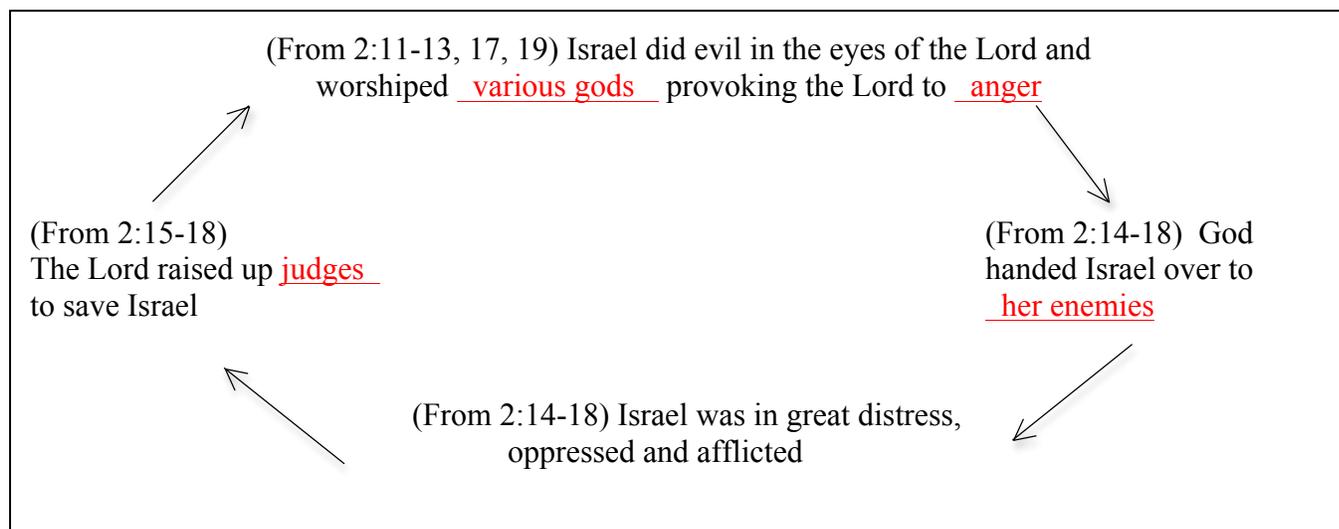


Promised Land 1 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Four: Causes of Israel's Decline, Deborah, Gideon - Judges 1 – 9

Judges 1 – 2: Causes of Israel's Decline

- 1) Read what Judges 1:1-3 and Joshua 19:1 say about the tribes of Judah and Simeon. Then, look back at the Patriarch Jacob's prophetic blessings over his twelve sons on his deathbed (Genesis 49) and try to explain how Judges 1:2-3 reveals a partial fulfillment of the prophecies about Judah and Simeon (Genesis 49:5-12). Judges 1:2 reveals the tribe of Judah as God's chosen leader in the absence of an individual leader (after Joshua's death). Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 49) portrays Judah as a leader over his brothers. Because of Simeon's geographical location within the boundaries of the land of Judah and the resulting relationship between the two tribes, eventually, Simeon was absorbed into Judah and lost its identity as a distinct tribe. In this sense, Simeon was "scattered," as foretold (Genesis 49:7).
- 2) Following the national campaigns that Joshua fought and won, Judges 1 reveals information about regional tribal battles, fought to drive remaining inhabitants out of the Promised Land. How thoroughly did Israel cleanse the land of these people groups (see Judges 1:19, 21, 27-36, 2:2-5)? The tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan (seven-and-a-half tribes) are named among those who did *not* completely drive the Canaanite/Amorite inhabitants out of the land. (Only nine-and-a-half tribes possessed land west of the Jordan and Simeon [one of the two not listed], by implication from verses 1-3, was included with the tribe of Judah.) The Lord had confronted the Israelites (apparently prior to Joshua's death [2:2-7]), about failing to break down the altars of these other people groups and entering into covenants with them. He had said He would no longer assist them in driving the former residents out of the land but would allow them to remain and become thorns and snares to Israel.
- 3) Judges 2:10-19 describes a cycle of apostasy (abandoning faith in God) that characterized Israel during the period of the Judges.
 - a) Use the verses listed to fill in the missing words:



- b) What does 2:10-19 reveal about God's anger toward the Israelites? God was angered by Israel's apostasy (abandonment of faith in Him) and idolatry (2:12-13). The Lord's anger caused Him to withdraw His hand of protection and divine enablement (2:14). The Lord's anger moved Him to thwart Israel's progress; He fought against them (2:15).

- c) What does 2:10-19 reveal about God’s mercy toward the Israelites? **The Lord was willing to deliver His people when they were in distress (2:16), because He had compassion on them (2:18).**
- d) Which behaviors of the Israelites, as described in 2:10-19, are typical of people in every era who neither “know the Lord nor what He has done” (2:10)? **They do evil (2:11), substitute lesser gods for the true, living God (2:11-12), tend to follow what others around them are doing (2:12), are quick to abandon positive influences or instruction (2:17), and “refuse to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways” (2:19).**
- e) How will you use what you learn from this cycle to intercede in prayer for yourself or others? **This information certainly leaves one humbled and keenly aware of our need for God’s mercy. It also gives some insight into the complexity of the relationship between human free will and God’s sovereign control and election: one cannot help themselves out of the bondage of human depravity (“refusal to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways”), yet responsibility for bondage and the sin that results is fully ours (2:12b-15). God is behind the scenes working alternately for and against us. He is angry about rebellion yet shows compassion and mercy. Such knowledge ought to move us to humbly ask God to work both for and against those who are in rebellion against Him so that they seek Him. The passage also evokes gratitude to the Lord for His gracious dealings with us and for rescuing us, since we cannot rescue ourselves. Personal sharing**

Judges 2 – 3: Causes of Israel’s Decline

- 4) What reasons did God give for allowing the other nations to be left in the land after Joshua’s death (Judges 2:20 – 3:6)? **To punish them for their apostasy (2:20-21), to test Israel’s faithfulness (2:22; 3:4), and to give Israel experience in warfare (3:2).**
- 5) See any text note in your Bible that clarifies the word translated “judge” (for example, in Judges 2:16). What insight about the nature of this office is given in Judges 2:16, 18, 3:9-10, 15-16, and 31? **The judges were primarily military leaders (deliverers). However, Judges 4:5 indicates the judge Deborah held court. Samuel, the last Judge of Israel, was also a prophet (1 Sa 3:20) and went on an annual circuit through Israel “judging in all those places” (1 Sa 7:16). Apparently, his leadership was spiritual, civil, and judicial.**
- 6) Israel had many enemies.
 - a) Which three enemies of the Israelites are named in Judges 3:7-31 and who were the first three judges the Lord raised up to deliver Israel from them? Include verse numbers. **Aram (northwest Mesopotamia) was Israel’s enemy (3:8) and Caleb’s nephew Othniel was Israel’s first judge (3:9). Moab was Israel’s enemy and Ehud the left-handed Benjamite was Israel’s second judge (3:12). Philistia was Israel’s enemy and Shagmar was Israel’s third judge (3:31).**
 - b) From Judges 4:2, 6:1-3, and 10:7, list the names of Israel’s other enemies in this period. **Israel’s other enemies in the time of the judges were Canaan (4:2), Midian (6:1), the Amalekites and other eastern peoples (6:3), and Amon (10:7).**
 - c) From what kind of personal, social, or spiritual enemies do you need to ask the Lord to deliver you today (see John 15:18, Romans 8:8, and 1 Peter 5:8)? **The believer’s greatest enemies are the world, the sin nature, and the devil. Personal sharing**

Judges 4 – 5: Deborah

- 7) Skim Judges 4-5. Why did Barak fail to receive the honor for defeating Sisera? **Barak said he would only obey the Lord’s command to lead Israel to war against the Canaanites if Deborah went with him (4:8). Deborah told Barak, “Because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman” (4:9). That woman was Jael (4:21). Barak put his confidence in Deborah instead of in the Lord.**

- 8) How does the picture Deborah paints at the conclusion of her hymn of victory (Judges 5:31) give insight into the key to spiritual success, the key that eluded Israel in the days of the judges (see also Deuteronomy 6:5, Joshua 22:5, Psalm 18:1, 119:132)? Deborah said, “May those who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength” (5:31 [some translations use the term “friend” rather than “those who love you”]). The social, political, and spiritual strength that the Israelites lacked during the 400-year period of the judges could only be found in love for (friendship with) God. Deborah, a prophetess (4:4), knew that Israel needed a new heart, one that truly loved the Lord.
- 9) Read Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Hebrews 8:7-13, focusing on the word “heart.” In consideration of these verses and what Deborah indicated at the end of her hymn (see question 8), how should we pray about persistent patterns of sin in our own lives? Write out your prayer. We are wise and scriptural when we ask God to change our hearts, to cause us to love Him more, and as a result, to find Him as our source of strength to overcome cycles of sin. We should pray, “God, cause me to love you far more than I love anything else.” Personal sharing

Judges 6 – 8: Gideon

- 10) According to Judges 6:14-15, what was Gideon’s main objection to leading the Israelites in battle against the oppressive Midianites? What do 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 have to say about this? Gideon was riddled with fear. He saw himself and his family as weak. Corinthians says God chooses weak people intentionally so they will not boast in themselves but in God. Paul said he boasted in his weakness, for when he was weak (in his own estimation), he was strong (in the Lord).
- 11) What first step toward courage did the Lord ask Gideon to take (Judges 6:25-30)? The Lord had Gideon start close to home. He had him tear down his father’s idol and altar and replace them with an altar to the Lord.
- 12) Judges 6:36-40 tells of Gideon requesting a miracle regarding a fleece he laid out overnight.
- Describe Gideon’s putting out of the fleece (Judges 6:36-40). Gideon asked the Lord for a very specific sign, involving a fleece, as proof the Lord would give him victory. If there was dew only on the fleece and the ground was dry, he would know God would use him to save Israel. After God answered him favorably, Gideon reversed the strategy, asking God to make the fleece dry and the ground wet. Again, God answered his request.
 - Was Gideon testing God because he did not know God’s will? If not, why might Gideon have tested God as he did? Gideon knew God’s will and had God’s promise of assistance before he put out the fleece. He was not putting out a fleece to discover God’s will. Since Gideon was so riddled with fear, it is possible he may have been looking for a way out of leading Israel in battle. He may have hoped to change God’s will with his test. However, since Gideon very likely had semi-pagan notions about God, he may have simply lacked the confidence that God was able to do what He promised and been looking for a demonstration of God’s power. If nothing else, Gideon was certainly weak and struggling and just needed confirmation.
 - Consider whether Gideon’s actions in creating this test are an example Christians should follow and record your thoughts. Gideon’s request for the miraculous is *not* a model for us to follow. God is not obligated to accommodate such requests, although apparently in this case, He was graciously willing. It is far better for us to ask God to give us the assurance we need without demanding the miraculous or anything too specific. Deuteronomy 6:16 tells us not to put the Lord to the test when we are unbelieving. We should never demand that God prove Himself. However, in taking his struggles to God in prayer, Gideon is a good model. When weak, we too should go to God in prayer.

- 13)** According to Judges 7, what lesson did the Lord teach fearful Gideon (and Israel) about human weakness? For what do you need to ask God to give you assurance and victory? **The Lord told Gideon He did not want Israel to boast that she had saved herself from the Midianites in her own strength. Through a process of whittling down Israel's soldiers until only 300 remained, God showed the Israelites that He was their deliverer. Human strength is not needed for victory. Having God fight our battles is the key to victory. Personal sharing**

Judges 8 – 9: Gideon's son Abimelech

- 14)** Read Judges 8:22-23, 29-31 with 9:1-6, 22-24, 42-57. What did Gideon's son Abimelech desire for himself? **Abimelech desired to be the people's ruler (king). The Israelites had offered king-ship to Abimelech's father Gideon (8:22-23). Gideon refused in word, declaring that the Lord was king, but his subsequent actions indicate that he assumed the position anyway (at least to some extent). He took a harem, instituted a system of worship in his hometown, and named a son "Abimelech" (which means "my father is king").**
- 15)** Compare Gideon's declaration about the Lord (Judges 8:23) with the Israelites' attitude toward the Lord in the period of the Judges (Judges 1-2; review your answers to questions 2-3, if necessary). Read Revelation 19:16. *Specifically* what will you change or do differently today in acknowledgment of Jesus' rightful lordship? **Personal sharing**