

You Need A King!

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[0 : 0 0] Most of us, we would say, are probably suckers for a tragic story with a happy ending. We don't mind a bit of drama. In fact, some of us probably enjoy a bit of a drama, whether we would admit it or not. We don't mind so much drama, but as long as we can anticipate at the end of that story, or at the end of that movie, or at the end of that book, there is a happy ending that we might enjoy, we are drawn into those stories and encouraged by them.

The problem is, when we come to the book of Judges, and we take it as a unit on its own, you will find no such joyful climax as you hope you would find in most stories.

It's actually quite a tragic book, and it ends in tremendous tragedy. It's the opposite of the stories that we long for. In fact, the difference between the promising notes of blessing at the book's beginning and the devastating circumstances of its conclusion are shocking, maybe even offensive to some extent to our modern sensibilities.

Before we explore the heart of this particular series of narratives, I want to consider here, just for a moment, its opening and its close. By doing that, maybe that will give us a path forward.

As we jump into this book today. You're in Judges chapter 1. Let me just read the first two verses, and we'll see how it begins. 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?

[1 : 4 3] And the Lord said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have given the land into his hand. Now, that may not seem very much to you. There may not be a lot there. There actually is quite a bit there for us to understand. Judges begins with the people of Israel on the brink of all that God has promised them up to this point. So just think back. They've spent 400 years in exile.

Throughout those 400 years in exile and in bondage in Egypt, they have encouraged one another, probably, mostly, on the promises that were given to their patriarchs, to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. Now they have been delivered from that bondage. They've spent some difficult years in the wilderness, and they stand on the precipice of blessing now. The Lord has given the land into their hand. All of these promises that he has made seem to be at their fingertips. That's what this book is opening with. God has provided leadership through the tribe of Judah. God has assured them of success in possessing the land of promise. And the people seem but steps away from enjoying a new type of Eden, a new type of garden experience that they've been told about from Moses. So after hundreds of years in bondage and in wilderness wonderings, they're on the verge of unimaginable blessing. And that's where these opening verses link us back to. But like I said, that's not at all how the book ends. After a devastating civil war in which one of Israel's tribes, Benjamin, almost is completely extinguished.

By the time you get to the end of the book, I think it's something like 600 people remain in an entire tribe. It's devastating. And we find this refrain at the end of the book. And it's the way that the author closes the book. In fact, if you just flip over to chapter 21, it's the very last chapter. In the very last verse, you'll see this refrain working as something of a theme to summarize the entire story of the book of Judges. Verse 25, In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Now, when we read those first two verses, that is not what we anticipate being at the end of the book. In the end, Israel is leaderless. In the beginning, God has given them leaders.

And not only has he just arbitrarily chosen this tribe of Judah, but as we'll find in the next few weeks, he is actually fulfilling a promise that he made through the blessing of Jacob on his 12 sons, highlighting Judah as the one that will lead the nation and from which will come a king who will lead God's people. But when we get to the end of the book, they're leaderless. There is no king in Israel. They have not possessed the land. And they have, instead of experiencing a new type of Eden, they have actually experienced a new fall. God had designated them in Exodus chapter 19 to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But by the end, Israel had become like all of the other nations around her. And the question that we ask as we begin to consider this particular book is, how does Israel go from chapter 1 and verse 1 to chapter 21 and verse 25? How do they do that?

[5 : 35] How do they move from here, unimaginable blessing, right ready for them, to now they have completely gone as far away from that blessing as they could possibly go by the time they get to the end of the book?

Is God unwilling to fulfill his promise? Worse, is he unable to fulfill his promise? What on earth happens to these people? As we study the book, we'll discover that the primary issue at play with the people of Israel is precisely the same problem that plagues each of us day by day and that plagues our churches week by week and year by year in the church. It is an unending struggle against sin that we will find. Now there's this thing that the book of Judges continues to say over and over. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That's really what the problem boils down to. And it's not very different from our own culture. We live in a follow your heart type of culture where self, the individual, is what people are concerned with first and foremost above everything else. We can call it postmodernism or expressive individualism or some other philosophical ism, but it's all rooted ultimately in the ever-present sins of pride and idolatry and rebellion, selfishness. So that rather than love, obey, and worship Yahweh, people generally spend their lives serving their own appetites and being concerned with pursuing their own agendas. And what's amazing about the whole thing is that this type of self-centeredness and self-focus is actually celebrated in our society. It's praised. In fact, you're told that healthy human behavior, true mental health, involves first and foremost self-care. You must take care of self before you concern yourself with anyone else. And that's more than just a simple take care of yourself.

We know what underlies that type of philosophy. You do you or follow your heart or do what's best for you. Or as I heard one person say at one time, look out for number one and don't step in number two, right? These are the things we hear all the time. These are the, this is the mindset. These are the phrases that we and our children are being trained to live by. So like Israel as a culture, even unfortunately as Christians, we find ourselves doing what is right in our own eyes. And of course, this is the antithesis of biblical teaching. In fact, at the very heart of the Christian message is Jesus, the son of God, wholly submitting himself to the father and sacrificing himself for the salvation of undeserving sinners. The last thing on Jesus's mind, what is that? The heart of the gospel message is not self-care. It is not doing what's best for you. It's actually servant-heartedness. It is giving yourself for others. It is sacrificing yourself for those who do not deserve, to be sacrificed for. This mindset, this cultural agenda is the opposite of everything that the

Bible stands for and that Christianity is supposed to represent as we follow Christ. But still, Christians seem to fall prey to this seductive spirit of the age. And God has all kinds of things to say about this in the Bible. But the book of Judges gives us one of the clearest pictures of the devastating consequences of doing your own thing. What happens when you just live life your way?

What happens when you disregard everything else that everyone has said? When you disregard what God has said and you just do you? What happens? Judges tells us. It's a story of God's people doing life their own way regardless of what God's life their own way regardless of what God has said. But it's also a story of God's enduring mercy and steadfast love. In fact, that's the thing that comes to the surface most clearly as we get to the end. There's little hope in the book, unfortunately, except in the fact that it ultimately points us to Christ, a king and champion that will and does reign over his people in perfect righteousness, not only now, but for all of eternity. Ultimately, that's what Judges teaches us. There is no king in Israel, but there is a king. There is a king coming for Israel and for the people of God who will do what none of these judges could do, who will do what Joshua could not do, and what Moses could not do, and what Abraham could not do, and what Adam could not do, and what Noah could not do. King Jesus is on the way, and this book is pointing us forward to him and to the gospel. So, Lord willing, we're going to spend the next several months examining the details of really this fascinating book and the fascinating stories that it contains. But what I'd like to do today is just this kind of simple survey so that we might better prepare ourselves for the study moving forward, okay? First thing, there's not really much of a structured outline for you, but if you want to keep notes in those journals that were on your seats or whatever, the first thing maybe that we want to do is look back, okay? So, we want to look back. Would you flip with me, please, to Joshua chapter 1? Joshua chapter 1.

[11 : 45] So, that to understand where we're going, we need to take a moment and kind of look over our shoulder, so to speak, to see where we've already been or should have been at this point in the biblical text.

Now, we know this is necessary for us to do because the author has already said in chapter 1 and verse 1, he's going to say it again in chapter 2, that all of this, the theming and the story, the plot line of this book of Judges hinges, he's insisting on linking it to the death of Joshua. So, we know that if we're going to understand Judges, we have to go back and see what was Joshua all about and what was happening there.

So, that just as the death of Jacob represents the end of the patriarchal period and the death of Moses marks the end of the Exodus, the death of Joshua represents and marks the end of conquest and points forward to the time of settlement in the land, okay? So, that's the link that's happening here and I want to look at two particular texts. You're in Joshua chapter 1. Let's start there.

Verse 1. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now, therefore, arise. Go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness in this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. So, be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give to them.

[13 : 50] Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. In other words, if you do not do that, you will not have the success everywhere you go.

But so long as you listen to my word, you will have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.

Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. So, God makes his plan for Joshua clear. He is to take up the mantle of leadership from Moses, and he's to lead the people in the land that God has prepared for them. He's to teach them to trust God's promises and obey God's law. Every word of it. Not only the things that says do this and don't do this, but consider what all is contained in the Torah, in the law. It contains how they are to worship.

It contains instructions for what they are to do once they get into the land, and how they are to take the land, and how they are to establish the kingdom from there. It has everything that they need to function as the people of God once they move forward. And Joshua is told, make sure to teach them God's law, to trust in God's promise. Nothing that God has said through Moses is to be disregarded. And insofar as Joshua is faithful to lead the people, they will receive the blessings of dwelling in the land. And Joshua was indeed faithful to that task. He wasn't a perfect man, but he was faithful to the task that God gave him. And he leads the people valiantly, and they conquer their enemies. So when we get to Judges, they are standing having conquered the nation. There are remnants of people still there. They must still take possession, but there are no kingdoms left in Canaan. Joshua, through the power of God, has defeated them. Now I want you to flip ahead now to Joshua 23. Joshua 23, just toward the end of the book. So that after faithfully leading the people, Joshua takes the charge that God has given him in chapter 1, and he now gives that same charge, that same instruction to the entire nation in chapter 23. It's as if he's saying, look at what

God has done. He has proven himself to be faithful to his promise. He has kept his end of the covenant. We must keep our end of the covenant. And he looks ahead with the people of Israel to settling the land in the same way that he looked ahead to conquering the land. Chapter 23, verse 1.

[17 : 04] A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, I am now old and well advanced in years. And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake. For it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. Behold, I've allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes, those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off from the Jordan to the great sea in the west. The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight, and you shall possess their land just as the Lord your God promised. Therefore, be strong to keep and to do all that's written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left. Now, remember this part, verse 7, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. But you shall cling to the Lord your God, just as you have done to this day. For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations, and as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. So be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you, and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you.

So Joshua delivers this charge. No mighty nations are left. God gave them the land. They only need now to possess it by driving out the remnant of remaining people. But this is where they failed.

They did everything that God said not to do. After Joshua's death, they failed to possess the land. They intermingled and intermarried with the Canaanites, and ultimately they forsook Yahweh to follow after the Baals or the Baals and the Astaroth, the gods of Canaan. So that rather than driving out the inhabitants and destroying the false worship that existed in Canaan, Israel became thoroughly Canaanized.

That's what this book tells us. They did not obey God. They did not take the land. They actually became Canaan. So that the promised land, as I said before, it was meant to be this picture of a new kind of Eden where God's people. And instead, Judges tells us of this fall. So that just like Adam and Eve, God made clear to the people, this is my law. This is what you must do, and this is what you must not do.

And just like Adam and Eve, Israel did what was right in their own eyes instead. And this is always how sin works. Always.

[20 : 53] God gives us His truth. We rebel against it, opting to pursue our own path instead. And all of this is pointing toward the fact that we need a better Adam. We need a better Moses. We need a better Joshua.

We need Jesus. Okay? That's looking back. Now let's look at the structure of Judges. Okay? Are you with me still? Good. Let's look at the structure. The macro structure of the book is really actually quite simple.

There's three major movements here. In literary terms, we would call it a prologue, which is the introduction. That's chapter 1-1 through 3-6. Then there's the cycle of Judges. That's the main body of text.

That's 3-7 through 16-31. And then there's what we would call the epilogue, which is the very end of the book. But to understand this and the function of this structure, Barry Webb has illustrated it with the process of compiling a musical composition.

Some of you are musical people, and you will understand this. The others of you just do your best. Okay? I think this is really a helpful way for us to understand this. There are three parts sometimes.

[22 : 08] There could be more, but there are three parts to this composition, so to speak, of the book of Judges. First, there's the overture. The overture. Now, if you're into musicals, you know what the overture does. It opens up before anybody comes out on stage.

The orchestra strikes. They begin to play a melody, some harmonies. They range in scope and in intensity. And what you find is that it introduces what is coming ahead, so that as you work your way through the musical composition, you begin to hear repetition of what you hear in the overture.

Okay? That's what these first couple of chapters do. The author here, probably Samuel, maybe later with a revision from Ezra, is writing this, most likely one of those two men.

And he is introducing for us things that we're going to continue to hear all throughout the book. That's the overture. Then there's the variations. The variations is the main body of the composition, with each part distinct, yet clearly woven into this tapestry that presents this huge picture, this main message and point and plot line that goes along through the musical or whatever it is that you're considering at that moment.

So there's different scenes that are taking place, and there's different characters, but it's all basically telling one big story. That's the cycle of Judges. Okay? And then we get to the end, and this is the coda.

[23 : 32] Okay? The coda brings the composition to a satisfying conclusion. And what it does is it summarizes, summarizes for us the overall point of the story.

Now, here's what I want to do real quick. I want to take these three sections and just give you a taste of what we're going to learn in these three sections, and then we're going to come back and look at the overall message as we finish.

Okay? First, let's consider this overture. Okay? In the overture, verses chapter 1 and verse 1 through chapter 3 and verse 6, connects the story in chapter 1 to the death of Joshua, showing in a general sense how Israel failed to do all that God had commanded.

We get to chapter 2 then, and the nation is confronted by the angel of the Lord, who pronounces judgment against the people. And then we're introduced to what will be this cycle repeated over and over and over throughout the book.

And there's five parts to the cycle. Okay? Part 1 is this. The people rebel against God. Look at chapter 2, verse 11. The people rebel against God, and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

[24 : 48] Or the Baals. Okay? So that's part 1 of the cycle. Part 2. God delivers them into the hands of their enemies. Verse 14 of chapter 2.

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.

Okay? That's God's doing. That's part 2. Part 3. The people cry out to the Lord. Now, this doesn't happen in every cycle, but it's usually there. Look at the second part of verse 18.

Then the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. We'll find this usually spoken of in terms of the people cried out to the Lord regarding their oppression, and then the Lord responds.

Okay? So that's part 4. God raises up a judge who delivers the people and provides rest. Verse 16 of chapter 2. Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered.

[25 : 56] And then there's the final part of the cycle, and it all begins again. The judge dies, and the people again rebel against God. Verse 19. Whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them, bowing down to them.

They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. It's a vicious cycle for Israel. They rebel. God judges them by delivering them to their enemies.

They cry out to God. God raises up a judge, sometimes wicked men in and of themselves. He raises up this judge, delivers the people out of their oppression.

Then the judge dies, and the people return back to the rebellion. And over and over and over and over it goes. But the cycle, what we find is that it's more than repetition.

It's a downward spiral. So that with each story, the sins worsen, the rest is shortened, and the judges get more and more corrupt.

[27 : 09] And eventually, the people don't even bother to call out for mercy any longer. Sin is never stagnant. That's the message.

It's never stagnant. It always grows. It always worsens. And if you think for even a moment that you can somehow maintain this measure of sinfulness or sinful pleasure in your life without it going too far or what you consider to be too far, then you're already blind to how pervasive sin already is in your life.

In the end, you will ultimately completely reject God and turn to self or to some other God. That's the cycle of sin for the nation of Israel.

Okay? We find all that in the overture. We're going to see all that repeated through the book. Let's look at the variations. This is beginning in chapter 3 and verse 7 and takes us through the end of chapter 16.

And it's the main body of text which takes us through six of these cycles. And in these six cycles, we are acquainted with 12 what's called judges.

[28 : 27] Six of them are minor judges. They're just really just mentioned by name. The exception to that is a man named Shamgar. Shamgar who kills people with an ox code.

That's all we get. We get his name and we get an ox code. He doesn't even have a sword. The rest of them, we just get their name. Okay? So six minor ones. And then, but the main storyline in the plot line, it moves through six major judges is what we would call them.

And it's important for us to realize at the beginning, they are not laid out chronologically. There is overlap with these judges. They are laid out theologically in the book so that they progressively worsen the judges themselves.

By the time, we start with Othniel, who basically is the golden boy of the judges. By the time you get to Samson, who is the last one, he is the worst. I mean, he's terrible.

There is almost nothing good about Samson and Jephthah and barely anything good about Gideon. We're going to find that they get worse and worse and worse representing the culture of Israel in which they live.

[29 : 32] So they're not laid out chronologically. They're laid out theologically. And there's two groups of them. So let's just walk through the two groups quickly. Group one starts with Othniel and it's signaled by this phrase, and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Okay? Two other judges are grouped with Othniel and it's signaled by specific phrases. The second one is Ehud or Ehud, whichever way you want to say it.

I don't know what's right. I'll probably say it both ways. And the people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord is what it says. And then the third one, really the judge is Barak.

Deborah gets the attention and that's part of the story. But really the judge is Barak. And Barak is in chapters four and five. The people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Then that brings us to group number two. Group two starts with Gideon. And we have the same phrasing as we have with Othniel. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[30 : 38] Then it's Jephthah. The people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. And then there's Samson, the people of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Now, there's a big question that we need to answer now. What in the world is a judge? Who are these people? Where did they come from? And why does God use them?

Okay. Well, a judge in this instance is not a lawyer with a white wig and a black robe that sits on a bench and judges the law and passes sentencing on criminals.

That's not what a judge is in this context. The judges in this book are military leaders who are used by God to deliver the people from oppression.

We might refer to it as the book of deliverers or the book of saviors, perhaps. It's also true that these deliverers function somewhat like tribal chiefs.

[31 : 37] Remember, the nation has not come together at this point. There's no king. So there's no unifying force at work or unifying person for the nation. All the tribes have kind of split up and done their own thing.

And these men are raised up as tribal chiefs and the oppression that the people face in the judgment of God is regional. So there's probably not a point in Judges where the Midianites or the Ammonites or one of the other Ides comes in and actually takes over all 12 tribes.

That's really not the picture that we probably need to have of this. These are regional oppressions. God raises up these tribal chiefs who are military leaders to deliver the people in that area.

Okay? So a judge then is an individual uniquely raised up by God and empowered by God's spirit to deliver certain tribes through military victory.

Okay? That's the variations. Now let's do the coda. All right? This is short. The very end of the book, 17.1 through 21.25, is like an exclamation point at the end of this tragic story.

[32 : 45] So after the author tells us all of these cycles and tells us about all of these judges, he gives us two stories that essentially describe what life was like in Israel that show us how bad things actually became.

And it's graphic. It is terrible. It's offensive. It is everything that you will hate about stories like this. It just couldn't get much worse than what we read at the end of the book.

And the point of that is to say, this is what Israel became. Because they did what was right in their own eyes, this is what they became. Civil war comes through and we see the near extinction of Benjamin and the book ends.

It just ends. And it sets us up for Samuel. Samuel really probably would be the next book for us to read after this, where there is no king in Israel, but now God's going to give the people their king who comes from the hated tribe, Benjamin at this point, Saul.

God judges the nation with Saul and then God raises up his king from Judah, King David. Okay? So that's where Judges is taking us in the whole storyline.

[33 : 59] Now let's talk about the message of it and then we'll be finished. Okay? Typically, we interpret books like Joshua and Judges as simple histories.

In fact, in our English Bibles, if we're categorizing them, we say in the Old Testament we have the books of law and then we have the books of history, right? And so that's primarily how we think of them. We observe the events and then we draw certain moral conclusions from the stories.

I want to suggest a different approach is actually probably more appropriate here. Judges is not less than history, but I do think that it's actually much more than that.

I want to submit that Judges is a prophetic message that is wrapped and presented by God in the shape of a historical narrative.

And if we understand it this way, it's going to alter how we interpret the meaning and the purpose of the text. Okay? So let me just explain that. If you were to grab a Hebrew Bible, you will very quickly realize that it's not arranged the same way.

[35 : 09] The Old Testament books are not arranged the same way that our English Bibles arrange the Old Testament books. In fact, it's divided into three different volumes. There is the Torah, there's the prophets, and then there's the writings or what's sometimes called the Psalms.

So three-volume set. Jesus even refers to this three-volume set. This is the way that the Old Testament would have been structured even in Jesus' day. We see it in Luke 24.

Jesus says to them after his resurrection, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, it's the law of the Torah, and the prophets, that's the second volume, and the Psalms, that's the Psalms or the writings, must be fulfilled.

So Jesus is using an Old Testament that is a three-volume set. It's categorized in three different volumes with a particular structure. So are the apostles. It's not until really the invention of the printing press that the order that we have in our English Bibles really becomes the standard.

So I want you to pretend that you're at home in your living room and your bookshelf is there and you have a three-volume Hebrew Bible on the shelf. And you've decided this afternoon, I'm going to make sure that Jared's right and that he's not lying to me and I'm going to go and I'm going to do a little studying in my Hebrew Bible.

[36 : 28] And so you go over to your three-volume set and you look and you pull off the second volume. On the spine, it's labeled prophets. And so you open it up on the prophets and you look at the table of contents and you're going to see that the prophets are divided in two parts.

There's the former prophets and there's the latter prophets. The latter prophets, as you begin to read through your table of contents, looks exactly like what you think the prophets should look like.

There's Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then a fourth book called the Twelve. The Twelve includes the minor prophets. So that's part two. But then you get curious and you think, okay, well there's no more prophets left based on what I understand in the Old Testament.

So what could possibly be in the former prophets? And you find there's Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

Now you may be surprised to find it that way, but it's that way for a reason. And that's what I think we need to have in mind as we come to this book. Judges is not merely a collection of historical events.

[37 : 36] The goal of this author was not simply to describe the settlement of Canaan. If that was his goal, he failed. Because this book says almost nothing about settling the land.

In fact, when you get to the end, you realize they haven't settled the land. They need David to help finish settling the land. They don't even do it. So that's not what he's doing here. Neither is the goal of the author to give us a series of biblical heroes to look up to.

In fact, we'll find that these men, aside from specific moments of incredible, spirit-empowered faith, were terrible role models.

They are not worthy of our affection in the way that we typically hold up people as heroes in our lives. So that's not what he's doing. The author, considered by the Jews to be a prophet of God, which is why this is in the prophets, carefully selects and arranges this material in order to challenge readers and effect in them a spiritual and moral transformation.

Okay? That's the difference. If we interpret this book as simple history, we will reduce its purpose to little more than moral lessons to make us better human beings.

[39 : 08] But that's not what this book is. If we interpret it as the author intended, as a prophetic work meant to persuade us to turn from sin and to love the Lord and to obey the Lord and worship the Lord, then we will enter this realm of spiritual transformation that can only come from the penetrating work of God's Spirit.

These are not history lessons. These are prophetic messages from God to His people. As Daniel Block says, recognizing the sermonic nature forces us to engage this text as Scripture, or better, he says, to let it engage us to hear its message, to respond in accordance with the human and divine author's goal.

We come to this in every other book in the Bible, not to look at it and cast our opinion about what it says and on the characters that are contained, but to see what God says to us, to see what God has to say to His people so that He might transform us.

So what then is the message? The primary message of Judges is that Israel Israel needs a king. They need a king. But not just any king.

They need God's king. They need someone who will be a man after God's own heart. They need someone who will unite the nation to worship God and obey His law.

[40 : 50] Judges anticipates the arrival of King David. But even more, Judges anticipates King Jesus. He is the one who has defeated the ultimate enemy.

He has provided ultimate rest. He has given us an everlasting inheritance that cannot be lost. And this is one reason for that refrain at the end of the book.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. As long as there is no righteous king, the people will flounder in this hopeless cycle of rebellion.

Now listen, until you have a righteous king ruling over your life to which you are wholly submitted to in faith and love and obedience, you will flounder in this continual cycle of rebellion and sin and devastation that will ultimately end up in an eternal hell.

You need a king. I need a king. And it's not Donald Trump and it's not Joe Biden and it's not Gideon and it's not Samson and it's not Jephthah.

[42 : 06] It's not even David. It's Jesus. Jesus alone can break the cycle. Jesus alone can conquer your sin. Jesus alone can give you life.

That's what Judges is ultimately about. Israel needs a king and who they really need is Jesus. It anticipates the gospel. But there's a second line of messaging here that we don't need to forget.

Judges is a message about God's sovereign mercy. His sovereign mercy. Three ways I think this is proven true in this book.

Jim Hamilton has written a central theme. You've heard me reference it before that the central theme of the Bible is that God is glorified in salvation through judgment.

Now this theme comes to the surface in Judges as God seeks to save his people through and from his own judgment. So think back to that cycle.

[43 : 11] In fact, Becky, can you put the cycle back on the screen here for just a moment? Think back to this cycle. The people rebel. Who's responsible for delivering the judgment? God is.

God sells them into the hand of their enemies. Now why does God do that? God does not do that simply because he's vengeful.

That's not why God does that. God sells them to their enemies in order that he might drive them to repentance and he wants to drive them to repentance because what he really desires to do is pour out his mercy on them so that the moment they cry out to him for mercy he raises up a deliverer.

He raises up a savior who brings rest to the people. This is a book about mercy. God's unending mercy. Secondly, we learn here that God in his mercy uses weak vessels.

Weak vessels. Do you know why God uses weak vessels to do his work? Because there are no other vessels to use. There are no other vessels to use.

[44 : 26] The details given about some of these judges are spiritually obscene. Gideon in the end of his life leads the nation into idolatry.

In the beginning he fights against idolatry. In the end he's the one that's causing the nation to horror after this ephod that he has made. Jephthah makes a rash vow to God and what's even worse about the vow that Jephthah makes is that he follows through with the vow completely against what God would have wanted and he sacrifices his own daughter as a pagan ritual to celebrate the victory that God had given.

Then you get to Samson and the only good thing that happens in Samson's life is when he kills himself at the end. That's the only moment in the whole Samson story where God is actually using him in this moment of faith.

These men are not role models but then we get to Hebrews chapter 11 and what do we find in this great hall of faith? It mentions Barak it mentions Gideon it mentions Jephthah and it mentions Samson Why?

It's the four worst ones. The writer of Hebrews adds them to this what we see in Hebrews chapter 12 to be the great cloud of witnesses and what are the great cloud of witnesses!

[45 : 55] They are urging us to look unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Now what does this teach us? God uses weak vessels.

We don't come to these men looking for a moral role model. We come to these men looking to the mercy of God that despite my sin and despite my failure and despite my weakness God is faithful and God is merciful and he continues to pour out that mercy and then the writer of Hebrews presents these men as if they're in this whole group and it's as if they're saying to all of us coming behind in this great cloud when you go to judges don't look at us look at Jesus look at the author look at the finisher of our faith we had moments empowered by the spirit but don't look to us look to him look to him look to Jesus that's what they're doing that's what they're showing us and then finally the third way I think this is a book about mercy is that God never abandons his promise never when you get to the Samson cycle the people do not ask for

God's mercy yet God still raises up a judge to deliver them why because God is faithful he's faithful this encourages me in this sense that God never gets so frustrated with Christians that he steps back and he says you know what forget it all forget it all he could have done that with Israel he could have said this is just ridiculous forget the land forget the king forget all the stuff I'm going to make them like Sodom and Gomorrah because they've actually become worse than Sodom and Gomorrah in fact the last story that's told in the book is a parallel to Sodom Israel has become as bad as you can get and yet God does not step back and say forget it he never does that he doesn't step back at the church and say forget it forget the church just continues to decline they're being canaanized just like

Israel is just forget the whole thing I'm just getting rid of all of them he doesn't do that and even in your own personal life if you're in Christ there is no sin in your life that God is finally going to get to a point he's going to say you know what forget it forget it I'm done with Josh I'm done with Ashlyn I'm done with David forget it he doesn't do that God is faithful to his promises even when we are unfaithful and especially when we are unfaithful this is a book of God's mercy his mercy the book of judges is immediately relevant to us you won't have a hard time seeing that like Israel the Christian church is!

continuously showing signs of canonization instead of driving out sin and following God as he's commanded in the word we are routinely guilty of intermingling and intermarrying so to speak with the people and the ideas of this world Brian and I were talking before the service started this morning that when people don't know their Bibles they will be carried off by every wind and wave of cultural transition and cultural movement and the more like the world we become the less we will have any kind of footing in what is good and right and true surely we can see the signs of that rather than fighting in holy war against sin we regularly fight against one another we see that with Israel instead of submitting to God most people seem to just be doing whatever seems good in their own eyes judges is a warning against this it's a warning against the idolatry of self and it's a call to turn from sin to the unending mercy of

[50 : 08] God through faith in the true King Jesus Christ let's pray to take to take take take