

Judges 07-12-28a

This is Friday, the 28th of December, 2007. We begin a new study tonight in the book of Judges, which is in a way a continuation of our Friday night study in the book of Joshua. Let's take a moment as we begin to focus our concentration, avail ourselves of the presence and the ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

Shall we pray? Father, we recognize that our lives only have meaning as they are a part of your plan and purpose. We are blessed and we are fulfilled and we are productive when we are incorporated into the positive side of your accomplishments and your purposes in this world. We thank you for the opportunity to be so designated and so called.

We thank you for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ that makes that potential and that opportunity possible for us. And we pray that as we study your word tonight, that each of us will find the truths and the principles and the promises and the doctrines that are before us this evening pertinent and applicable to every aspect of our life in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, we find ourselves in the historical study of the nation of Israel having emerged from Egypt, having been delivered from bondage, having spent 40 years in the wilderness, switching out the generation, being regenerated, if you will, in the wilderness so that it is a new generation that goes into the land under Joshua. We saw the three parts of that book, which was the infiltration of the land, the conquest of the land, the appropriation or taking possession, and then the settlement phase, which is the closing section of Joshua.

The book of Judges is a continuation of that third section, the occupation of the land. This was Joshua's concern in his last words to the elders and the officers of Israel. What would they do? How would they behave after his departure? And he enjoined them.

He made them pledge and commit to faith and obedience. We saw this in recent weeks. Because he well knew, just as the Apostle Paul did in Acts, when he met with the Ephesian elders, he said, wolves are going to come in amongst the flock, and it's your job as shepherds to provide leadership and provide protection.

So the book of Judges picks up and is going to actually back up and cover some of the same ground as the closing chapters of Joshua in a slightly different way, and take us forward in the historical narrative of Israel's occupation of the land. We'll take a few points of introduction just to set the framework for the study of the book of Judges. The name is actually not very appropriate for this book.

The English name Judges comes from the Latin assignment for this book, which was Liber Iudicum, I-U-D-I-C-U-M. And this goes back to the Greek Septuagint name, Kritai, K-R-I-T-A-I, and a Kritos, or critic, was a judge. The word of God is a critic, a Kritos, of the thoughts and intents of the heart, a judge.

And so naturally, being named by the Greeks and by the Latin-speaking church fathers as Iudicum, or Judges, it has taken on this name. These are literal translations from the Hebrew name Sophatim, S-O-P-H-E-T-I-M. Sophatim.

This is the first book in the Hexateuch. We had Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and then Joshua. And these books, particularly the Pentateuch, the first five books, they get their name from the first few Hebrew words that are used.

Genesis in Hebrew is Barashit, in the beginning, and so on. Their Hebrew titles come from that. But this book takes its name from the perceived activity of the main characters.

You have Gideon and Samson and the other main characters, and they are thought to be judges. However, this idea of judges, at least the English word, is misleading, and here's why. First of all, none of the individuals that we associate their stories with this book, or their stories are told in this book, are identified as a judge, per se, as a sophet.

The title, the judge, is only used once in the book, and Jephthah speaks it in reference to God, in reference to Yahweh. He calls Yahweh the judge, the sophet. So, why do we call this book Judges, and what does it mean? Because it talks about the fact that these guys judged Israel for 40 years, they judged Israel for so long, they did this, that, and the other.

Well, the root itself, Shaphat, to judge, doesn't even appear in many of the book's major sections. It's not in the first chapter, or the first part of the second chapter. It's not in chapters 18 through 20.

It's only in the last half of 17, the first half of 21. And it doesn't fit exclusively to the time period covered by this book, because it is used to cover the activity also. The word Shaphat is used of Eli, and it is used of Samuel, which of course, their stories are in the book of 1 Samuel.

So, we need to, I say all of that to say, we really need to get a better grip on what does it mean to Shaphat? What is a Shophet, or a judge? Because it doesn't really mean what the English word judge means. We think of a judge being in a courtroom and issuing judicial decisions, and that's not what the word means. These individuals function in ways other than the judicial role.

And we find this out, this book, by the way, in the Old Testament, in fact, in the whole Bible, probably has the longest introduction of any book. Now, my introduction is not going to be the longest, so don't panic. But this book's introductory section is one of the longest of any book in the Bible, in my opinion, anyway.

Because it extends all the way through chapter 2, and some people think even into chapter 3, before it really gets going in its main content, as we'll see when I give you the outline. But the summary of the book is found in chapter 2. And I'm going to have you, oddly enough, turn forward to chapter 2, verses 16 through 19. This is really the distillation of the function of the content and the purpose of this book.

Chapter 2, verses 16 through 19. And you'll find here the author saying that Israel is... And it kind of starts back up in verse 11. The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

They served the Baals. These are the lords or the gods of the local Canaanites. They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

And they followed other gods, from among the gods of the people who were all around them. And they bowed down to them. You remember I covered extensively and repeatedly the fourfold idea associated with God or other gods.

I'll give you two seconds to remember those four functions. That's a half second for each function. Ready, set, go.

Take oaths in His name, remember His name, serve Him, and bow down to Him. Those are all aspects of worship. Watch for those when you see references to God or to gods, small g, plural, as you see here.

They followed other gods. They served other gods. They bowed down to other gods.

They forsook the Lord God of their fathers. The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. In verse 14, so He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them.

And He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity. As the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them, and they were greatly distressed.

Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges, shofotim, who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but played the harlot with other gods and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked.

In obeying the commandments of the Lord, they did not do so. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

It came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he said, Because this nation has transgressed my covenant, which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded my voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel whether they will keep the ways of the Lord to walk in them as their fathers kept them or not.

Therefore the Lord left those nations without driving them out immediately, nor did he deliver them into the hand of Joshua." Well, that is a summary. That section basically tells you, in a nutshell, the story of the next 350 years that are going to be covered in this book of Judges. Now, in this story of disobedience, apathy, faithlessness, departure from God, oppression by foreign powers, and then deliverance, we don't really think of a judicial role.

These men are not setting up a little courtroom and saying, Okay, bailiff, bring in the next plaintiff. So the word judge is not really apropos. And what we find here is that the key word in this account is the function found in verse 16.

Look back up at verse 16 of chapter 2. It says, And when the Lord raised up judges, who did what? Who delivered them. And this is the verb yasha, Y-A-S-H-A. It is the root from which we get Yeshua, Hoshea.

All of that family of names come from yasha, which means to deliver, to save. And we find in these verses, verses 16 through 19 specifically, what does it say? Nevertheless, where did these judges get their authority to deliver? The Lord, Yahweh, raises them up. So they didn't appoint themselves.

They didn't run for office. There wasn't an election. God appointed them.

God called them. God raised them up to deliver. So the source of their authority is Yahweh.

They are divinely commissioned. And it puts you in mind of some other times in Israel's history where somebody comes in at the right place at the right time. You think of the apostle Paul, Saul, who's got all of this Old Testament knowledge, and he's held in reserve, as it were, during the life of Christ, during the career of the disciples and so on.

He's a young man. He's around. He's sitting at the feet of his mentor.

And then when the time is right, he comes to faith on the Damascus Road, and he becomes the apostle as one born out of time. And he's the right man at the right place in God's economy. He is raised up to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

You think of Esther. Who knows, Mordecai says, but that you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Well, right away, before we go any further, think about this.

Each of us, you, fill in your name here, God carefully selected the time of your birth. God carefully selected and determined the place of your birth, the family with which you would grow up, the parents or lack of parents, or whatever the situation was that engendered your youthful experiences and brought you into the world as an adult. All of that was appointed by God.

And sometimes people look back and say, I had a wonderful, happy childhood. Other people look and say, well, you were really born with a wonderful silver spoon in your mouth. And other people say, you know, I didn't have a very happy childhood.

I really would rather look forward than back. It was kind of a hard time. People didn't fulfill their responsibilities.

Some of them weren't there, or maybe somebody died. People have lots of strange and various experiences in growing up. Some of us don't start out as children with faith in God, and we make mistakes, and sometimes grievous mistakes.

And we look back and we say, oh, I'm not proud of that at all. God knew when He designated the time and the place and the circumstances of our birth. He knew all of that.

He knew that there would be a chain of cause and effect. He knew that there would be environmental factors. He knew that there would be decision points.

And He knew the decision points at which we would fail and at which other people would fail. And He incorporated it into His plan for those who love God, for those who are the called. These become valuable, necessary components that make us who we are and that form a part of that equipping and preparing for every good work.

We know things and we understand things by experience that God uses. The classic example that comes probably to everyone's mind is Joseph, the son of Jacob. Who would raise their hand and say, oh, yes, sell me into slavery? Oh, yes, have me falsely accused and thrown into prison for several years.

Oh, yes, have me ripped away from home and hearth and my father and everything else and have all of these experiences and languish seemingly with no hope for long periods of time. But he waited and he watched and he was faithful. And when he becomes the vizier and the second to Pharaoh in the land and when it's time for his brothers to come down there with their hats in their hand, as it were, pleading for subsistence and the lives of their families and so on, he understands a lot.

And he becomes the model and the shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is the Savior of His brethren even though His brethren have bloodied His coat. Joseph has the privilege of prefiguring the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you imagine a greater honor in eternity than to have your life so directly reflect the character and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ? Joseph has that privilege because he didn't look at his circumstances and his assigned path through life as a horrible tragedy.

He trusted God. He trusted Him in the good times. He trusted Him in the bad times.

And he was patient and he endured and he waited. And God wrapped up his life in an extraordinary way. And you look at the way Joseph finishes up.

And even in his death, even his corpse becomes a testimony to Israel. For decade after decade after decade when they fall into oppression and slavery and bondage, Joseph's bones sit there as a testimony and as a witness. And the children of Israel carry them through the wilderness

for 40 years and take them into the land and bury them up there in Shechem.

And it's a witness and a testimony. Long after he's gone, his life is still a witness and a testimony. God has a purpose for everything.

And we don't have to look back with chagrin and regret. We look ahead with hope and faith and recognize that God works all things together for good. That's going to be a test for the nation of Israel in this period of time that's going to be covered in the book of the Judges because this is going to be a time of great failure and great hardship and cycles of ups and downs.

It's going to be like Gilgal all the way through, up and down and up and down and cycling, cycling, cycling all the way through. And yet you would think, well, God would find this somewhat embarrassing as people keep failing and keep forgetting who they are and they keep going after foreign gods. God could have easily swept this part of their history under the rug.

And yet he didn't. It's in one of the more prominent books of the Old Testament. Judges bridges the gap between the glory days of Moses and the glory days of David.

Judges fills almost completely that gap. This and the several chapters of 1 Samuel take you from Yeshua to David. And God doesn't leave any of it out.

It's ugly. It's embarrassing. But God puts it there.

Why? Because even these failures he works together for good. Now, as the apostle Paul says, well, then shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid. We don't want to say, well, I can just be laissez-faire because God will just work everything together for good.

We don't want to be the negative example. The people in this account suffer horribly. But it is written down for our instruction so that we cannot follow the same pattern of unbelief.

You read the first few chapters in Hebrews. And the author there, who I think is Paul, goes to great pains to say, these things were written down to warn us so that we should not fail to enter into that rest. So this is the warning.

Many times you see these things on the news. Here's what not to do. Here's somebody who failed to get the gas completely shut off and it pulled and blew their house up and everybody died.

And we look at that and we say, wow, I'm going to go check all my gas valves and make sure nothing's leaking. You read about the thief who was trying to get in and came down through the chimney and got stuck and nobody found him for a couple of weeks and he died. And you say, well, if I'm going to be a thief, I'm not coming down through the chimney.

I'm going to learn from that negative example. We try not to repeat the mistakes of others and their warnings and negative examples. And that's what we're going to have in many cases in

the book of Judges.

But on the positive side, God, in the midst of all of this failure, with nothing by way of recommendation, nothing by way of deserving or meriting deliverance, God's people cry out to Him. They messed up. They made bad decisions.

They followed after other gods. They got themselves into this predicament. But there is no excuse.

God would be completely justified in just wiping them out as a people. But they do one thing right. When they really get in distress, they look to Him and they cry out to Him.

There's no redeeming quality. They have nothing to bring to God. They have nothing to offer.

Well, you know, we really are talented and vigorous and really wonderful people. They're terrible. They're horrible.

They're faithless. They're fickle. They're shallow.

They're indifferent. They are blasphemous. But they do one thing right.

When everything really goes into the handbasket, they cry out to the God of their fathers. And every time they do, He hears them. Every time they really get in a bind, as soon as they turn to Him with a genuine plea for deliverance, God responds.

And it's a wonderful picture of grace, over and over and over again. The Lord raises up these Shoftim to deliver them. And the Lord is with the judge.

It doesn't even say the Lord is with the people. The Lord is disgusted with the people, but He'll raise up a judge. He'll find one reasonably faithful man, even if it's only a Samson, even if it's only a Gideon, even if it's kind of the best of the worst.

And He will be with that man, and He will use that man at a pivotal time and a pivotal place to deliver the people. And the word there for deliverance is Yashah. And when you turn that into a noun, how do you make a noun out of a verb in Hebrew? What's the first thing you do? Put an M on the beginning, remember? If you want to turn Shafat, to judge, into the noun justice, you put an M in front of it, and it becomes Mishpat.

Mish-sha-fat. Mishpat. Mishpat is the noun in Hebrew for justice.

So if you want to turn the word Yashah into a noun for salvation, or for a savior, it is Moshiah. Moshiah. You put an M in front of it, and the Y kind of gets absorbed there, because it's a weak letter.

A Yod at the beginning in Hebrew is always kind of weak, just like an N is. A Nun or a Yod will kind of get absorbed. And so you have Moshiah.

And this is a very interesting word, because God loves a good word play. And who was the first deliverer for Israel? Moshi. In Hebrew, Moses' name is M-S-H-H.

Moshi. And actually, Muse, or M-U-S-E in Egyptian, in the Egyptian language, means son. And it's likely that Moses' name, it says, one drawn from the water.

And that's from Moshiah, and there's a derivation that way. But it's likely that this was... People in Old Testament days, they didn't have TV, they didn't have radio, they didn't have big, thick war and peace novels and things. And so they liked to play games with words, and they liked alliteration.

They liked... Even today, there are these little clever word plays that go on. And so, the Egyptian word, Muse, means son. And when the princess finds the baby floating in the basket, she says, oh, Muse.

And then, Moshi is what the handmaiden says, because he's drawn from the water. And so all of these things intermix in his name. And yet, he is also the Moshiah, because he is the deliverer.

He is the savior. It's a different set of consonants. Because now, for Yashah, when you put an M in front, you have maim, and then you have waw, or the O, and then the SH, and then you can stick an ending on.

And so, Moshi, and Muse, and Moshiah, all reflect different aspects of what Moses did. These judges are going to do many deliverances, because the people of Israel in the land have returned in their attitude to Egypt, and so they return in their circumstances to Egypt. And they need a Moshi to deliver them.

And time and again, God says, okay, you're a generation that didn't see the ten plagues. You didn't see the crossing of the Red Sea. You don't remember the days in the wilderness.

So I'm going to send you another Moshi. And he's going to come and give you a mini-deliverance that harks back to the great Moshi, the great Mose, the son who brought you forth, and with whom you were baptized in the Red Sea. And so there are many layers of meaning going on in the function and the efforts of these judges.

And rather than calling this the book of the judges, or the book of the Shoftim, really, it ought to be called the book of the deliverers, or the book of the governors, because they do two things. They do the Yashah, to deliver. The Lord raised up judges who delivered them.

But Shafat ends up meaning not so much a judicial function, as a governing function. And we see this when we look at the use of the word Shafat. When you aim it at the local population, it means to judge internal affairs.

Let's settle a dispute. You came and you're arguing with your neighbor about where your land ends and his begins. So the Shafat might make a judicial decision.

But in an external situation, where you've got someone coming in from the outside, outside the nation of Israel, the Shafat becomes the military leader, or the governor, or the militia commander. And so he's sort of a governor-commander authority. And it's a non-judicial function.

And you find this out, the use of the word Shafat, for example, in 1 Samuel chapter 8 and verse 5. Now you think about the book of 1 Samuel. And you know that in the early chapters, it's the story of Samuel. And then when you get to chapter 8, 9, and 10, along in there, it becomes about Saul.

And then when you get over to 15, 16, 17, you have Goliath, and then David comes on the scene. And the last half of the book is all about David, right? Well, so think about it. 1 Samuel 8, this is right about the time that people are getting sick of Samuel.

And they say, well, you know, his sons don't walk in his ways, and so on. We want a king. Give us a king.

So in 1 Samuel chapter 8, verse 5, the people say to Samuel, Look, you're old. Boy, do we hate to hear that. Are you going to get a positive response when somebody walks up and says, Hey, you're old.

But that's what they do. Look, you're old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to shafat us like the nations.

Now, what do the kings do for the nations? Do they hold court and have plaintiffs and defendants and lawyers and render verdicts? Shafat means to govern, to lead, to represent. It's a much broader term. And judge, in English, doesn't really comprehend those functions.

And the king, at various times, is the deliverer and the savior of his nation. He's the guy that takes charge when the chips are down. Make us a king to judge us like the nations.

Shafat. And so the idea here, during the period of the judges then, is as each of these individuals comes up to deliver or to save Israel, they're going to do it through an exercise of authority, not necessarily judicial. Many of these you can very easily see that they had nothing to do with settling disputes or deciding cases or distributing punishment or anything else.

They simply took charge in a time of crisis and were leaders. So this is the book of the Savior Leaders. That's really the best title you could give this.

And it's based directly out of this passage in 2.16. The Lord raised up leaders who saved them. Leaders who delivered them. Governors who made good things happen for them.

Delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Well, that's a reasonably good summary and introduction to this book. As I mentioned earlier, it's going to detail the days of occupation of Israel before the monarchy.

And they still have this mopping up that they're supposed to be doing with the Canaanites. And there's various ways that scholars deal with this and you'll run across it when you read articles and hear things about this period in Israel's history. Because we as God-fearing, Bible-believing, conservative, fundamental Christians believe that when the Bible says in Kings that Solomon dedicated the temple 480 years after Israel left Egypt, and he's doing that in the 9-somethings B.C., that means the Exodus took place in 1440 or 1445 along in there.

And we believe that that's when the Exodus took place. But that is not the prevailing view. It is a minority view.

Many liberal modern scholars just poo-poo that and say, no way, they've got a lot of issues that we could talk about at another time. But what they try to figure out is what really happened. The book of Joshua can't necessarily be taken at face value.

So there are three prevailing theories. I just want to familiarize you with this so that when you read an article, when you see something in Christianity Today, or hear an article, or see a thing on educational TV, National Geographic and some of these other discovery channels, we'll do Bible-related specials. And you will hear these viewpoints.

You will at least have a frame of reference to say, ah, this is view B. Or this is view A. Or this is view C. And you'll know what camp they fall into and a little bit about why they believe this. So there are several different camps. I'll give you the three main ones.

How did there come to be Israel in the land of Canaan? Well, one is, of course, the violent conquest interpretation. And this is, you know, American conservative Christian scholarship has always held Moses led the people on for 40 years. Joshua brought them into the land.

It was a violent conquest. Southern campaign, northern campaign. Walls of Jericho.

Hail storms. Slaughter far and wide. Wiping out the Hivites and the Hittites and the Arkites and all the other ites.

That's the violent conquest interpretation. And so then by the time you get to, this was a sudden incursion. It was a military incursion.

They took it by force. They burned Hazor. They burned these other towns.

Jericho got knocked to the ground. And so Judges then shows the period of consolidation after this violent incursion. And archaeology properly interpreted and properly understood supports this view.

There are burn layers in many cities in Canaan that correspond. If you can fix the weird goofed up chronology, they correspond exactly to the time of the conquest. But many scholars think, well, this is just too simplistic.

It can't be that simple that you could just read Joshua and say, oh, that's how it happened. So

they have these other alternative views. So one of the main ones is that there was independent migration and settlement by separate tribal groups.

There were just some cat and dog groups, Bedouin living out there, and they all just kind of migrated in. They were following the flocks and herds, and the grass was a little greener on the other side of the Jordan. They came in.

They settled in the lowlands and sort of indigenous festooning like mushrooms. They just sort of grew up and, hey, here we are. Let's get together and form a nation.

So over an extended period of time, they sort of filtered in, and they weren't necessarily related, and they didn't come from Egypt. They just appeared out of the traffic like the streak. Well, there's another view that says you had to be around in the 80s to understand that, and you have to know who Ray Stevens is.

The second view of these alternative views is gradual, peaceful penetration in search of pasturage. The occupation of Palestine occurred gradually as nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes moved into unsettled regions in search of pasture. Initially, they were peaceful with the people that lived there, but conflicts arose later at the end of the period of the judges, and as the tribes began to move up into the foothills, the hill country, and they got into the plains and river valleys, they united around the worship of Yahweh, first at Shechem and then at Shiloh, and they sort of adopted this religion, and the religion kind of united these groups that came in.

The difference between that and the first view is that in the first view, instead of nomads looking for pasturage, there were just these little groups that were kind of drifting around looking for a home. They came in and occupied one place and another, and they each had their own little conquest narrative. Well, we moved into Hebron, and we took it.

Oh, well, we moved into Jebus, and we took it. Well, we moved in up here at Dan and Beersheba or wherever, and we took these places, and as they later sort of confederated, they merged all of their conquest tales into this grand story of a united nation coming in. So it doesn't have the agricultural piece so much as a compilation of small, minor military conquests.

The second one is the agricultural view. They were goat herds and stuff looking for pasture, and so then the third one is the funniest to me, which is the internal revolt and class warfare view, and this is straight out of Marx. There was a guy, what was his name? Gottwald, G-O-T-T-W-A-L-D.

Gottwald is a big Marxist, and so I just give you this as an example of how your persuasions can color your interpretations. He's a Marxist, so he looks at it, and he says, well, Israel came as a revolt of the peasants against the overlords. You've heard of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and all that.

Well, he says, you know, the peasants are revolting, and there were overlords and city-state kings and so on, and the peasants became numerous, and they sort of overthrew them, and it

might have been initiated by slave labor captives who escaped from Egypt and had this worship of Yahweh in their religion, and they came, and they were the rabble-rousers, and they got all the peasants riled up and overthrew the existing, but they were already indigenous peasants. Well, in reality, none of these have anything other than theory and hypothesis and imagination behind them. All of the archaeological evidence that is not an argument from silence, people will say, well, we find no evidence of a great mass of people wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years.

That's an argument from silence. The fact that you haven't found it doesn't mean it isn't there. It just means you haven't found it.

They didn't think the great Hittite empire existed for many, many years, and then suddenly they found, you know, archaeological evidence, and there was egg all over the face of a lot of guys who had poo-pooed the existence of the Hittite empire, and come to find out the thing was enormous, and they had treaties with Egypt, and it was enormous. So it's a dangerous thing to argue from silence. But there is a lot of evidence to show.

For example, the Barnetta Stele is a record of the conquests of an Egyptian pharaoh who went up in there, and he lists the Israelites by name as a people group, and depending on where you date that, and there's, again, chronological issues, but even in the standard chronology, people look at that and say, by the time Barnetta went into the land, the Israelites were a people group, and they are named as Israelites on his stela. You also have the Amarna tablets, and you have a lot of other evidence, and certainly by the 11th century, it's indisputable that by the 11th century B.C., there was a definable people group. But specifically, here's the thing that is more pertinent for us, and that is that the Book of Judges, which even liberal scholars have recognized preserves authentic early traditions, does not treat Israel as a loose confederation or a bunch of separate tribes that just kind of happen to come together.

Over and over again, it uses the word Israel. In fact, the word Israel occurs in Judges more times than any other book in the Bible. Israel, that's the common noun for all of the tribes.

And from beginning to end, and we'll talk about this in more detail in the next lesson, but from beginning to end, remember at the end of this book, if you know the story of the Benjamites and their great malfunction, all of the other elders and tribes get together and say, we don't want Benjamin to disappear because our nation will not be complete. Remember that? We will be losing a brother. Now that doesn't happen if you're just a loose confederation and you don't really care who's a member.

This is like the 50 states saying, hey, if we lose Texas, we've lost something major. And the other tribes say, we cannot have Benjamin perish out of the nation. We've got to find a way to preserve that tribe.

And so they had a concept of the unity of their nation, and that's the evidence we need. It didn't grow up from a merger of small independent groups who were unrelated. They are descended

from the sons of Jacob, and they knew it.

And they call themselves Israel, the sons of Israel, the camp of Israel, the men of Israel, the hand of Israel, the daughters of Israel, the border of Israel, the possession of Israel, over and over and over again. The word Israel occurs in this book. It's just peppered with it.

And they have a national identity under God. We have a similar identity as the church that is not to be forgotten. We're not an island.

We're not separate. We are connected. We are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

And we're going to see that, as the founding fathers said, if we do not hang together, we shall all surely hang separately. And so this will be another theme in this book of Judges. But let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll complete our introduction and dive into the text.