.
- Interesting to see how it is so clear that God was using Israel’s enemies to reveal their true heart conditions. Like Satan testing Jesus, enemies can reveal our heart of hearts.
- Inter-marriage becomes one of the biggest problems in Israel. But during this time two inter-marriages are clearly led by God. Sampson’s marriage as well as Ruth and Boaz. One was for judgment and the other was for the purpose to show God’s grace even in the midst of terrible circumstances. We can’t judge by appearances or by a blind application of the law. God always bases this gracious response on people’s hearts. Ruth

though a Gentile had a heart of faith. She was acceptable to God and blessed as someone through whom the Messiah would come.

- The Spirit in this case empowers these judges to bring God's judgment through war. Again, everything is physical and external. In the Jesus movement the Spirit comes to empower God's people to bring mercy through living lives of peace and reconciliation.
- The whole story of Ehud and Elgon is the first of many stories that are meant to make the reader sick. These are written to shock and disturb. The story of the Judges is all about "how bad can it get?" This story is sick, no doubt. Judges was not written for Sunday school children but maybe for Junior Highs who like gross things.
- Peace lasts eighty years. Note, once again a whole generation comes and goes but the transfer of true faith in God fails. The external righteousness enforced by a military leader cannot last.