

Judges 07-12-28b

Let's pick up our study now in the book of Judges. We're going to rapidly conclude our introduction and get into the text. But, of course, it's helpful, I think, to have a little bit of a framework on which to hang the events and the substance and the content of the upcoming chapters.

And so we recognize, first of all, that this is a book of history. It does continue the saga or the account of Israel that began back in Genesis with the, as they like to say, the eponymous ancestor. Try to work eponymous into your conversation sometime this week and see if anybody knows what it means.

But the name Israel is, of course, the name of the patriarch, Jacob, that was given to him by God, prince of El, prince of God. And these people are now trying to hang on to that identity. They were incarcerated in Egypt.

They were held together as a group in the land of Goshen. They had sort of an enforced identity in slavery. They were held together during the wandering period by Moses and by the fact that there was basically no place else to go.

They have gone across into the land, and they are taking possession of what was promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Now that they are taking possession, there is no longer an enforced identity. It is reminiscent of what happens to teenagers, which I see a few in my audience.

And you have a certain set of things that you sort of take for granted as you are a child and you are growing up in a household. There is a structure, there is authority, there is provision, there is a schedule. Most things are outside of your control, and the older you get, the more things are given to you to determine and to accomplish for yourself.

Hopefully, by the time you are ready to fall out of the nest, you have enough flapping ability to keep from hitting the ground. You can fly. And this is a gradual move toward independent, sustainable existence on your own.

Israel as a nation is sort of going through this. You think about it. God is directly with Jacob and interacts, speaks to him directly.

And then you have Moses transitioning the people out of this cradle in Egypt through their years of wandering and into the land, victorious, taking possession, settling down. And now the parents are gone. Moses and Joshua are gone.

Eliezer the priest is gone. Now they are going to be on their own, and can you remain true to your identity when you leave home? What happens to teenagers who go off to college and are not under their parents' supervisory gaze? Well, it depends on the teenager, doesn't it? It

depends on the individual. It depends on the standards you set for yourself.

It depends on the level of awareness that you maintain as a believer that you have a responsibility and you have accountability for your morals and for your stewardship of your time and your resources and your opportunities, and that by being irresponsible you can do irreparable harm. It's hardly a month that goes by that you don't hear about a car full of teenagers or college students getting whacked out in traffic because someone is being irresponsible. People come to harm at fraternity parties and at social events at college because there is this feeling that, well, I'm on my own.

I can do what I like. The whole phrase, you know, free, white, and 21 is based on the idea that there's no stricture, there's no hold. This is where the nation of Israel is.

If you think about the equivalent in our culture for individuals, that's where they are as a nation. Now the individual tribes can make up their own mind. Joshua is not saying, well, tomorrow's campaign is going to be down this valley and up this ridge and against this town.

Now each tribe has to try to gain and maintain and further its own possession within its own assignment. And it's only in times of great stress where there's an outside agent that threatens more than one tribe that they will band together. And the book is going to open with Judah speaking to his brother and saying, we can do more together than we can do separately, so you help me and I'll help you kind of a thing.

But this is where they are. And this is where the book of Judges opens. It is the dividing line where Joshua is no longer on the scene.

Jesus in the upper room speaking to his disciples and those few opportunities that he has to communicate with them after his resurrection, preparing them for the church age. And he says, I am not going to be with you much longer. I will send you a comforter who will lead you into the truth and who will remind you of what I have said.

And there is a great responsibility to remember. Remember those four parts of worship? And one of them is to remember his name. It is failing to remember who God is and his place and his role to and for Israel that gets them in trouble.

They begin to dally with other gods, other solutions. They will bow down and make their requests in other directions. They will rely on other quote unquote powers to get things done.

And this is their big mistake. Same thing for you all who are teenagers. Same thing for the rest of us who are beyond that phase.

To the extent that we look to and rely upon God, to the extent that we live our lives taking oaths in his name, remembering his name, bowing down to him and serving him, presenting ourselves a living sacrifice, to that extent God makes our lives fruitful and bounces his glory off of our life. And we are useful. We are fruitful.

We abide in the vine. We are those branches that get pruned so that we can bear even more fruit. And as soon as we lose sight of that, disaster will ensue.

And the book of Judges is going to be a record of what happens when the people of God forget why they're here. Look at what God has done for this nation. Look at how steadfast and faithful God has been to Israel through Joshua and through that time of conquest.

You would think, having seen God's mighty acts, you know, so many times we say, well, you know, God seems so far away. If he would just do a miracle, if I could see an angel, if God would part the fabric of time and space and poke his face through and show me that he's real, I would be faithful unto death. I would just glow in the dark with faith and fire and passion, and I would be a Christian to rival the Apostle Paul.

If God would just manifest himself and make himself... No, you wouldn't. You would be no different. If Jesus Christ appeared at the foot of your bed, you would be no different than you are right now.

It wears off. It passes. People ascribe it to other things.

Well, was that real or was that a dream? I'm not really sure. Maybe I hallucinated. You know, there can be chemical imbalances.

There can be electrical storms in the brain. Maybe I had a brief epileptic. Maybe there was a low-flying satellite that took a radio cell phone too close to my head.

Who knows? Maybe I've got a tumor. How can I know that that was really... These people saw God. They saw the sun stand still.

They saw the hail fall from heaven and kill only the enemy. They're running around on a battlefield all intermingled. Only the enemy gets hit with hailstones.

It's a miracle. They saw the walls of Jericho fall. These people, these people who are going to become faithless, these people who are going to be oppressed, these people are going to cry out to God for deliverance because they forget.

And they saw miracles at first hand. Do not think that if you could only see a miracle, it would make you more faithful. We are what we are because we choose it.

We choose. We decide. There is an abundance of evidence.

There is the witness of God's own Holy Spirit in our soul, which is stronger and more permanent and more convincing than any physical evidence. A miracle is a small thing. A miracle, watching Jesus in the synagogue, I would love, I want to see the video.

I want it in high definition. I want it in three dimensions. I want 7.1 surround sound.

I want to see the scene in the synagogue on the day when the man with the withered arm was there. And Jesus said in Aramaic, Stretch out your hand. And when he did, this gooned up, comatose patient, absolutely useless limb just becomes, just like they do with CGI now.

They can do all this stuff on computers and it looks real. Jesus did it for real. And the man, these withered, stringy, atrophied, hopelessly bent and twisted bones and muscles and sinews stretched out and it was as healthy as Adam and Eve's arms ever were.

In a moment, he stretched it out. Wouldn't it be great to see that and you think, you know, if I saw something like that, I would be forever changed. I would be transformed.

I would be the energizer money for God. You know, I would just go and go and go and go on the strength of that miracle. No, you wouldn't.

You would not. Don't kid yourself. We have a better witness.

We have a better testimony. And if we are not doing something better, if we are not on fire and if we are not passionate about our faith, don't think anything God can do by way of a miracle would fire us up, because it wouldn't. We have got a better fire.

The people that saw the miracles, the Old Testament prophets, the Old Testament saints, Simeon, Anna, those people, they longed for the day that we live in. They would have loved to have the resident Holy Spirit opening the Scriptures up before them. Sixty-six books of the Bible to study, the entire canon of the New Testament open, revealing Christ page after page after page, doctrines, principles, promises, the connection between all of the shadows in the Old Testament and the fulfillment in the New, the infinitude of facets of God's character and God's plan and purpose that is revealed over and over and over, page by page by page, verse by verse.

Those people would have longed for that. What do you think Moses and Elijah were asking Jesus about up on the Mount of Transfiguration? Lord, can you levitate Peter up over there behind the rock? He looks like he is getting a little sleepy. Could you do a miracle and raise him up? Can you do a weather thing here right quick? They were talking with Him.

They were asking Him questions. So, is this it? This is the fulfillment? This is why we slaughtered all those animals? And this is Passover, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering, and the peace offering, and the grain offering, and the heave offering, and the wave offering, and the colors in the tabernacle, and the gold sockets, and the rings, and the poles, and the acacia wood overlaid with gold, and the Holy of Holies, and the cherubim, and the curtains. This is what it is! Can we stick around? Can we stay a while and see it fulfilled? They were there for an instant, and they're gone.

They're there on the Mount of Transfiguration, and they say, Lord, I've got a few more questions. I've got to wait. Time to go.

I've got to go down the mountain. I've got to finish this First Advent thing. We'll talk in the Millennial Kingdom.

We live in the age of revelation. We live in the age where everything in the Bible can be unfolded and revealed. And if this doesn't light your fire, you're woods wet.

There is something the matter with you, if you do not have a passion for the things of God, looking at the opportunity that we have. What a tragedy to have a life that reads like the Book of Judges. It's only in extremis.

It's only when the chips are down that I wake up and say, wait a minute, I'm a believer. I can go to God. Let me cry out to God and get this crisis over.

And as soon as the pressure's off, and as soon as everything is kind of stabilized, well, now I'm busy. Now I'm going to look around, and I'm going to bow down, and I'm going to remember, and I'm going to serve, and I'm going to do other things. I've got some things that interest me.

I've got some stuff going on. We live in an exciting age. There's technology, and there's information, and there's the Internet, and there's electronics, and there's this and that and the other.

Wow, look at all these things I can distract myself with and occupy myself with and pour myself into, and it has nothing of God in it. No eye on heaven. No eye on the kingdom.

No eye on the future. No awareness of what is at stake. That's the situation of these people.

They have been given so much in the Old Testament sense. They're in the land of promise. God promised this to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

Isaac wandered around going from well to well, wishing that these ites were out of the land, and he didn't have to keep moving further and further into the wilderness so that the inhabitants would leave his land alone. It's his. It's his.

God gave it to his father and gave it to him and gave it to his descendants after him, and these squatters keep pushing him around. Remember that? Isaac has to keep going and going and going. They're filling in all of his father's wells, and he has to go dig them out.

Then they say, Get out of here. This is our well. He has to keep moving and moving until he gets to this desolate place that nobody wants, and that's where he can finally have peace.

These people don't have that problem. God has given them the victory. All they have to do is say, Lord, we've got another city to take.

Here we go. And it's theirs. It's theirs for the taking.

God's promise is with them. God's angel is with them. God's presence is with them.

God's supernatural power is with them if they will just claim it. And what do they do? They become complacent. Well, you know, this is not such a bad town.

Why do we need to take that one over the ridge? Well, it's in your assigned tribal area. It's in the area assigned to your clan. Your elders have divided up the tribal area, and you need to take that.

God said, Drive these people out. He said, Don't intermarry. Don't intermingle.

Don't serve their gods. Don't tolerate this stuff. These people are under judgment.

They've got to go. They have to go. God said, Drive them out.

Here we are, and we've got ites living in our soul. We've got Hivites and Hittites and Arkites and Jebusites and all other kinds of ites living in our soul. And God says, Drive them out.

Be ye holy, for I am holy. Be thou perfect. Touch not the unclean thing.

Hate even the garment spotted by the flesh. And we settle, and we compromise, and we say, Well, this is not so bad. And we squat in our little compartment in the land, and we do not fulfill the divine mandate.

I remember a long time ago when I was a teenager, a pastor who was teaching at the time said, Your life in the plan of God is not static. It is dynamic. Things are moving.

And you're on an escalator, and it's a down escalator. You cannot stand still. To stand still is to descend.

To stand still is to go downhill, to lose ground. We have to actively, aggressively pursue the plan and purpose of God. You have to run up the down escalator.

That's what God gives us the ability to do through His Word and through His Spirit. Even though everything in this world is trending downward. Even though the culture, and the society, and the surroundings, and the people, and the influences, and the information, and the liberal bath that we take every day from the media is moving us downward.

God, with His Holy Spirit, and with His Word, gives us the power to move up, to advance, to head toward the high ground. But we have to do it. We cannot just stand still.

We cannot be complacent. We cannot be apathetic. Well, that's the pep talk.

This is the record of people that didn't get that message. Joshua gave it to them. You remember the last chapter of Joshua? What did Joshua say? Are you going to ask for me in my house? We will serve the Lord.

Oh, we'll serve the Lord, too. No, you won't, Joshua says. You're not going to do it.

You're not able to serve this God. He will not forgive your sins. And it took them aback.

And they had to think more seriously. Well, yes. Yes, we will serve God.

I understand what you're saying. I understand the danger. And yes, we will.

And the Bible says, and the book of Judges is going to tell us, that the people, the generation that Joshua led, and the generation that Joshua charged, and the elders that served in the days of Joshua, were faithful, even after Joshua's death. It was the next generation that faded out. They couldn't pass the torch.

They couldn't transfer the fire. Each new generation has to make up its own mind. You young people cannot live on your parents' faith.

You cannot be pushed forward by the previous generation's momentum. You have to make the decision yourself. You have to grab hold.

You have to decide. You have to get your spiritual feet moving. Your parents could be the greatest believers that ever lived.

It does nothing for you. They could also be the worst rascals that ever lived. And it does not hold you back.

There was this old saying in Israel, the fathers have bit the sour grapes, and the sons' teeth are set on edge. Think about that. What does it mean? My parents did a thing, and I'm suffering the consequences.

They bit the sour grape, and I'm the one with that awful taste in my mouth. I'm the one trying to get over that prune, alum effect in my mouth. Has anybody ever put alum in their mouth? A-L-U-M.

Do you even know what it is? Well, think of what happens to your mouth when you suck a really bitter lemon. Have you ever done that? All of your salivary glands just clench, and your mouth just puckers up, and you can hardly function. Well, there's a substance called alum.

They used to have it in drugstores back a hundred years ago. You could sprinkle some of that on something, and boy, it would just pucker you up to where you couldn't even talk. This is what bitter sour grapes... By the way, if you've ever eaten a green persimmon, you know what I'm talking about.

Man, that is the bitterest, sourest, nastiest thing. I got fooled and eaten into biting into a green persimmon one time. I thought my mouth never was going to recover.

But Israelites had a saying, My Father bit that sour fruit, and I'm the one suffering all of those symptoms. And God said, You know, you used to have that saying, but forget it. No longer will a subsequent generation suffer for the previous generation's decisions.

You stand or fall on your own. Previous generation could be a bunch of ne'er-do-wells, be a bunch of apathetic no-goodniks. Doesn't matter.

You can excel. You can advance. You can go as far as you want.

Nothing is holding you back. By the same token, your predecessors could be a bunch of spiritual giants and kind of won great victories in God's name under the banner of Jesus Christ. And it does nothing for you.

You cannot wrap yourself in that flag. You cannot live in that shadow. It is up to you.

You stand or fall on your choice. When you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there's nobody to blame but you. You have the Holy Spirit.

You have the Word of God. And you can't say, But I was with so-and-so. Won't count.

God measures every Christian's soul, individually and on its own. So you will stand or fall based on your decisions, not your family's, not your parents', not your children's, you and you alone. So, the Book of Judges, this is a theme.

The reason I'm dwelling on this at some length is this is the background. This is the wallpaper behind the stories that we're going to see. Now, God demands attention.

God will not be ignored by His people. God will not tolerate you or me ignoring Him. He won't tolerate it.

He has spent too much on us. Is the blood of Jesus Christ precious? That's what you and I were purchased with. That's what we are worth in God's eyes.

And He will not tolerate apathy and indifference from blood-bought Christians. And He is paying close attention. And if we fail the grace of God, there will be consequences and they will be dire.

God is going to scourge every son whom He receives until we straighten up and fly right. So, it's not like you're going to be a nameless face in the crowd and you get overlooked in the shuffle. God is frequently in this book called Elohei Yisrael.

He's not just the God of creation. He's not just the God of the world. He is the God of Israel.

He is their God. He's called this in chapter 4, in verse 6, when you've got Deborah and Barak. And Deborah is talking to Barak.

She sends for him and she calls him up. She says, Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, Go and deploy the troops? The Lord God of Israel. We are a nation and He is our God.

Chapter 5, same thing. Hear, O kings, give ear, O princes. I, even I, will sing to the Lord.

I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel. Chapter 6, chapter 11, chapter 21, all the way through, God is set in contrast to the gods of the nations, the idols that the Canaanites worship. He is contrasted with Chemosh.

Jephthah talks about the God of the Ammonites. God refers to Himself, He reminds Israel that He is the God of their fathers. Elohe Avot.

Ab, A-B, Av, in Hebrew is father. Remember, even in Aramaic, Abba, father. Av, A-V, Av Raham, father of many nations.

Av, Elohe Avot, or Avotka, God of your fathers. He is the God of the patriarchs. He is the God of deliverance.

He reminds them over and over again, I am the God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt. And He is the God of the covenant that Israel entered into at Sinai. The anger of the Lord, in chapter 2, verse 20, as we've already seen, the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He said, because this nation has transgressed My covenant, which I commanded their fathers.

They are responsible to know the terms of the covenant with their nation, just as we, as church-age believers, are responsible to know what church-age believers are supposed to be doing. That's why we memorize Scripture together. Romans 12, 1 and 2, I beseech you therefore, brethren.

Why does He say brethren? Why does Paul call us brothers? We are God's people, chosen of the Lord, united in His Spirit, learning His Word. You remember the words of that song, We are God's people? It's an analogy. Israel in the Old Testament was God's people.

Psalms 100, we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. In the New Testament, we are God's people. We are brothers, that Christ may be the firstborn among many brethren.

And so Paul says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, collectively, present your bodies individually, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. This is your reasonable, what? service, for parts of worship, one of which is to serve. Presenting your body is not the same as taking oath in His name.

It's not the same as bowing down and making your petitions and requests. With prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. That's not the same thing.

It's a different facet, different area, different function. To remember Him in everything. Covenant with God.

They had a responsibility, just as we do, to know the terms. How does life work? You're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are obligations.

There are opportunities. You have to know them. You have to think about them and take advantage of them.

Avail yourself of God's grace. Commit a sin. Mess up, large or small.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses. Acknowledge. Homo logeo.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. Do we do that? Teenagers, old people, young people, do we stop and say, you know what? I just messed up. Should not have done that.

Not supposed to do that. Lord, that was out of line. I know that if I walk in the light, and I want to walk in the light, I want to have fellowship with You, I want You to have fellowship with me, and I want the blood of Jesus Christ to sanctify and cleanse and keep me qualified for service, qualified for production, qualified for my life to count.

Every minute we spend disqualified. Every minute that we spend unsanctified, contaminated, defiled, is wasted. It is bad stewardship.

You only have an allocated number. Wouldn't it be great? I think it would be great. I would love to have a separate dial on my watch that showed my remaining time on this earth.

Not to know when I'm going to die, but to remind me that every minute should be redeemed. Paul says we're supposed to be redeeming the time, because the days are evil. If you don't redeem the time, it gets poured down the drain of history as useless.

God is the God of Israel. He is the God of their fathers, and He is the God of the covenant. Those are the three ways that God is going to be identified over and over again in the book of Judges.

Watch for it as we go through. When you see God referenced, He is going to remind them. The judges who are raised up, the Shoftim, the Moshis that show up, the Yashas, the deliverers, are going to talk about God.

They're going to communicate His Word, and they're going to present Him as the God of their fathers. This is remembering God's name, remembering His mighty deeds of the past, remembering His covenant, and remembering that He is... Remember, Jesus makes this point when God says He's the God... He doesn't say, I was the God of Abraham, I was the God of Isaac, and I was the God of Jacob. Jesus makes this point.

He puts it in the present tense. I am. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

And God is not the God of history. He's not the God of the Old Testament. He's not the God of the New Testament.

He's not the God of thousands of years gone by. He is God right now. God, the Holy Spirit, is living and active in our souls.

God's Word is living and active in our souls. It is a present tense, now is the time status. These people, Israel, in the book of Judges, forget that.

And because they forget it, they suffer. They are disciplined. They are oppressed.

And time and again, God reminds them and delivers them, and they never catch that message. And generation after generation dies unfulfilled. Well, finally, the composition of this book.

Where did the book of Judges come from? Who wrote it? How did it come into being? Well, it's hard to know. It doesn't identify an author. Obviously, Joshua didn't write it.

Moses didn't write it. Did Samuel go back and pull these things together? It's hard to know. One thing we do know is that the book was known to the prophets and to the later people.

These stories and these accounts were certainly known because they are referenced by other Old Testament writers. And as we go through the book, I'll point out some of the allusions to the book of Judges. Just real quickly, I'll give you a few of them.

The Psalms refer to the time of the judges. And the Psalms were collected in the days of David and Solomon. And just in the near term, after the period that this book covers, you find these stories referenced independently.

So you find things in Psalm 78, for example, verses 56 and following. There is a summary of the book of Judges right there in the Psalm. In Psalm 83, verses 9-12, Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the brook Kishon, who perished at Endor, who became his refuse on the earth.

And these are independent. The textual transmission of the book of Psalms is different. They didn't necessarily collect all the books of the Old Testament way back in David's day.

And so the fact that there is a reference to these tells us that these are very early and therefore legitimate accounts. Psalm 106, verses 34-36, talks about this period, about the people who did not destroy the peoples concerning whom the Lord had commanded them. But they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works.

They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons and shed innocent blood. The blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan and the land was polluted with blood.

They were defiled by their works. They played the harlot by their own deeds. The Lord's wrath was kindled, etc.

That's in Psalm 106. So early on, these things were referenced. And you find in the book of Ruth, there is a reference to the days when the judges ruled.

And of course, the book of Ruth is an account of David's grandparents. Nehemiah 9, verse 5 and following, gives an account of the history of Israel that includes this period. Particularly verses 27 and 28 of Nehemiah 9. You delivered them into the hand of their enemies who oppressed them.

And at the time of trouble, when they cried out to you, you heard from heaven. And of course, Nehemiah, this is early post-exilic days. So even the liberal scholars can't say, well, the book of Judges was a late fabrication.

And it does not show signs of editing. And because it talks about Israel, more so than any other book, and Israel as a united single people, this is really a thorn in the side of the liberals who say, oh, it was a confederation of disparate, unrelated tribes who eventually got together and invented a history. The book of Judges argues strongly against that because they have a sense of national identity and of unity amongst the 12 tribes.

And these accounts are referenced very early on by other books like the Psalms, like the prophets and so on. There are references to Midian and a few of the other prophets. But we'll cover those a little bit later on.

So, this brings us down to an outline of the book. There are three big sections. How many sections did Joshua have? Three big sections.

You've got the coming across and invading the land, you've got the allotment and apportionment of the land, and you've got the dwelling in the land. So you've got conquest, settlement, and then occupation. Well, there are going to be three big chunks for the book of Judges.

The first major division is going to be essentially the first two chapters. It's 1-1-3-3-6. And this is basically a statement or a summary of Israel's failure to follow God's command to eradicate the Canaanites from the land proper.

Remember, they were to make no deals, no treaties, no compromise with the inhabitants of the land proper. If they got to the borders, they could make treaties with the faraway nations. That's why the Gibeonites pretended like they were far away, because they knew Israel was to give no quarter and was to utterly and completely drive these people out.

Well, Judges 1-1-3-3-6 basically details the fact that that didn't happen. They did not... This is like running a good race under Joshua and the conquest and all of the initial stuff they did was good. But if you run a great race, you keep a really good pace all the way up... We used to do this in the Marine Corps.

I had to run three miles. The best time, you get maximum points if you can run three miles in 18 minutes. Maintain an average of a six-minute-mile pace.

It's not impossible if you're young and in reasonably good shape and don't have any injuries. I did it once in my life. I ran 18-minute-three-miles in my prime.

Well, let's say you're gearing up, you've trained and you're ready to do that, and you go forth and you start running, and your first mile, you think, Wow, boy, you know, 5.50, I'm right on track. I can even slow down a little bit. I'll be on track for that.

You get your second mile done, and you're at just under 12 minutes. You're saying, Boy, this is great. How long do I have to do? And then you get to the two-and-a-half-mile mark, and you're out of gas.

You didn't train well enough. You didn't eat right. You had a big Whataburger or something, and it's just sitting in your stomach like lead.

And all of a sudden, you are just out of gas. And for the last half a mile, you just slow practically to a walk. And that last half mile takes you 12 minutes to finish.

Well, it doesn't matter how well you did in the first two-and-a-half miles, because the only thing that counts is your final time. And when you finally drag your body across the tape, and they say, Well, Lieutenant Hall, I see you've done three miles in 28 minutes. Well, that's pathetic.

And you say, Well, but you should have seen me in that first couple of miles. I was at 12 minutes at the two-mile mark. Who cares? It's 28 minutes now, and you fail.

You're going to be out here next week running this thing again. It doesn't matter how you begin. It's how you finish.

Israel begins strong under Joshua. They do a great job, but if they don't complete the task, it's a failure. The conquest of the land, the occupation of the land, the settlement of the land is a failure if you don't push to the tape and finish strong.

So, the background of that failure is given in 1.1 through 3.6. Israel's performance as they go into the land. Chapter 1 talks about what Judah and Simeon and some of these others do, Benjamin and Ephraim and Manasseh and Zebulun and Asher and Naphtali and so on. All of this is in Chapter 1. And then there's going to be a little bit of a lesson drawn for this in Chapter 2. There's going to be an application made, an observation and an application made for us, because these people have sunk so far that it has to be just typed out in courier, 10-pitch form.

Well, that's Section 1. Section 2 is going to begin in Chapter 3, verse 7. And it's going to go all the way through Chapter 16 and what does God do? What is God's response to Israel's failure? Instead of driving out the Canaanites, Israel becomes like the Canaanites. So, what does God do about that? Is God apathetic and indifferent? No. So, Chapter 3 through Chapter 16, this is the account we're going to get.

3-7, 3-16, 31. And we're going to see cycles. There is the Othniel cycle, there is the Ehud cycle, there is Shamgar, there is Barak, there is Gideon, there is Jephthah.

We're going to see some, what they call, minor judges or secondary judges like Ebzon. You probably don't even remember Ebzon. Elon and Abdon.

And then you have Samson. And finally, we're going to get to Chapter 17. And starting at Chapter 17 through the end of the book, this is the result.

Israel fails. God responds in the central section of the book. And so, the epilogue, the result of God's intervention and God's chastising of Israel, what is the result? Is there going to be a happy return to faith and obedience? Well, that's what we find out in 17 through 21.

And we're going to close with an epilogue in verse 25, the closing verse of the book. In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit.

That's how the book is going to close. So, that's the broad outline. And next Friday, when we dive into the text, we'll begin on sort of a positive note.

And then we'll take this long, slow trip into discouragement. But have no fear. There's a lot of very interesting things.

And there are many bright spots in the book of Judges. Every time the wheel goes low, it comes back high. And there are some wonderful examples of faith.

What if you're trapped in a lousy generation? What if you're trapped in a lousy environment or a bad bunch of folks? It doesn't have to hold you back. Just remember the grapes. Everybody's going to bite their own grape.

And whether your grape is sour or sweet is entirely dependent on you. You can transcend. You can rise above.

Whatever. Or you can get dragged to the depths of Sheol like Jonah. It all depends on what we choose.

So, Judges is just as much a hopeful book as it is a depressing book by turns. Gilgal, Gilgal, Gilgal. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word and the graphic and impressive way in which the truths of your plan and purpose are revealed to us. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will find us ready students, that we will remember who we are and why we are here, and that as we lay claim to the possession that has been won through the victories of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we will be found faithful, that our lives will reflect your glory. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.