

The Book of Judges

Instructor: Antipas Desai

Time: Saturdays 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET

Class Size: No limit on the number of participants

Course Description:

A woman who drives a tent peg through the temple of an enemy general into the ground. Gideon's fleece. A man kills a young lion with his bare hands, then picks up a donkey's jawbone and strikes one thousand men, and finally, having had both eyes gouged out, throws his entire weight against the two pillars of a house, thereby killing himself and more people than he had ever killed in his lifetime. We may read the book of Judges out of morbid curiosity, savoring the heroic exploits of valorous men, intertwined with the frequent gory and unsavory details of their narrative, almost like a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale or an Edgar Allen Poe horror story. Yet there is much more than the sensational and the macabre in this book. Indeed, the book of Judges does lead us step by step into Israel's darkest hour, not sparing the grisly details, but, more than that, underscores the reason for, and graphically describes, the failure of God's people to lay hold of the promises that God had given them. Shortly before the death of Joshua, who led the children of Israel into Canaan, the promised land, God told him that there still remained very much land to possess. Joshua divided the land into lots as an inheritance for the twelve tribes of Israel. In order for each tribe, excepting the tribe of Levi, to possess their inheritance, it was necessary to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The book of Judges describes Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites, and instead to mingle and live with them, thereby learning to worship false gods and adopt the idolatrous manners and customs of the inhabitants. Such a picture may mirror the condition of the church. However, in the midst of apostasy and unfaithfulness, God never forsakes His people. He raised up judges, men and women, to bring about spiritual revival. With the exception of Deborah, and later Samuel, these were not judges appointed to adjudicate in civil or criminal cases or disputes, like Moses, but merely as military leaders and deliverers. Such judges were used by God and acted by faith, as Hebrews 11:32 tells us, resulting in the enemies of God's people being subdued and the people of Israel being brought back to the worship of God. Nevertheless, such revivals did not last for long. As we will see, the vessels that God raised up and used hardly allowed themselves to be touched and worked on by God. Many of them relied on the gift or the faith that God had given them, rather than on God Himself. As a result, neither their nature, nor the nature of the people, was much changed. Such a tragic failure may mirror our condition today as believers, and is a lesson to us to seek to know God's ways rather than merely His acts. We may seek to serve God and work for Him by using the gift that God has given us, but God, in His mercy

and compassion, desires to break our vessel and touch our gift so we can know Him and glorify Him alone, and not our overcoming ability and strength.

This is a one year (two semester) course, each semester (Fall and Winter) comprising nine weeks. We will examine the first ten chapters during the Fall Semester, and the last eleven chapters during the Winter Semester.

Syllabus (week by week)

Following the chapters in the book of Judges:

1. Introduction and Chapter 1: A positive condition of theocracy where God is the king of the people; the positive response of the people of Israel, after the death of Joshua, to inquire of the Lord, and to possess the good land, and also the negative response in their inability to drive out the Canaanites, thus setting the scene for the ever recurring cycle of serving the Lord faithfully, falling into, and becoming enslaved to, sin and idolatry, crying out to the Lord in repentance, God raising up a judge and delivering His people.
2. Chapter 2: The death of Joshua and his own generation who knew the Lord and the work He had done in Israel; the emergence of another generation who did not know the Lord, their unfaithfulness, God's discipline in leaving their enemies in the good land; God's compassion in raising up judges to deliver His people.
3. Chapter 3: Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar, three judges raised up by God to deliver His people.
4. Chapter 4: God's deliverance through Deborah and Barak.
5. Chapter 5: The song of Deborah the prophetess and Barak.
6. Chapter 6: God calls Gideon, and Gideon's response.
7. Chapter 7: The test of the soldiers' manner of drinking water, and God's reduction in the number of 32,000 soldiers to only 300 soldiers.
8. Chapter 8: Gideon's 300 men, a type of the overcomers, "faint yet pursuing;" Gideon's failure and his death.
9. Chapters 9-10: Abimelech's (Gideon's son) ambition for power and conspiracy, God's discipline, and yet another cycle of sin and idolatry, the crying out to God by the people, God's severe response, the people's positive response to forsake idolatry, and the raising up of another judge for deliverance.

Course Objective:

The book of Judges mirrors our Christian experience. It is difficult to realize the extent of the degradation of God's people in the Old Testament, who are a type of the church today. Many refer to this period as the dark history of Israel. The goal of this course is to bring us to realize that we are no different. Each of the propensities of the children of Israel

(idolatry, fornication, worldliness, unfaithfulness) is in us. God desires to deal with us, to purge us and to conform us to the image of His Son, that He alone would be the meaning, object and goal of our life. He is a jealous God, and brooks no rival. He will judge us and discipline us, even as He raised up judges to deliver His people, through His word, the believers around us, and even our environment. The nations and their kings that He raised up in the Old Testament were all instruments in His hand to discipline and perfect His children. Today is no different. All the nations, authorities and powers are ordained by Him to sanctify us, to cleanse us by the washing of the water in His word, in order to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Every character, their speaking and actions in the book of Judges, and their consequences, are a warning to us to examine ourselves in God's light, and allow Him to expose and purify us. May we respond to Him and give Him the ground to make us wholly His.

Resources:

The Book of Judges, The Bible

Class Structure:

Lecture with a 10–15 minute question/discussion period

Homework:

Participants will be expected to invest 30 minutes each week in reading assigned verses and giving short answers to assigned questions. Group work is encouraged. Some questions may ask participants to share their thoughts in the discussion period, thus facilitating group discussion.

The timing and content of this class has been specially considered in view of participation of saints from Africa. For those from Africa who wish to join, please register through the church in Accra or the church in Kampala. Even though this class has been designed with Africa in view, all saints from everywhere are welcome to join them. All other registration is still through this website.