

# Falling from Faithfulness: The Book of Judges

## Introduction

### Contextual Introduction

#### Author:

- Anonymous, likely tribe of Judah, schooled in the Torah and especially Deuteronomy, was a prophetic figure

#### Date:

- Likely composed 1010-930 BC

#### Historical Context:

- Death of Jacob and 12 sons = end of era of the patriarchs
- Death of Moses = end of era of exodus and desert wandering
- Death of Joshua = end of conquest and transition into settlement
- 15<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC
- The nation that kings and pharaohs feared has become a nation in transition and crisis
- Definite absence of leadership-political, spiritual, military-no centralized authority

#### Religious:

- Degrading and devolution of the nation's spiritual life
- "The symptoms of Israel's spiritual progressive degeneracy are recognizable on almost every page..."
  - 1) Failure to fulfill the divine mandate to route the Canaanites
  - 2) Failure to transmit God's saving acts
  - 3) Refusing Yahweh's call to arms
  - 4) Construction of altars to Baal
  - 5) Complete replacement of Yahweh with Baal
  - 6) Creation of images to worship and self-serving cults
- Seven-fold repetition of the refrain, "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals."

Purpose:

- We see the prophetic stance of the author as we consider his purpose: to show the effects of faithlessness and call his people to return to Yahweh.

Theme:

- The Canaanization of Israel, or, to illuminate God's people falling from faithfulness

### Historical Account – 1:1-36

- Chapter 1 gives us the current context of the Israelites
- It answers the question, "What will the Israelites do in regards to their divine mandate to conquer and settle Canaan?"
- Chapter 1 summarizes, re-evaluates, and continues the Joshua narrative:

**1:1 (ESV)** After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

- Would the Israelites remain faithful? Would they fulfill what God had called them to?
- We see in Chapter 1 that they would do neither of these things. In fact, the Book of Judges will expose a difficult and depressing era; it is a testimony to Israel's "falling from faithfulness."
- Judges begins with God using Israel to judge the Canaanites:

### 1:1-19 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" <sup>2</sup> The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." <sup>3</sup> And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. <sup>4</sup> Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. <sup>5</sup> They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. <sup>6</sup> Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes.

<sup>7</sup> And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me." And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. <sup>8</sup> And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. <sup>9</sup> And afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. <sup>10</sup> And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba), and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. <sup>11</sup> From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher. <sup>12</sup> And Caleb said, "He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter for a wife." <sup>13</sup> And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Achsah his daughter for a wife. <sup>14</sup> When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" <sup>15</sup> She said to him, "Give me a blessing. Since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. <sup>16</sup> And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people. <sup>17</sup> And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah. <sup>18</sup> Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. <sup>19</sup> And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.

← All is not well!

- v27-Mannaseh did not drive out, v29-Ephraim did not drive out, 30-Zebulun did not drive out, 31-Asher did not drive out, 33-Naphtali did not drive out, 34-Dan and Joseph
- Judges begins with God using Israel to judge the Canaanites but there is a quick reversal as God uses Canaan to judge the Israelites:

#### 2:1-4 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, <sup>2</sup> and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? <sup>3</sup> So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." <sup>4</sup> As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept.

- We also see the fall from faithfulness in Israel's relationship with Yahweh. In verse 1 and 2 the people "inquired of the Lord" but in the passage we just read God initiates the communication and it is one of judgment. Israel has moved from initiating their relationship with God to seek His commands to a place where God must initiate the conversation and mandate their actions with the threat of judgment.
- **Commentator Daniel Block** sums the theme up nicely as it is derived from the early parts of the Book of Judges: "The opening scene of the book offers so much promise. The theocratic system is still in place. Israel is sensitive to the will of God, and God responds to the overtures of his people. In its present canonical position, after the Book of Joshua, the reader expects a continuation of the triumphant narrative encountered in the previous book. But how different will be the reality from the ideal, the history from the dream! By raising the reader's expectations this way the narrator invites us to share the intensity of his own and God's disappointment with his people in the period of settlement."
- Israel's "fall from faithfulness" has begun and we will see in the pages of this narrative <sup>continued</sup> continuing unfulfilled commitments, incomplete obedience, and irreverent compromises that are the hallmarks of a people's apostasy from their God.

### Theological Analysis – 2:1-23

We see in chapter 2 God's divine response to the onset of Israel's fall from faithfulness. Chapter 2 is a theological analysis of the reality that chapter 1 introduces to us. I'd like to employ chapter 2 to introduce and illustrate some of the minor themes of this book. If "falling from faithfulness" is the over-riding theme of Judges, and works like the roots of a tree giving support to everything growing out of it, than these 6 themes represent the trunk and branches of the story.

3 themes about God and 3 themes about humanity:

*ESVSB  
JUDGES FOR YOU  
DRD's JUDGES: Such a great salvation*

1. God is sovereign
2. God is Lord
3. God is gracious
4. We are sinners
5. We require saving
6. We need renewal

1) God is sovereign

2:6-15 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. <sup>7</sup>And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. <sup>8</sup>And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. <sup>9</sup>And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. <sup>10</sup>And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

<sup>11</sup>And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. <sup>12</sup>And they abandoned 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 around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. <sup>13</sup>They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. <sup>14</sup>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 hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

**Tim Keller in *Judges for You*:** “God is in charge, no matter what it looks like. The most pervasive theme may be the easiest to miss! God often seems almost absent from the scene in Judges, but he never is. He works out his will through weak people, and in spite of weak people. His purposes are never thwarted, regardless of appearances.”

*Punctate + Anecdote in narrative*

2) God is Lord

God's sovereignty indicates he ordains all things and that there is nothing outside his control. God's lordship indicates that all people owe him their allegiance

Again, Keller: "God wants lordship over every area of our lives, not just some. God wanted Israel to take the entire land of Canaan, but instead they only cleared out some areas and they learned to live with idols in their midst. In other words, they neither wholly rejected God nor wholly accepted him. This halfway discipleship and compromise is depicted by the book of Judges as an impossible, unstable compound. God wants all of our lives, not just part."

2:14-15 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup>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 hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.

- ① People rebel
- ② God is angry
- ③ Oppression by enemies
- ④ The people cry out
- ⑤ Salvation through a chosen judge
- ⑥ Peace
- ⑦ Judge dies

3) God is gracious

2:16-19 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored 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. <sup>18</sup>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. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. <sup>19</sup>But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

4) We are sinners

Don't think that there sins were immediately, demonstrably different than ours

Consider the phrase I used earlier: "unfulfilled commitments, incomplete obedience, and irreverent compromises"

commitments to God ⇒ I'll read my Bible. I'll serve in this area (Sunday school).  
I'll reconcile with that person.

incomplete obedience ⇒ 75% obedient - challenges come there

irrelevant compromises ⇒

5) We require saving *—humanity* *lets look at 16-19 again*

2:16-19 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup>Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored 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. <sup>18</sup>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. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. <sup>19</sup>But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

6) We need renewal

**Keller, *Judges For You*:** “There is a need for continual spiritual renewal in our lives here on earth, and a way to make that a reality. Judges shows that spiritual decline is inevitable, and spiritual renewal then becomes the continual need. We will see a regular, repeated decline-revival cycle. Some of the elements in this renewal include repentance, prayer, the destruction of idols, and anointed human leaders. Renewal happens when we are under the right master/ruler; slavery occurs when we are under the wrong master/ruler. Judges is the best book in the Old Testament for the understanding of renewal and revival, while Acts is the best place in the New Testament. Watch, though, for the way that the revival cycles in Judges become weaker and weaker as time goes on, while in Acts they grow wider and stronger.”

The gospel

1. God is sovereign
2. God is Lord
3. God is gracious
4. We are sinners
5. We require saving
6. We need renewal

## Consequential Application – 3:1-6

## 3:1-6 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. <sup>2</sup> It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. <sup>3</sup> These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. <sup>4</sup> They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. <sup>5</sup> So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>6</sup> And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.

The Book of Judges can be described as a test for Israel. Would they return to the days of Joshua and pursue God's mandate as required of covenant people. Or would they fall from the former faithfulness? We know already that they do not fare well in this test. Of the many reasons for this, let me suggest 3 that we can also apply to ourselves. Dale Ralph David, in his commentary on Judges called *Such a Great Salvation*, gives three reasons the Israelites failed this test:

- 1) They failed because they did not separate themselves from the world.

## 3:5-6 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>6</sup> And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.

Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

Ephesians 4:17, "you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds."

James 4:4, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Calvin: The heart is an idol-making factory

me: The mind is an idol-pursuing factory

DANGER  
idols



1 Peter 1:18, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers."

1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

We seek to make truces with the world, and parlay with the world, and even make covenants with the world when, in fact, the ways of world are our ideological enemies. *We do this to pursue their gods ... to whose after them. preceding*

2) They failed because they lack an experiential religion like the ~~succeeding~~ preceding generation had.

2:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.

Compare with:

3:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. <sup>2</sup> It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.

The current people knew something of God, but they didn't know Him by experience. Their relationship with God, if it can be called a relationship, was little more than a tradition of which they had some head knowledge, but little else.

**Jonathan Edwards:** "He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion."

**Dale Ralph Davis:** "That is a perennial peril. One generation can rejoice in a living faith, enjoy intimate communion with God, revel in the kingship of Jesus over daily life, even delight to teach their faith to those closest them; yet the next generation may come along and care nothing for all that. Not that they will formally repudiate everything. It's just that they will know about the Lord rather than know the Lord. They may remain within the church in their cold, dead, formal way. But there is no fire in their faith, no warmth in love, no joy from hope."

**3) They failed because they did not remember what God had done.**

**2:10-13 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup>And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

<sup>11</sup>And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. <sup>12</sup>And they abandoned 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 around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. <sup>13</sup>They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

**In the days of Joshua, when God did his great works, they served him. In the days of those who immediately survived Joshua, who had the memory of God's great work, they served him. But, in the days after the witnesses of God's great works, there arose those who did not know God or remember his works, they did not serve him but fell from faithfulness.**

**We risk the same thing! But we have been given a way to remember! The Lord's Table!**