

## What's the Message – Lesson 44

Today we begin our study of the book of Judges.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Our prayer today is that we will learn, not only from the good examples of our spiritual fathers, but especially from their failures. Let the warnings of God to Israel be ever mindful to us, that we do not repeat their mistakes. Amen.

Last time we heard Joshua, as he neared his time of death, give instructions to Israel much in the same manner as Moses did, telling them to be faithful and true to Yahweh and His covenant, warning them of the punishments the Lord would exact on them if they failed.

One of the last verses of the book of Joshua says this:

*And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work which the Lord did for Israel.*

But the book of Judges begins with a review – not of their faithfulness – but of the failures of the tribes of Israel to clear out the Canaanite inhabitants from the territories that had been assigned to the Israelites. And chapter two has this key verse about what happened after the time of Joshua: *and there arose another generation after them* – that is, after the generation of Joshua – *who did not know the Lord or the work which He had done for Israel.*

This same chapter makes a forecast of what will happen to Israel because of their failure to obey. The Angel of The Lord spoke to them and said: *I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land which I swore to give to your fathers. I said I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; but you have not obeyed my command. What is this you have done?*

*So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you.*

And now, beginning with verse 16, chapter two gives us what can be viewed as an outline of what happens in the rest of the book of Judges. It says:

*And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Ba'als; and they forsook 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 round about them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger.*

*They forsook the Lord, and served the Ba'als and the Ashtaroth. 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 power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.*

*Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in sore straits.*

And with that, Teacher, we have a coarse overview of the entire book of Judges. But now comes my usual question, what is the message for us?

You are correct, verses 11 to 15 of chapter two does serve as a valid outline of the book of Judges. But there is still more that we should include, from verse 16 through verse 20: *Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the power of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges; for they played the harlot 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. 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 . . . but whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.*

Here we have the rest of the outline, and the picture is a constantly repeating pattern of behavior. Draw a circle, and on this circle place six arrowheads pointing in the same direction. Then label those points as follows: Peace, Apostasy, Conquered, Oppression, Repentance, Deliverance. Here you have a sequence of behavior that we can relate to, because it is just as true today as it was then.

Peace led to apathy and apostasy, which in turn led to the enemies conquering them, which naturally led to oppression. When the Israelites realized they had done wrong, they cried to the Lord for deliverance, and He would send them a judge who would lead them – for a while. But after the judge, the pattern would repeat itself all over again. Now, our situation may look different in some ways, but isn't it basically the same? So is there a lesson here for us also? Wouldn't it be the same lesson God was trying to teach the Israelites? And the lesson can be summarized with the departing thoughts of Joshua: commit yourself to the Lord, be faithful, and obey Him.

Next time we will examine more closely the leadership of some of the more prominent judges of Israel.