

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

the PROMISED *land*

GOD THE JUDGE

The Judges Cycle

Today, we turn our study to the historical book of Judges that covers approximately 300 chaotic years between Joshua's death and the beginning of a centralized government under King Saul. The judges for whom the book is named were actually 12 military leaders or deliverers whom God raised up to deliver His people from their enemies. We will specifically study Deborah, Gideon, and Samson in the weeks to come. The story of Ruth also occurred during the time frame of the Judges and I have read that Ruth was originally included in the book.

The book of Joshua tells of a swift and thorough conquest of enemy armies and cities, while the book of Judges suggests lengthy and drawn out conquests. When the 12 tribes of Israel first entered the Promised Land, they united as one army to crush the inhabitants until they were too weak to retaliate. Then, after the land was divided among the 12 tribes, each tribe became responsible to finish driving out the remaining enemy from its own territory. Judges tells of their disobedience in removing the pagan people who occupied the land God promised to them.

Under Joshua, they started out strong, but soon most were sidetracked by fear, weariness, lack of discipline, or pursuit of their own interests. As a result, their faith began to fade away, and *the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes*. In order for our faith to survive, it must be practiced day by day. It must penetrate every aspect of our lives. Beware of starting out strong and then getting sidetracked from your real purpose—loving God and living for Him. The greatest danger of our generation is to hear about Christ, His death, burial, resurrection, and miracles and disregard them!

Do you recognize these headlines?



POWERFUL GOVERNMENT LEADER
CAUGHT IN "LOVE NEST"
 GANG RAPE LEADS TO VICTIM'S DEATH
AND DISMEMBERMENT
 GIRLS AT PARTY KIDNAPPED AND FORCED
TO MARRY STRANGERS

The above headlines were not taken from today but from events found in the book of Judges. “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” In the closing chapters of Joshua, we saw a nation resting from war and enjoying the riches God had given them. **Judges 2:7 (ESV)**⁷ *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. However, Judges picks up the Israelites' story in the generations who followed Joshua and relates how Israel suffered from invasion, slavery, poverty, and civil war. What happened?

Read Judges 2:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ *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 that he had done for Israel.*

One of two things happened: either the older generation failed to instruct their children and grandchildren in the ways of the LORD, or, if they had faithfully taught them, then the new generation refused to submit to God's ways. Throughout the book of Judges we see an inevitable series of sin cycles – sin – judgment – cries for help – and deliverance.

Warren Wiersbe makes a very interesting point regarding the period of the Judges and the time following when he says, “**Judges** is the book of “no king,” **1 Samuel** is the book of “man's king” (Saul), and **2 Samuel** is the book of “God's king” (David). The world today is living in the Book of Judges because there is no king in Israel. When presented with their rightful King, the Jews said, “We have no king but Caesar.” Next on the agenda is the appearance of “man's king” (Antichrist) who will usher in world control and chaos. Then “God's King” Jesus will appear, defeat His enemies, and establish His righteous kingdom.” I mentioned that the book of Ruth occurred during the time of the Judges. God's people are living in the Book of Ruth, sharing in the harvest and waiting for the wedding when Jesus the Bridegroom will return for His Bride the Church).

God's people did evil by worshiping idols.

Read Judges 2:11-13 (ESV) ¹¹ *And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.* ¹² *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 peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.* ¹³ *They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.*

Baal was the name of the supreme god worshiped in ancient Canaan and Phoenicia. The practice of Baal worship infiltrated Jewish religious life during the time of the Judges. The word baal means lord. In general, Baal was a fertility god who was believed to allow the earth to produce crops and people to produce children. Different regions worshiped Baal in different ways, and Baal proved to be a highly adaptable god. Various communities emphasized one or another of his attributes and developed special “denominations” of Baalism.

Ashtaroth is the plural form of the pagan goddess, Ashtoreth. She was considered to be a companion of the male god Baal. The Ashtaroth were worshiped by other peoples under such names as Astarte (Phoenicians), Inanna (Sumerians), Ishtar (Babylonians), Aphrodite (Greeks), and Venus (Romans). All these were goddesses of sensual love and fertility.

The principal tenets of Baalism were child sacrifice, sexual immorality (both heterosexual and homosexual) and pantheism (reverence of creation over the Creator). Baal worship was rooted in sensuality and involved ritualistic prostitution in their temples. At times, appeasing Baal required human sacrifice, usually the firstborn

of the one making the sacrifice. The struggle against these sins were an ongoing problem in the lives of the people. Centuries later, the prophet Jeremiah would speak about the sins of Baalism.

Read Jeremiah 19:4-5 (ESV) ⁴ *Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents,* ⁵ *and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind.*

We may think that we are beyond such heinous sins but in reality Baal worship is still prevalent in America today. It is disguised under the banners of liberal thinking and freedom of choice. While its macabre rituals of throwing babies into the flames and sex orgies inside temples may have changed, the sins remain the same. The worship of “fertility” has been replaced with the worship of pro-choice. Child sacrifices through burnt offering have been updated to abortion. The ritualistic celebration of both heterosexual and homosexual immorality now fall under the heading of equal rights. And yes, Pantheists on Facebook are wishing people Happy Earth Day – not believing in the God who created heaven and earth. It all goes back to the same human attitude described in **Judges 21:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

God punished His people by giving them over to the enemies.

Read Judges 2:14-15 (ESV) ¹⁴ *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 that they could no longer withstand their enemies.* ¹⁵ *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.*

Time after time, the Israelites found themselves in trouble with God. Why? Because of their disobedience. The LORD had promised what would happen if His people turned from Him.

Read Leviticus 26:17 (ESV) ¹⁷ *I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you*

Read Deuteronomy 28:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.*

At Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, Joshua had the people read the blessings and the cursings that the LORD had promised. When the people of God, went against Him, Jehovah went against them. But when the people cried out to Him, God saved His people through a chosen leader.

Read Judges 2:16-19 (ESV) ¹⁶ *Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.* ¹⁷ *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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.

God delivered His people by raising up judges, who would defeat the enemy and set Israel free. They lived for approximately three centuries in a vicious cycle of disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance. God was angry when they sinned and yet He saved them time after time. **Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)**²² *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

Our sin cycles are similar. Things are good – we forget Him – things are bad – we rush back to Him. The ‘best life’ is the life that stays in sync with the Savior on a daily basis.

When times are bad, we often wonder is God is punishing me for my sin?

In order to answer this question, we need to distinguish between punishment and discipline. For believers in Jesus, all our sin—past, present, and future—has already been punished on the cross. As Christians, we will never be punished for our sin. That was done once for all at Calvary. **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Because of the sacrifice of Christ, God sees only the righteousness of His Son when He looks at us. Our sin has been nailed to the cross with Jesus, and we will never be punished for it. HOWEVER, if you have not accepted Christ’s sacrifice, you will be punished for your sins. You will go into eternity lost and without a Savior.

As followers of Christ, we need to realize that the LORD’s covering is not a shield to allow us to live as please. We are to live to please our Savior. When we live in disobedience, we should expect discipline.

If we continue to act in sinful unrepentant ways, the LORD will bring His divine discipline to us. If He did not, He would not be a loving and concerned Father. **Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**⁶ *For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.* If God doesn't discipline you, it means you are illegitimate and are not really His child.

Human nature is no different now than in the time of the Judges. It may not be that we are caught in a particular sin cycle like they were— we may just be caught up in the cares of this world. Things are good and we forget our Father. Things go bad for us and we go back to our Father in tears.

The way to please the heart of our Father is that our tears come from a genuine heart of repentance. This repentant heart not only applies to individuals but to our nation. **2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)**¹⁴ *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*