



# Bible Readers Club

Covenant Presbyterian Church

Week

# 13

## Judges 1-21

**D**ear Friends, What happens when God's people do not fulfill their God-appointed-and-empowered mission? When they get lazy and determine that "well enough is well enough?" When they compromise their faith and obedience to God in favor of the comfort and attractions of local customs and beliefs? The Book of Judges gives us the shocking truth.

Judges is one of my favorite Books in the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament. I see it as a very old story that speaks with power to our world and culture today for it tells of the "Cycle of Disobedience" that seems to be a natural part of all people's relationship to God. It is a sad tale of people who are habitually infatuated with the fatal idea that they can live well without knowing, hearing or obeying their God. The results are devastating.

The cycle goes like this... 1. The people turn away from God, serving Canaanite deities... 2. God, in His righteous anger, raises up enemies from among the Canaanites to threaten and oppress His wayward people... 3. The people cry out to God for help... 4. God rescues them through the heroic leadership of a "judge-deliverer"... 5. Peace is restored and there is "rest in the land" for a period of time (and so the people become complacent and again turn away from their God and the cycle repeats!).

We see this cycle repeat through the adventures of twelve judges (the number seems to be intentional, calling to mind the twelve tribes of Israel). Othniel is the first pattern-setting judge, and he is followed by five "major" (Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson) and six "minor" (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon) judges. The structure of the book points us to the central narratives. Two "loner judges" (Ehud and Samson) provide an outer frame within which two "outcast judges" (Deborah and Jephthah) surround the central figure of Gideon. He is the "quintessential judge" and is paired with his son Abimelech whose name means "father of the king" and who is the "anti-judge." Gideon, chosen by God to be His instrument of deliverance from the Midianites, declines the people's request that he rule over them as king saying: "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you" (8:23). However, his son Abimelech, not chosen by God at all, attempts to seize power and make himself king by murdering his brothers and attacking

towns and ends up having a rock dropped on his head by an unnamed woman (chapter 9).

As the cycle of disobedience repeats the circumstances go from bad to worse until the last few chapters tell of God's people making their own places of worship and buying and fighting over their man-made priests (chapters 17 & 18) and of a brutal civil war within Israel brought on by the most detestable of crimes (chapters 19-21).

One of the purposes the Book of Judges serves is to set up the next period in Israel's history, that of the Monarchy. Judges ends with these chilling words: *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.* (21:25). Though Israel should need no king buy Yahweh God Himself, the social and religious and moral chaos this verse summarizes threatens its existence, and so God will allow His people to have a king like the other nations. The story of this grand and destined-to-fail experiment begins in the ministry of the Prophet Samuel and through the books bearing his name.

May our reading of these events from more than 3000 years ago shed light on our life and times here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

- Pastor Jay

### **Notes**