

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 18
Judges 1-12

Key Concepts: The key concept in this section is that God's people cannot remain faithful, yet God will still deliver them when they cry out.

Stories: The stories include the continuing, but incomplete, conquest of the land, the apostasy of the people after the death of Joshua, the stories of the judges, including those of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and her song, Gideon and the fleece and ephod, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon.

Brief Summary: The book of Judges brings the story of God's people back to reality. At the end of Joshua the reader is left with the understanding that all the land is conquered and that the people have made an irrevocable commitment to God. In a sense the end of Joshua is similar to the end of Genesis where the people of God are in Egypt and everything is fine, only to open Exodus and discover that they have become slaves. Judges brings us back to reality in that we witness that the people of God almost immediately abandon God and go chasing after the Canaanite gods and goddesses. This leads to a couple of recurring phrases.

The first recurring phrase is "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord..." We will find this language used multiple times. And at each of those times, this phrase basically means that the people quit worshipping the God of their ancestors and started to worship the gods of the new land in which they live. The two most frequently named gods are Baal and Asheroth. Baal was a name given to multiple Canaanite gods, while Asheroth was his female consort. Their worship was focused on fertility. The worship of these deities is possible because much of land was not conquered and remained under the control of those who worshipped "foreign gods." Though Joshua ends with the declaration that the land was all taken and conquered by Israel, there were multiple cities and territories which were not taken and which continued to be in the hands of non-Israelites.

The second recurring phrase is "Then the people of Israel cried to the Lord for help..." In other words the people of Israel got themselves into trouble and then asked God for help. We might assume that God would very quickly tire of this game, but God does not. Each time the people cried out, God sent a deliverer. These are the judges after whom the book is named. These were charismatic leaders who were often cruel and unscrupulous. In addition at least a couple of them had less than stellar pedigrees. One was only half Israelite (Abimelech) and another was the son of a prostitute (Jephthah). In some ways this harkens back to the Jacob stories in which we watch God use a lying thief to continue the promise. Here God uses some very unsavory characters to gain Israel's freedom.

Though it is not a recurring phrase, the theme that emanates from these stories is that God will free the people and give them rest. Even though God uses individuals to carry out God's plans of liberation, it is always clear that the numerically outnumbered and technologically outgunned Israelites were only victorious because God brought them victory. This appears most clearly in the Gideon story, where God insists on using only a fraction of the troops available.

Finally please take note of the recurring references to God as the one who led the people out of captivity first in Egypt, and then again in the Canaan. These references maintain the unity not only of the story, but of God's desire to maintain God's people in order to maintain the promise.

1. Why do you think it was important for the writer of Judges to remind us that the land was not completely conquered?
2. Where do you see people today "doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord?"
3. How do you see God maintaining the promise in the face of human evil?