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Message 1 of 12

**Introduction: Without Directions, People Perish  
*Judges 1:1–3:6***

**Timeline**: After the death of Joshua, Moses’s assistant (1:1) and before the first king of Israel, Saul (21:25), a total of 300 years; ca. 1390–1090 BC (i.e., nearly 3,106 — 3,406 years ago)

*Their key problem was that they didn’t destroy the enemies near them. This might sound strange in our day where we don’t do such a thing, but this was over 3000 years ago where God had different expectations than today.*

**Theme**: “In those days there was no king in Israel; each person did what was right in his/her own eyes” (21:25); ironically, God was their king (8:23) but they just didn’t acknowledge Him as their king or live accordingly (see 7:18–20). There is even a vivid picture in Judges 9:7–15.

*This relative standard resulted from not acknowledging anyone as king, although Gideon named his 71st son Abimelech, meaning “may father is king”!*

**Main Characters**: The tribes of Judah (1:1—3:6), Othniel (3:7–11), Ehud (3:12–31), Deborah-Barak-Jael (4:1—5:31), Gideon-Abimelech (6:1—9:57), Tola (10:1–2), Jair (10:3–5), Jephthah (10:6—12:7), Ibzan (12:8–10), Elon (12:11–12), Abdon (12:13–15), Samson (13:1—16:31), Micah and the tribe of Dan (17:1–18:31), and the tribes of Benjamin and Israel (19:1—21:22).

*The whole book centers on various people, some of them individuals and others entire tribes.*

**Cycles**: The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord and served other gods, God handed them over to an enemy who oppressed them for x-number of years, the Israelites cried out to God, God raised a “warrior” (Judge) who delivered them from the oppressor(s), and there was peace for x-number of years. But then the cycle continued: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served other gods, God handed them over to an enemy, etc. (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).

*We do the same today in our cycles of addressing sin. Where are you today in your sin cycle?*

**Judges?** The title “Judges” invokes the image of a judge listening to prosecutors, defendants, and decreeing a judgment. Only one person functioned in that role in the book of Judges: Deborah (“She held court under the Palm of Deborah . . . the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided” 4:5). The rest of the people mentioned were “warriors” who used various tools to kill their enemies: Jael used a tent-hammer, Ehud used an 18-inch left-handed knife, Shamgar used an oxgoad (a plowing instrument), Samson used a fresh jawbone of a donkey, etc.

**Today’s Lesson (1:1—3:6)**:“Judah shall go first; See, I have placed the land in his hand” (1:2)

*The book of Joshua shows an incomplete conquest of the land when Joshua was age 85, so he divided the land and commanded each tribe to conquer their own surrounding area themselves.*

Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the edge of Jordan. Joshua led them into the Promised Land and helped five tribes to possess the land. He assigned the other seven territories before he died. So, the people asked the Lord who was to lead them into battle to take possessions of the territories that Joshua assigned them, i.e., to defeat the enemies within the land. The Lord answered: “Judah shall go first; behold, I have placed the land in his hand.” The tribe of Judah followed God’s instruction and went against Adoni-Bezek. “The Lord was with the people of Judah” (1:19). But such a strong beginning soon followed spiritual lethargy (1:21; 1:27–36).

*However, the people were not faithful on the whole to drive out the pagan peoples in their areas.*

The writer of Judges, then, summarized the need for them to take possession of the land: (a) by pointing to the history (2:1–15), and (b) giving a challenge to move forward (2:16—3:6).

**Lesson for us**: Often we begin our spiritual journey with vigor, vitality, and enthusiasm. But then life’s struggles and busyness take over. The Book of Judges and the recorded events are reminders/warnings that when the Lord isn’t king over our lives, we resemble those around us.

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