

Bible Study November 10, 2020

The Book of the Judges

[text Judges 4:1-7]

Last week, we considered the Israelites entering into the land of promise; we noted the crossing of water at the Jordan River and also at the Red Sea, many years earlier. We thought about how this compares to our baptisms and how our baptisms shape our lives, individually and together.

We looked at a map of the land, a relatively small parcel comparable roughly to half of the size of South Carolina. The first half of the book of Joshua described many battles and conquests of the people while the second half describes the allocation of the land among the sons of Jacob. We noted some peculiarities as well as the designation of the Cities of Refuge. And finally we considered Joshua's final words to the people, comparing them to the last words of Moses in Deuteronomy. And the ending of Joshua was a natural break in the history of God's people.

This week we move forward into the Book of Judges for a very brief survey while our focus text speaks of one of the judges, Deborah. Professor Mark Throntveit of Luther Seminary describes the Book of Judges this way:

The book of Judges presents the story of the individual tribes that became Israel from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel. Its title comes from the individuals called by God to be "judges" (charismatic leaders) of Israel, delivering the people from the oppression of neighboring peoples and leading them in faithful obedience to the Lord. Within the framework of the Deuteronomistic History, Judges illustrates the dire consequences of the lack of faithful leadership and paves the way for the discussion of monarchy in the books of Samuel and Kings.

[<http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=27> accessed 11/9/2020]

It covers the period following the death of Joshua and before the anointing of Saul as the first king of the Unified Monarchy. There is no clear consensus about when it was written, though Prof Throntveit notes that Judges has some of the oldest material in the Bible – the “Song of Deborah” in Judges 5 may date to 1125 BC and at the same time there are some textual clues that suggest that portions were written much later. Final editing, unlike that of the Torah, appears to have occurred before the Exile in the 6th century.

We might wonder what a “judge” is, thinking of someone in dark robes sitting at a tall table in a courtroom. A judge in this context was more like a local hero or tribal leader. Some were military leaders (Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah among others), others lone warriors like Samson; some were prophets (Deborah and Samuel), and one was a Nazirite (Samson), while others still were priests (Eli and Samuel.) These are diverse leaders. The Book of Judges describes the period after the conquest and before the monarchy, roughly 1200 – 1020, BC. How does this compare to what we have seen up to this point in the leaders of the people of God?

Read Judges 2. What are the basic plot lines at play here? Are there any themes that we have seen before? (See Judges 2: 10-13.)

Judges 3 – Judges 16 is a description of several of the judges. The last chapters, Judges 17 – Judges 21, describe crises among the people of God. The ending – Judges 21:25 – In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased.

Judges 4 introduces Deborah. Read Judges 4:1-10 and describe what is happening here. Who is Barak? Note verse 14 and the subsequent battle in verses 14b – 16. What happened?

Describe Deborah. (Judges 4:4 says that she is the wife of “Lappidoth.” In Hebrew, “lappidoth” means “torch” or “lightning.”)

Read verse 9a again. And then read the “interesting turn of events” in verses 17-21. What do you make of this?

Judges 5 contains the song of Deborah and Barak. In Exodus 15 we hear the song of Moses. In I Samuel 2, we hear the prayer and song of Hannah. And in Luke 1 we read the songs of Mary and of Zechariah and in Luke 2 we read the song of Simeon. What purposes does song play in the scriptures and in the life of God’s people? What hymns resonate in your heart these days?

Let us pray: *Holy God. You know that there are times when things around us are confusing and we feel embattled on all fronts. Thank you for the Deborahs you bring into our lives to help guide us through. In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.*