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Biblica Study Notes

Judges 1:1–3:6

The book of Judges continues the story of Israel recorded in the book of Joshua.

God had done many miracles when he gave Canaan to the Israelites. That is the main point of the book of Joshua.

Along with God's amazing deeds, the Israelites were supposed to work hard to possess the land. They were also supposed to stay faithful to God. But they didn't work as hard as they should have. And they weren't faithful. That is the main point of the book of Judges.

The angel of the Lord told the Israelites the evil things they had done. The people were sad about the evil things they had done. But they didn't stop doing them.

Judges describes the pattern of how the Israelites acted and what happened to them. This was the pattern of sin, suffering and salvation. First they sinned by turning away from God. This included worshipping false gods called Baal and Ashtoreth.

It also included marrying into Canaanite families and living as a community with them. This meant that the Israelites no longer lived as a kingdom of priests. They no longer lived as a holy nation.

Next the Israelites suffered. God brought judgement against them for breaking the Mount Sinai covenant. He allowed them to experience some of the covenant curses.

When this happened the Israelites repented and turned back to God. Then God brought salvation to his people (God's people) through certain leaders. These leaders were the 12 judges. The judges freed the Israelites from the power of their enemies.

Once they were saved, the Israelites sinned again by turning away from God. The book of Judges records the stories of this pattern happening again and again.

Judges 3:7–5:31

In Judges, the pattern of sin, suffering and salvation begins with certain words. These words state that the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the

Lord. These words are found six times in the book of Judges.

The first three times are in the stories of the judges Othniel, Ehud and Deborah. Their stories show something about how God works through people. Often God chooses leaders that people wouldn't expect him to choose. Each of these leaders was willing for God to work through them.

God used Othniel to save the Israelites from the king of Aram. God used Ehud to bring victory for the Israelites over Moab. Deborah was a prophet. She was full of wisdom and was faithful to God. God used Deborah, Barak and Jael to save the Israelites from a Canaanite king.

Some of the 12 judges led at the same time. This was the case for Shamgar. It isn't clear if he was an Israelite but he killed many Philistines. After the judges won victories in battle, the tribes in their area lived in peace. This happened for periods of 40 years.

Judges 6:1–9:57

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. These words are also found in the stories about the judges Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. Their stories show something about the people God works through.

Gideon, Jephthah and Samson didn't know God well or serve him faithfully. Yet God still worked through them to save his people from their suffering. A prophet had explained why the Israelites were being treated badly by the Midianites. It was because the Israelites had stopped worshipping only God. Yet Gideon blamed God for their suffering.

The Holy Spirit made Gideon able to lead a small army to destroy the Midianites. Gideon recognised that God is Lord and King. Yet Gideon led the Israelites to worship a gold object instead of God. Gideon recognised that God should be the only ruler in Israel. Yet his sons ruled over Shechem.

Abimelek even made himself king over the people of Shechem. Shechem was where the Israelites had committed themselves to the Mount Sinai covenant. That was in Joshua's time. But they were worshipping a god named Baal-Berith or El-Berith at Shechem instead.

In the Hebrew language the name of the god means lord of the covenant. This shows how the Israelites mixed their worship of God with worshipping Canaanite false gods. Both Abimelek and the people of Shechem were destroyed for their violent and evil deeds.

Judges 10:1–12:15

The judge Tola led in Ephraim. The judge Jair led in Gilead.

God wanted his people to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But they weren't doing that. The Israelites continued to worship the gods of the people groups around them. Because of this, the covenant curses came on them. The Philistines and the Ammonites treated them badly. God said he would no longer save the Israelites from their enemies. Yet he didn't want Israel to keep suffering. So he forgave them when they stopped worshipping false gods.

God saved the tribes east of the River Jordan from the Ammonites. The story of Jephthah shows how this happened. It also shows how the Israelites used Canaanite worship practices to worship God. Jephthah made a promise to God that he shouldn't have made. In Leviticus 5:4–6 and Leviticus 27:1–8 the Law of Moses explained how to stop such promises. But Jephthah kept his promise and killed his daughter.

Sacrificing children was one way that the Canaanites worshipped their false gods. Jephthah tried to use this evil practice to serve the true God. This story also shows the troubles between the tribes east and west of the River Jordan. There was war between the tribe of Ephraim and the tribes living in the Gilead area.

After Jephthah's time there were other judges. Ibzan was a judge in Bethlehem. Elon was a judge in the Zebulun area. And the judge Abdon led the Israelites in the hill country of Ephraim.

Judges 13:1–16:31

The Philistines treated the Israelites west of the River Jordan badly. The story of Samson shows how God saved the Israelites from them.

God chose a woman from the tribe of Dan who couldn't have children. He made her able to have a son. God had done something like this with Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel.

Samson was to be set apart for the Lord by his parents. He was to be a Nazirite for his entire life. God's Spirit gave Samson amazing strength. He was able to destroy many Philistines.

Yet Samson did many things that went against God and the Law of Moses. He didn't live the way Nazirites were supposed to live. And the way he treated women caused many problems. It even led to him losing his amazing strength.

When a Nazirite cut their hair, it showed that their promise to serve God was over. When Delilah cut Samson's hair, Samson was no longer set apart from other men. He didn't have his amazing strength anymore. The Philistines believed that this change was a mighty work of their god Dagon.

In his prayer Samson recognised that God is Lord and King. Then one last time God gave Samson his amazing strength back. This showed God's power and authority over the false god Dagon.

Judges 17:1–18:31

The story about Micah and the people of Dan shows something about Israel. Families and tribes in Israel weren't living as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They made statues from things they had set apart to God. Then they worshipped these statues as gods.

Micah, his family and a Levite from the family line of Moses did this. So did the entire tribe of Dan.

The tribe of Dan didn't obey God's instructions about the land God gave them. They didn't drive out the Philistines. Instead the tribe moved away and attacked people who had done them no harm.

The book of Judges says that in those days Israel didn't have a king. The hope was that a king who served God faithfully could help the families and tribes. They needed leaders who helped them stay faithful to God's covenant.

Judges 19:1–21:25

The story about the Levite's concubine shows something about the 12 tribes of Israel.

They weren't living as a holy nation. Judges recorded that the people did anything they thought was right. This led to treating women in terrible ways. It led to making promises and decisions that caused harm. It led to protecting people who did evil things.

The Israelites weren't following God's ways. They were living like the Canaanites. They were supposed to destroy the Canaanites. Instead, they destroyed one another in civil war.

Twice more the book of Judges recorded that in those days Israel didn't have a king. The hope was that a king who loved God and obeyed him could help the tribes. The Israelites needed leaders who helped them do what God taught them was right.