

March 16

Judges 1 & Some Joshua

Hey there! My name is Alex Ehly. I am the high school ministry intern here at Christ Community. I am excited for the opportunity to lead the accelerators for the next few days as we crack open one of my favorite books in the Old Testament in Judges.

We opened up the reading with the burial of Joshua, Eleazar and the bones of Joseph, essentially seeing a passing of the baton from one era to the next. Today we returned to the history of Israel as we dove into the book of Judges. We read the first chapter of the book of Judges, as well as a few supporting passages in Joshua, which sets the stage historically for the remainder of the Book of Judges by describing Israel's occupation of the Promised Land in the days after Joshua's death.

The main body of the Book, which we will dive more into in the next couple of days, addresses the work of six major judges: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. We will become familiar with each of these characters as we continue on in the book.

For a lot of people, the book of Judges is unfamiliar territory. Most of us had some prior knowledge of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, of Moses and Joshua and even Caleb – as popular Sunday School characters, if from nothing else. But characters like Othniel and Ehud and Jephthah and others who we will be introduced to shortly are a bit less familiar to us. For that reason I want to encourage you today to begin a list of the judges and other significant people and places we will run across in the Book of Judges. A great place to put it, would be in your Project 4:4 notebook if you have one. It would also be helpful for you to take some notes on each to remember who they are!

Upon reading the title of the book, it's easy to assume the main characters were probably legal judges who settled land and property disputes, however that isn't necessarily the case. Although we will see some of that as we move through the pages of this book. Predominately however, the "judges" were deliverers – or types of saviors -- raised up by the Spirit of God to accomplish the redemption that His people were in need of. As we read about these different human judges -- (nearly every one of which had some outstanding defect almost as striking as his strength) -- we need to keep in mind that the real judge of Israel is always God. He is the one who gives them over into the hands of their oppressors; He is the one who raises up deliverers; it is His spirit that comes upon the judges and equips them to do their jobs.

In your reading today of the first chapter to the Book of Judges, here are some of the things I hope that you noticed. First of all, I am certain you noticed that over and over again, seven times in chapter 1 alone, we are told that the tribes of Israel failed to completely drive out the inhabitants of Canaan before them. Caleb and

his family succeeded, but the tribal groups failed. Judah took the hill country, but did not fully conquer the plain. Benjamin failed to drive out the Jebusites, who lived around Jerusalem.

(By the way, even though Jerusalem was burned and sacked by the armies of Judah, it was not settled by the Jews. The native Jebusites resettled it, and remained in that city until the days of King David. Then David ended up conquering it and making it the capital of Israel.) Ephraim and Manasseh, Zebulun and Asher, Naphtali and Dan -- tribe after tribe failed to accomplish what God had told them to do, and what they themselves had pledged that they would do.

Knowing that they failed. Was this failure due to inability or disobedience? I feel that the account itself makes the answer pretty obvious. It was disobedience and not inability. We know that for two reasons. First, we know it, because in the case of Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun and Naphtali, we are told explicitly that the native inhabitants were overpowered and forced into labor. If you have the ability to enslave a nation, you would obviously have the ability to drive it out if you wanted to. When Judah burned and sacked Jerusalem, the Jebusites could have been driven out -- but they weren't. We also know that it was "disobedience not inability" because from Genesis to Revelation we cannot find one single instance of God requiring anything of anyone that He was unwilling to give them the ability to do. If God requires, God enables. As we see time in time again in scripture and in life.

"A lack of adequate strength was clearly not Israel's problem. Divine resources were readily available ... The choice was made to disregard God's command and seek other roles for their new servants to fill. They reasoned that their adversaries could carry wood, draw water, build houses and tend to children. They could keep them busy enough. Their reply to Jehovah was in effect, "Isn't this a better arrangement? We haven't been so cruel as to drive them away from land and homes. Instead we have created legitimate reasons for them to remain here with us." What they were actually saying was that God's plan had been improved upon. There was a better way

...and that pretty well sums up what was happening here.

One thing we need to be very clear about is the fact that every single problem or catastrophe that Israel faced during this very long period was directly tied and traced back to the incomplete obedience of the first generation of Israelites after Joshua!! That, my friends, is a very sobering thought. If we fail to completely obey all that God gives us to do, then I wonder what life will be like for the next generations who arrive in our churches, or families and in our country.

As we go throughout today and each day - may we be sensitive to the voice of God and empowered by His Spirit to completely obey that which He has called us to accomplish.