

Background on the Judges

Adapted from a sermon by the Rev. Coleman Glenn

The story of Gideon takes place during the time of the judges. The book of Judges is about the period in Israel's history after the children of Israel were led out of slavery under the leadership of Moses and had settled the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. While the children of Israel conquered their enemies enough to settle Canaan, they did not completely destroy them. If the children of Israel had kept Jehovah's law, this would have been a period of peace and stability. Joshua warned Israel to remain faithful to the Lord and completely wipe out their enemies, but they had not done this. So Israel's enemies remained in the land.

In time the children of Israel began to worship their enemies' images of wood and stone and forgot about the Lord. A pattern emerged that repeated itself over and over again. First, Israel would disobey God. As a result, an enemy would oppress them. When they cried out for help, the Lord would raise up a judge, a local leader, to save them and restore peace in the land. After learning their lesson, the people would obey for a time, but after the judge's death, they would backslide, and the cycle would start again.

The cycle of the judges represents spiritual cycles in our own lives. At times we fall into worshipping false gods, or "idols". We may live for the sake of worldly things that, like the Midianites, plunder the part of us that yearns for a life of depth and meaning. The Lord warns us to obey His commandments, but allows us to make mistakes, and permits the consequences with the hope that we will learn to do better. He is always ready to help us.

The dramatic story of Gideon invites us to set aside time to focus on spiritual things, to commit to entering the spiritual battlefield, to topple the false gods in our lives, and to go in the power of the Lord to overcome our enemies.

