

Potomac Crossing Ward, Ashburn Stake
Gospel Doctrine, Old Testament
Lesson 19: Judges
May 25, 2014

Let's do a free-association on the book of Judges. What words would you use to describe the book of Judges? The words I would come up with are "Yuck" and "Eeew".

The book of Judges really is awful. All of the characters are deeply flawed. Even the judges, which are saving Israel from their enemies are far from perfect.

This book is the scandal sheet of the Hebrew Bible. If it bleeds, it leads.

What is happening in this book? Historical & Theological Context

Joshua 24:

14 Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

16 And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods;

[...]

22 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

23 Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.

24 And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Right, yeah, except they didn't do that.

Ch. 1: Some of the tribes start to drive out the locals, but as the chapter goes on the rest fail to drive the other nations out, but put them to tribute instead.

Ch. 2: Lord chastises them, they worship idols.

The overarching context here is Lev. 26 and Deut 28. If Israel does what the Lord says, then they prosper. If they don't, then they are punished and go into captivity.

The historical content of this text is very likely deliberately selective. The author's intent is not to present an accurate history, but to make theological points from Israel's history. As such, the presentation is overwhelmingly negative and exceptionally unpleasant.

The Apostasy Cycle

Yes, the apostasy cycle is here in the text, but, really, it is downplayed. You don't get any good characters here. The time of peace is mentioned briefly as to how long it was and there is no detail at all about how good things were or the leaders either. All of the time and effort in this text is spent on the negative examples, and it great and gory detail.

Didactic Nature of the Text

Note editorial comments can be found throughout the text.

2:10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim:

2:12 And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger.

2:13 And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

2:14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

Side note on Ba'al and Asherah...these are generic names. You have to dig deeper to figure out what culture worshiped which deity in what form at what time. You can generalize some things, but a lot of details are lost to time.

This is the purpose of the book:

2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim:

3:7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgat the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

3:12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord

strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

4:1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead.

6:1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not him.

13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

19:1 And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah.

21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

The argument is the lack of God-fearing, civil society resulted in people being horrible. They were rebellious against the Lord and the result was a lawless society.

Purpose of the text:

1) Warning to Israel, don't forsake the covenant, don't forget the Lord, keep the Law of Moses, don't every man do as he wishes, live in a polite society with laws and social order

2) Warning to the king of Israel, maintain order; warning to Israel over the necessity of a king, despite all of the flaws of monarchy

3) Implicit in this message is the Lord's patience, the persistence of the covenant with Abraham, and the Lord's willingness to forgive and work with deeply

flawed people

The collected history as represented in the text was very likely written well after the fact, given the editorial comments and didactic nature of the text, during a time when Israel did have kings and society was more polite.

What do we get from this text? What is the modern value of such a thing?

1) Beware intermingling your values with those around you, avoid the “idols” of our times

2) The Lord really will be patient with you, look at who He has worked with in the past, have you personally done anything rivaling what these people have done? No, then, rejoice, and be glad, the Lord will be happy to work with you.

The Judges, the Leaders

Ehud the assassin, ch. 3

Deborah* and Jael, not a righteous man to be found in Israel, a real poke in the eye to the male chauvenists, ch. 4-5

Gideon*, argumentative, sign seeker, but ultimately comes around, ch. 6-8

Abimelech murders his brothers, gets scull cracked by a woman, ch. 9

Jephthah and his accidental virgin daughter child sacrifice, and then the Gileadites and Ephramites kill each other, just horrid, ch.11-12

Samson*, genuinely awful his entire life, only redeems himself in death, ch. 13-16

Micah and the Levite, Danites steal a Levite and his idols and go on slaughtering the Zidonians, ch. 17-18

Levite’s concubine and tribe of Benjamin, truly vile, ch. 19-21

*The lesson manual suggests the teacher forward these three as better examples. But, really, you have to overlook a lot of serious character flaws in Gideon and Samson to get to anything good. Deborah, we really don’t know much about her at all, she is largely a two dimensional character in the text.

Next week: Ruth, and 1 Samuel 1. The complete opposite of the current text, thank heavens.