

It is not a day of great prosperity that brings out the truth of things most before God.

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We are reading in the last chapter of Joshua as preparation for studying the book of Judges. Joshua has led the conquest of Canaan and the resulting division of the land among the twelve tribes. He now challenges the children of Israel to solidify their allegiance to the Lord. This they promise to do. How well do they succeed?

Not well at all. The book of Judges has many exciting stories but overall it is a grim, disturbing account. Again and again the Israelites fail to honor the Lord in the land He has given them. But also, again and again, He raises up leaders to rescue them from the annihilation that they deserve. And then they turn from Him again.

The events in the book of Judges take place around 1400 to 1100 BC. Some of the judges are operating at the same time in different regions. The book was written sometime later. Judges 17:6 and other verses read “when there was no king in the land,” indicating that indeed

there was a king at the time of writing. The early years of David’s rule, around 1050-1000 BC, seems a likely date. Jewish tradition points to Samuel as the author but scripture does not confirm this.

As we read about the violence and chaos that pervade the book of Judges, it’s comforting to remember that the beautiful book of Ruth takes place at the same time. In every day of ruin there are corners where kindness, order, and faithfulness persist.

We should also recall that God, as Mr. Kelly points out, delivers some of His most powerful lessons amid times of discouragement and downfall. We should look for parallels between our world and the time portrayed here, and see what we can learn for ourselves about man’s weakness and God’s strength. *“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”* (1 Cor. 1:27-29)

Questions:

1. Summarize the book of Joshua to this point. What has changed for the children of Israel?
2. What river is mentioned in verse 14? Whose gods reside beyond it?
3. Joshua seems skeptical that his listeners will faithfully serve the Lord. Why might he think that?

4. This scene takes place at Shechem, between Mount Gerazim and Mount Ebal. Where in scripture were they told to gather here, and for what purpose?
5. Verse 23 refers to hidden idols that would stumble the people. Are there any parallels for us?
6. According to verse 31, how long did the people serve the Lord? Why did they?
7. Why did the people have no excuse for forgetting about the Lord?
8. What promise is fulfilled in verse 32? How much time has elapsed?
9. Name some provisions that God has made for His people to remember Him and remain faithful to Him.