

Judges 1A

- The Lord is Captain of His people
 - He leads us in a variety of ways and through a myriad of circumstances
 - Sometimes He leads in dramatic ways, as a pillar of fire in the desert
 - Sometimes, He leads through a simple instruction like “Go to a place I will show you”
 - Today He leads us by His Word and by His Spirit living in each of us
 - And in a day to come, the Lord returns to lead His people in person in His kingdom on earth
 - But there is one common denominator in every case: the Lord elevates men to participate with Him in leading His people
 - The patriarchs were called to lead families and tribes
 - Moses and Joshua were called to lead the nation
 - Elders are called to lead the church
 - And the Church will be called to lead the nations during the Kingdom
 - All these leaders operate under the authority of the Lord, of course
 - Nevertheless, they share in the ruling
- Today, we begin a new study of God leading His people, the nation of Israel, in an important period of their history through a collection of people
 - The book of Judges covers a period of about 300 years in Israel’s history
 - The book moves us away from the period of Moses and Joshua, when Israel was moving out of Egypt and into the Promised Land
 - And the book of Judges (along with Ruth) looks forward to the arrival of Israel’s kings
 - In that way, Judges serves as a transition book

- It is an epilogue to the times of Israel's desert wanderings and conquest of Canaan
- And it's prologue to the period of Jewish monarchy
- The book is called Judges, but the title is a bit of a misnomer, since it's really a book about military leaders, called captains
 - The book opens with Joshua dying
 - Joshua was the military leader the Lord appointed to succeed Moses after Moses died
 - Joshua brought Israel into the Promised Land and led the nation for 35 years through a series of military campaigns against the Canaanites
 - In that time, the tribes established a strong presence in the land,
 - But at the time of Joshua's death, Israel had not yet conquered it entirely
 - When Joshua dies, the Lord does not appoint a successor
 - Instead, the Lord expected each tribe to move into its appointed territory and complete the work of taking the land as directed
 - But this doesn't mean the Lord intended for His people to operate without any leadership
 - On the contrary, the Lord expected the patriarchal leaders of each tribe to rule over their respective tribe
 - And of course, the people of Israel were to follow the Lord according to the Law given to Moses
 - The priests would operate the temple and instruct the people
 - The elders of each tribe would adjudicate over the people
 - And fathers would lead their households
- On occasion, the tribes would encounter a strong enemy in the land, one they needed to defeat, requiring the appointment of special leadership for a time
 - In these situations, the Lord would raise up regional captains of the people

- These leaders would possess the anointing and charisma to unite a tribe or multiple tribes in a campaign to defeat the enemy
- This office of leadership, which our Bible calls a judge, is not entirely new
 - In Deuteronomy, Moses commanded that judges be appointed in every town to settle civil disputes
 - But the role of judge after Joshua was expanded
- The judges in the time following Joshua were men and women appointed to ensure Israel accomplished its duty of taking the land
 - Sometimes, these leaders assumed military authority
 - Other time, they addressed rising apostasy
 - Each judge ruled for a time and over a certain number within Israel
 - They were God's agents during a time when no single person was responsible for leading the entire nation
- So the book traces what happened in Israel when God's people were given a law and in their land with a responsibility to follow the Lord
 - How did that work out?
 - Do God's people possess the ability in themselves to follow the Lord with their whole heart?
 - Are God's promises fulfilled by the strength of His people?
 - Or will they come another way?
- The author of this book was most likely the prophet Samuel, who wrote while Saul was king of Israel
 - Samuel didn't author the book of Judges to provide a complete history of Israel's first three centuries in the land
 - Instead, he wrote a selective record focused on certain events and people
 - He wanted to explain the later arrival of kings in Israel, including David's ascending over Saul

- When Samuel wrote this book, he knew David was anointed to be the next king
- So he wrote to explain Israel's circumstances in terms of God's prophetic purposes
- In fact, the Jews placed the book of Judges among the prophets in their Bible, not as among the historical books
- Since Samuel wrote Judges to explain history, we need to do a little historical homework of our own
 - We need to understand what comes immediately before and after the 300-year period of Judges
 - Let's start at the end, looking briefly at how the book of Judges ends

Judg. 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

- You've probably heard this ominous ending of the book of Judges before
 - Samuel says "in those days there was no king"
 - Samuel reminds his readers that Israel didn't always have a king
 - In fact, the nation existed for over 350 years in the wilderness and later in the land with no king at all
 - In place of a king, the nation was led by various men, including tribal elders, prophets, and captains of the army
 - Above all the people were ruled by God Himself, leading and instructing His people in the desert and in the land
 - Then Samuel tells us all was not well with the people
 - Increasingly, in the years from Moses until the death of Joshua, the people did what was right in their own eyes
 - Samuel's phrase is intentionally ironic
 - The Hebrew word translated right is *yashar*, which literally means acting in an upright manner, a righteous manner
- Samuel reports that each Israelite did what was upright...but in their own eyes

- This qualification serves to contradict the idea of doing what's right, thus the irony
 - The phrase "in their own eyes" is a euphemism meaning acting according to one's own interests or standards
 - It means looking out for #1, doing whatever feels good
 - For example, if I were a Jew living in those days doing what was right in my own eyes concerning the Sabbath, then when I preferred to observe a Sabbath, I observed a Sabbath
 - But when I preferred not to observe the Sabbath, I didn't
 - I did what I judged was right to do
- We can immediately see the problem with this situation, can't we?
 - In matters of righteousness, there can be only one right way: God's way
 - As Jesus said to the young, rich ruler:

Luke 18:19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

- By our sinful nature, when we do as we choose, we sin
- Only God has a good nature, so only God does good
- That's why we need God's righteousness assigned to us by faith
- So if everyone in Israel is doing what is "right" according to their own standards, then no one is doing what is truly right at all
 - They might have obeyed God's standard on occasion, but only when it suited them
 - In general, they lived without concern for righteousness, living only for themselves
 - And as a result, the people did not obey and did not achieve what God asked
 - And remember, Samuel's commentary comes at the very end of the book of Judges
 - In other words, the period of judges over Israel didn't correct for this problem

- The problem persisted throughout the period, as Samuel observes at the end of the book
- Such was the state of the Jewish people in the years leading up to the monarchy
 - God gave Israel leaders
 - And they possessed the Law of God and enjoyed the presence of God in the temple
 - Nevertheless, the people were driven by their flesh and lived in increasingly unrighteous ways
 - Yet at the same time, they judged themselves to be upright even as they sinned
- So Samuel wrote this account to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of human judges
 - Local, temporary leaders could not bring Israel into righteous living
 - In the end, each person judged himself righteous even as he sinned
 - The people needed a ruler strong enough to lead the entire nation
 - Of course, God Himself is that Ruler
 - But before we can fully understanding the need for Messiah's rule, it's helpful to appreciate that all other options fail
 - Human leaders are inadequate, including the judges
 - So as we enter our study, we must recognize that God never intended His judges to bring righteousness to Israel
 - Like the Law itself, the judges only served to reveal the unrighteousness of Israel
- Having seen the ending, lets go back in time to the moment right before the period of judges begins, in the final chapter of Joshua
 - Beginning with Joshua's speech to the people shortly before his death

[Josh. 24:1](#) Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

[Josh. 24:2](#) Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

[Josh. 24:3](#) 'Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.

[Josh. 24:4](#) 'To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

[Josh. 24:5](#) 'Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out.

[Josh. 24:6](#) 'I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea.

[Josh. 24:7](#) 'But when they cried out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

[Josh. 24:8](#) 'Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you.

[Josh. 24:9](#) 'Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.

[Josh. 24:10](#) 'But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.

[Josh. 24:11](#) 'You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand.

[Josh. 24:12](#) 'Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow.

[Josh. 24:13](#) 'I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

- Shortly before Joshua died, he called the leaders of Israel together in Shechem, the traditional home of the patriarchs in the land
 - Notice Israel had elders, heads or leaders of tribes, judges and officers of the military
 - These leaders collectively were led by Joshua, but now the time was coming for Joshua to die

- And in preparation for that moment, Joshua recounts briefly the history of the people leading up to this moment
- Joshua explained that Israel's fathers have lived from ancient times beyond Jordan in Ur
 - These men served other gods until the Lord took Abraham and brought him into Canaan
 - He granted Abraham a son and multiplied his people
- Later the people went down into Egypt, where they were kept in custody under slavery for hundreds of years
 - Later, the Lord plagues Egypt and brought the people out of slavery
 - He defeated the forces of Pharaoh in the sea
 - And this same generation, now old like Joshua, saw these very things happen as children
- Then in v.8 Joshua moves to telling the story of their conquest over the land under Joshua's leadership
 - Beginning with the Amorites on the far side of Jordan, Joshua's forces defeated stronger forces just as God promised
 - Even when a king tried to have a prophet curse the people, the Lord's people prevailed
 - And the Lord ensured the people received a blessing instead
 - Then they crossed the Jordan and defeated the strong city of Jericho
 - And along with Jericho, they defeated the other Canaanite people in the land
 - All the while, the people faced an entrenched and powerful enemy
 - Nevertheless, one by one, the people pushed the Canaanites out of the land God had promised to Abraham's descendants
 - And they achieved these victories by the power of the God who led them, Joshua reminds the people

- It wasn't by the strength of Israel's army that they won these victories
- The Lord used ridiculous methods, like horns and hornets, to win the battles
- And because the Lord allowed the Canaanites to live in the land beforehand, the people of Israel came upon a land ready for their use
 - The cities had been built
 - The wells dug
 - The fields planted, the vineyards ready, the olive groves tended
 - The wild animals driven out
 - The Lord did all these things for His people because He loves them and honors His promises to them
- What an amazing testimony of God
 - And the reality of all that God has done for His people leads Joshua to one, unavoidable conclusion

Josh. 24:14 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Josh. 24:15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

- How many of us have v.15 on a placard somewhere in your house?
- But how many of us have the whole verse properly quoted?
- The entire context makes clear that Joshua has his doubts about this people
 - He asks sarcastically that is after all the Lord has done the people find it disagreeable to serve the Lord, then choose another god
 - Maybe the gods their fathers served beyond the Euphrates

- Or perhaps the false gods of the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan
- But Joshua says his house will serve the Lord
 - That statement is the part of v.15 that we know so well, but consider what Joshua is saying
 - He's saying that the people were making choices of what was right in their own eyes
 - There were differing views of which god to serve, despite the history they had known
 - Many of these people were present for the parting of the Red Sea and all that followed
 - Yet they were willing to consider other gods
- Therefore, Joshua's statement is a crack in the wall of Israel's faithfulness, revealing what lay ahead for the people
 - These people are prone to wander just as Moses said
 - They rebelled under Moses' leadership
 - And their wandering hearts are showing themselves again
 - Still the people, answer Joshua much like they did Moses at the mountain

[Josh. 24:16](#) The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods;

[Josh. 24:17](#) for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed.

[Josh. 24:18](#) "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

- They state unequivocally that they will serve the Lord who brought them into the land
- The words sound right, but we know from their history that words are cheap

- Following their profession of obedience, Joshua responds in a way similar to Moses from an earlier generation

[Josh. 24:19](#) Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.

[Josh. 24:20](#) "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you."

[Josh. 24:21](#) The people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD."

[Josh. 24:22](#) Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses."

[Josh. 24:23](#) "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

[Josh. 24:24](#) The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice."

[Josh. 24:25](#) So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

[Josh. 24:26](#) And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

[Josh. 24:27](#) Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God."

[Josh. 24:28](#) Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.

- Joshua's doubt in their profession is clearly evident in his response
 - He tells them they will not be able to serve God as they promise, because He won't forgive their sins
 - Why does Joshua say they won't gain God's forgiveness?
 - Because once they forsake the Lord to worship other God's, which Joshua knows is coming, they will have repeated the sin of their fathers at the mountain
 - And as they break the covenant, they sin
 - And there is no forgiveness for the sin of idolatry under the Old Covenant
 - Nevertheless, the people persist in claiming they will obey the covenant, so Joshua renews the covenant of the Law with this people
 - Just as Moses renewed the covenant before his death, so Joshua does the same

- He wrote down their agreement and set up a marker stone to remind the people of their promise
- The marker was placed under the same oak where Abraham set up his altar
- And it's in this same place where Jacob buried his idols
- In fact, a large standing stone matching this description has been found in Shechem
- So why does Joshua institute this moment before his death?
 - Because he knows that following his death, the Lord will not appoint a new national leader over Israel
 - The major campaigns of war to enter the land have been fought
 - The people have entered successfully
 - And their enemies fear them greatly
 - All that remains is for the various tribes to move into the land they have been given and settle that land as the Lord promised
 - And once settled, the people would possess the land the Lord promised in safety
 - Provided they continued in the covenant the Lord gave them through Moses
 - As the people followed the Lord through His law, they would enjoy the fruit of His promises
 - But they must do these things absent a strong, anointed leader with the power to compel obedience and deal with the rebellious
 - Despite Joshua's suspicions, the nation seemed to succeed for a time after his death
 - As the end of the book reports

[Josh. 24:29](#) It came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old.

[Josh. 24:30](#) And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash.

[Josh. 24:31](#) Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

[Josh. 24:32](#) Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons.

[Josh. 24:33](#) And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim.

- Joshua dies at 110 and his life's testimony was that under his leadership, the people of Israel served the Lord
 - That doesn't mean Israel lived perfectly or without sin
 - It means they didn't fall to serving other gods
 - They remained true to worshipping Yahweh and no other god
 - Joshua's leadership was largely responsible for this faithfulness
 - As the people may have had reason to stray, Joshua put down rebellions
 - And just his strength of leadership was a deterrent to rebellion
 - Moreover, v.31 says that the people could remember the deeds of the Lord in bringing them out of Egypt
 - That memory helped keep them faithful as well
 - All this time they were carrying the bones of Joseph who asked to be buried in the land
 - It was a tangible reminder that they were still a people seeking their home and the Lord was leading them
 - Finally, the High Priest of the Exodus, Eleazar, dies as well
 - He ruled at the right hand of Joshua
 - And along with the elders of Israel, he knew the works of God
- So Joshua's book ends with three burials: Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar

- With their passing, the nation entered a new period, which judges explains
 - A period when men begin to do what is right in their own eyes
 - And yet the Lord has not forsaken His people
 - So next week we begin to study how He rules over His people during these 300 years of history