**The Judges of Israel**

God promised Abraham that, when the time was right, He would drive out the wicked inhabitants of Canaan and give the land to Abraham’s descendants. Over the next 400 years, God set about carrying out His promises. Abraham’s grandson, Israel, moved the family to Egypt where they grew into a great nation. God led them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and gave them a law that was exclusively theirs. He established a priesthood to provide the spiritual guidance they needed. Finally, God gave the Israelites the land of Canaan under the capable leadership of Joshua.

Alas, when Joshua and his generation died, “there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD” (Judges 2:10). When Moses gave the Law to the people, he instructed them that God’s commandments should be on their hearts. “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when your rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). Obviously, they failed miserably in this regard.

Judges chapter 2 offers an excellent synopsis of God’s dealings with His people during this period of their history. As long as they were faithful to Him, they were blessed with safety and prosperity. When they turned their backs on God, they suffered at the hands of their enemies. When they cried out for help, He raised up judges to deliver them from oppression, but they seemed bent on an endless cycle of unfaithfulness and regret.

Where were the priests? Were they negligent in their spiritual leadership? Were there faithful priests who went unheeded by a rebellious people? One of the last judges was a priest named Eli, but what of the century prior? The Scriptures simply don’t tell us, but the fact is, God had provided everything the Israelite nation would need to be materially blessed and spiritually successful.

Any nation could have a king. They had the King of kings and Lord of lords as the monarch of their kingdom. They had a written law to guide their steps and a priesthood to administer it and to facilitate their worship to God. They had judges to lead them when circumstances warranted.

God’s choices of judges were as varied as they were effective. Othniel was a seasoned warrior, the son-in-law of the famed soldier / spy, Caleb. Gideon was a nobody that God made into a courageous strategist. Deborah was already a prophetess and judge, but when threats arose, she was willing to lead the Israelites into the heat of battle against the Canaanites. Many were chosen in the prime of their lives, but Samson was chosen by God before he was born.

One conclusion is clear: the failings of the Israelite people were theirs alone. God had provided everything they needed to be happy and successful. But before we get too judgmental, we need to look in the mirror. God’s divine power “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). He has given us apostles and prophets (in the form of the inspired Scriptures), evangelists, pastors and teachers to aid in our growth and spiritual development (Ephesians 4:11-13). When we fail to serve God faithfully, what is our excuse?

The history of Israel’s judges was written for our instruction (Romans 15:4). We should learn humility in our weakness and find courage in our complete trust in our Savior. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

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