

Joshua is dead

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[0 : 0 0] Well friends, let's turn up the book of Judges, which you'll find on page 200 in our hardback Bibles. Page 200. I'm going to read the first chapter and the first five verses of chapter 2 this evening.

And I'll just say one or two things about this reading before I read it so that it'll make a little bit more sense. The first thing to say about Judges is that the Judges that we're going to discover and meet over the next few weeks are not Judges in quite the way we understand Judges.

They were not primarily Judicial officials, though they did give judgment for certain cases and difficult things. But they were really military deliverers. They were saviors. They were rescuers who were sent by God to help the people of God when they were in deep trouble.

Now the second thing I'd like to mention, just look at the first two or three or four verses. You'll see Simeon and Judah are mentioned. End of verse 3, Simeon went with him, Judah went up.

Now this was not Simeon and Judah, the sons of Israel, because they lived and died about 400 years before the period with which the book of Judges deals. So what this means is the people of Simeon, or really the warriors, the soldiers of Simeon and Judah.

[1 : 1 8] And the other thing I wanted to point out was just to flag up, as we get towards the end of chapter 1, you'll hear that various tribes don't fully drive out the Canaanites that they should have been driving out.

They began to live with them and accommodate themselves to them. So just watch out for that, because that's a significant part of what's going on here. So book of Judges, chapter 1, let us hear the word of the Lord.

After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them? The Lord said, Judah shall go up.

Behold, I have given the land into his hand. And Judah said to Simeon, his brother, Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites, and I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you.

So Simeon went with him. Then Judah went up, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek.

[2 : 2 8] They found Adonai Bezek at Bezek, that was the king of Bezek, and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Adonai Bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes.

And Adonai Bezek said, 70 kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.

And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it, and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

And afterward, the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negev, and in the lowland. And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron.

Now, the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath Arba, and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. From there, they went against the inhabitants of Debiah.

[3 : 28] The name of Debiah was formerly Kiriath Sefer. And Caleb said, He who attacks Kiriath Sefer and captures it, I will give him Ahsar, my daughter, for a wife.

And Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Ahsar, his daughter, for a wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field.

And she dismounted from her donkey. And Caleb said to her, What do you want? She said to him, Give me a blessing. Since you have set me in the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water.

And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of Palms, that's Jericho, into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negev near Arad.

And they went and settled with the people. And Judah went with Simeon, his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah.

[4 : 36] Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron.

And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said, and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem.

So the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them.

And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. Now the name of the city was formerly Luz. And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you.

And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city, and called its name Luz.

[5 : 47] That is its name to this day. Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and its villages, or Ta'anak and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Iblam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages.

For the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely.

And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived among them, but became subject to forced labor.

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acho, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Aklab, or of Aksib, or of Helba, or of Aphek, or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out.

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth Anath, so they lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and of Beth Anath became subject to forced labor for them.

[7 : 08] The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Sha'albim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor.

And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabim, from Sila, and upward. Now, the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and he said, and he's speaking here to the whole people of Israel, he said, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers.

I said, I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall break down their altars, but you have not obeyed my voice.

What is this that you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their God shall be a snare to you.

As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept, and they called the name of that place Bochim, weepers, and they sacrificed there to the Lord.

[8 : 32] Amen. The word of the Lord. Well, let's turn up our Judges chapter 1 again, page 200.

And let me, friends, encourage you to strap on your emotional armor, because we're about to engage with this book of Judges. And this book of Judges, although it's a colorful book, with great stories in it and larger-than-life characters, like Gideon and Jephthah and Samson, is also a gruesome book.

And I say gruesome because it tells the story of a period in Israel's history when the life of God's people had reached a very low ebb. The nation was in rags and tatters, both morally and spiritually.

It lacked leadership, it lacked cohesion, it had lost sight of its purpose as a nation under God. And the very opening and closing of the book suggests this.

Just have a look with me at the very first words of verse 1. After the death of Joshua. Joshua, the great leader, has died. That's almost the title of the book.

[9 : 55] As if to say this book records the tale, the sorry tale, of what happened after the great Joshua died. And if you turn, no need to turn this up, but if you were to look at the very last verse of the book, chapter 21, verse 25, you would read this.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. So those two verses, the first and last of the book, act as the book ends, and they tell us a great deal about the message that the unknown author of Judges is conveying to the reader.

And the message is, this is a dodgy period in Old Testament history. Israel here is like a ship without a captain or a rugby team without a coach. Moses is gone.

The great Moses is gone. Joshua, the great Joshua, is dead. And we need a godly king to lead us, but we haven't got one. Result? Moral and spiritual disorder.

We're a nation without a godly ruler, and everybody acts without principle. So the first and last verses of the book give us an indication of the slimy bog that we are about to step into.

[11 : 07] But cheer up, drooping heart. There will be good and positive lessons for us to learn because when we look at ungodly behavior, we can't help but see the opposite as well, which is godly behavior.

And I trust that this rather gruesome book will spur us on to godly living and godly understanding. It's not all bad news. There are some fine moments in it. Now, I want to show up on the screen a historical table which will help us to see where the era of the book of Judges fits into the history of Old Testament Israel.

Somebody once said, foolishly, history is bunk. But I often say to our Cornhill students that if they don't get a fairly detailed grasp in their heads of the main lines of Old Testament history, I shall have them hung, drawn, and quartered.

I haven't yet followed that threat through, but perhaps this year should be the first time. But more seriously, more seriously, getting a grip on the main lines of Old Testament history is really very important.

It's important for any Bible reader because it's only when we see what happened and the order in which things happened that we can begin to see what God was doing and how he was preparing Israel and the world for the eventual arrival of his son, our Savior.

[12 : 26] All of the Old Testament eventually leads to the Lord Jesus. So if we're clueless about the history and about the storyline, we shall miss much of the power of the Old Testament.

And we shan't understand the achievements of the Lord Jesus nearly as clearly. So let me just run through the features on this table. The dating becomes fairly precise once we reach the time of Samuel, Saul, and David.

But in the earlier centuries, it's a bit harder to be absolutely certain. And even the expert historians don't all agree. But the order of events, as I've put them here, is absolutely clear, even if some of the dates are not necessarily quite precise.

So we start off at the top there with the patriarchs. Abraham, something like 1950 BC, his son Isaac, and Jacob. And Jacob, of course, had his 12 sons who gave their names to the 12 tribes of Israel.

Famine then came. You remember in Genesis, famine came to the land of Canaan when Jacob was an old man. And the whole group of Israelites, I think numbering about 70, went down to Egypt, where Joseph had gone before them.

[13 : 32] He was prime minister of Egypt, and he provided a good section of the land there. They settled there. They multiplied tremendously. Then became a threat to the Egyptians who enslaved them.

And something like 400 years later, Moses was raised up, and he led the Israelites out of Egypt in about 1440 BC.

There were then 40 years, I think to be precise, about 39 and a half years, actually, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, followed eventually by Moses leading the Israelites to the very bank, the east bank of the River Jordan, where Moses had to die.

And Joshua then led the people across the river. And it was then, and this brings us to Judges, it was then that the Israelites began to colonize the land of Canaan, the promised land, which lay on the west side of the River Jordan.

Now, this colonization and conquest of Canaan went forward considerably while Joshua was still alive, but it was by no means completed at his death.

[14 : 34] Which is why the first verse of the book of Judges tells us that after Joshua had died, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, who shall be the first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them.

So if we guess that Joshua died something like 1350 BC, that gives us the date of the beginning of the period covered by the book of Judges.

And this period lasted right down to the time when Samuel appeared about 300 years later. And the rest, you might say, is history of a kind that can be dated more accurately, the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, and so on.

Thank you very much, visual aid department. That'll do for now. That's great. Thank you. Now, we'll get into chapter one in a few moments, but let me say something first about how to read an Old Testament historical book like Judges.

The first question to ask about any Old Testament historical book is the question, what is God doing? The Bible has a lot to say about people, about men and women, but it's about God before it's about people.

[15 : 44] Every book of the Bible describes how God is working out his great purposes. Even a book like Esther, which doesn't even mention the name of God once, is all about God working out his good and kind purposes for his people, the Jews.

That's the first question. What is God doing? Here's a second question that focuses the issues up a little bit more. What is God doing in relation to the covenant that he made with the people of Israel?

Now, as you know, the Old Testament has a lot to say about the Gentile nations, but first and foremost, it's about the Jews with whom the true and only God had entered into a special relationship.

And the essence of the covenant, just ask yourself, do I know what the Old Testament covenant sounds like? What was it? The essence of the covenant can be summed up in a few very short sentences.

So beginning with Abraham, God's message to Israel was this. Here's the covenant. I'm choosing you out of all the world's nations. I'm choosing you to be mine. I've set my love upon you, the Israelites.

[16 : 50] I'm giving you a special tract of land to live in, the promised land. I'm going to multiply your numbers greatly like the stars of the sky. And I'm going to make you a blessing to the Gentile nations in due course.

I will be your God. You will be my people. And I will dwell among you. That's the covenant. A promise of land, people, blessing to the Gentiles, and mutual possession.

I will be yours, and you will be mine. It's just like a marriage covenant in that sense, isn't it? Will you be mine? Yes. Will I be yours? Yes.

That's what marriage is all about, isn't it? So it's a wonderful covenant, this marital covenant. But if Israel was to enjoy the blessings and the benefits of the covenant, namely, peace, security, and prosperity, they had to obey what God told them to do.

One of the subtexts of the Old Testament is that obedience brings blessing and disobedience leads to disaster. That, of course, is still true for disciples of Christ.

[17 : 55] But the genesis of that principle is found in the Old Testament and it's writ large on every page from Genesis chapter 1 through to the book of Malachi. Obey God, love God, serve God, and you'll have so much blessing that you won't be able to contain it.

But if you disobey him by treating his commandments with contempt and by running after other gods, he will hand you over to the dire consequences of your folly and your life will become a disaster zone.

Now, it's with these thoughts that we can begin to turn to the book of Judges and see what is going on. God's people, the Israelites, are bound to God by this gracious covenant.

And at this stage in their history, they are partly but by no means fully settled in the promised land. And we need to know what has happened in the previous few decades if we're to understand the rather delicate state of play which the beginning of the book of Judges records.

And it's the immediately preceding book, the book of Joshua, that tells us what has been going on. Joshua has been terrific. He's been a great, strong, godly leader. As I'm sure you know, he was Moses' personal assistant, so he knew God's commands, the law of Moses, very well.

[19 : 15] And he'd learned from Moses' example the almost impossibly difficult art of leading the people of Israel who so often veered off into disobedience and idolatry and had to be pulled back by the scruff of their necks.

And Joshua, strengthened by the Lord, had done so well as Israel's leader. After Moses had died, his first job was to get the people of Israel safely across the river Jordan into Canaan.

They didn't have to swim. In fact, their river crossing was really a kind of repeat of the Exodus crossing of the Red Sea. Do you remember how the walls of water at the Red Sea had parted?

Well, so it was with the Jordan. The water piled up some miles upstream and allowed the people to cross the riverbed dry foot. The Lord was with them. They then took the city of Jericho, whose walls fell down flat to allow them in.

The Lord was with them. Then they conquered Ai and they began to penetrate further and further into Canaan and many other towns and cities fell to them and they took them over and they established themselves.

[20 : 22] But years later, and Joshua chapter 13 records this, Joshua was now old. And the Lord said to him, you're old and advanced in years and there remains yet very much land to possess.

The land of the Philistines, the Geshurites, the Avim, the Sidonians, the Gebelites and a few others. So this job of conquest and colonization was barely half done when Joshua was reaching the slippers and Zimmer frame stage of life.

And much of the second half of the book of Joshua is a kind of geography lesson. The land is parceled out to the tribes of Israel on paper, on paper. So each tribe is given its own parcel.

The boundaries are drawn up and identified. This river will be your southern boundary and this ridge of hills will be your western boundary and the Dead Sea will be your other boundary and that sort of thing. A lot of geography. Very detailed.

In fact, reading through the second half of the book of Joshua is to be truthful rather hard work. And anyone who can do it and remember all its details deserves a PhD in geography.

[21 : 31] But it's important because it is the working out at ground level of the promise given to Abraham centuries earlier that a beautiful stretch of country will belong to the people of Israel.

So when we reach the beginning of Judges, we're in the middle of this ongoing process of colonization. And we find the people of Israel in the very first verse doing exactly what they should be doing.

Inquiring of the Lord. Perhaps using a system of drawing sacred lots. And they ask the Lord who shall be the first to go up against the Canaanites to fight against them.

And the Lord says, Judah shall go up. Behold, I've given the land into his hand. Now just notice this. Joshua has died but the Lord is still with the people.

I've flagged up the fact that things are going to go badly wrong but they haven't started to go badly wrong quite yet. As the book of Judges begins, this plan of colonization and conquest is going forward.

[22 : 38] You see from verse 3 that the warriors of Simeon join the warriors of Judah so as to multiply their strength. And verse 4 tells us that the men of Judah and Simeon defeated a force of 10,000 Canaanites at Bezek and they caught the king of Bezek.

And then verse 8 tells us that the men of Judah captured Jerusalem. And the following verses tell of further victories in the Negev. That's down in the south in Hebron and Debiah.

And then further victories are recorded in verses 16 to 26. And there are some very interesting little cameo stories there recorded which we haven't time to look at this evening.

But they give us a flavor of the inside story of how water supplies are secured. That's in verse 15. And how cities sometimes fell through the intervention of a spy which you'll see in verse 25.

Now friends, we must grasp a nettle. This promised land, the land of Canaan, was over 100 miles long from north to south and something like 60 miles wide from east to west.

[23 : 44] A fertile land of hills and valleys and plains about the size of Wales. And it was inhabited by many thousands of people in groups, larger and smaller tribes.

And these tribes had their own well-established systems of government and agriculture and culture and social life and so on. And yet, and here's the nettle, God commanded the chosen people with whom he'd established his covenant to drive out these Canaanite people from their territory.

It's really what we would call ethnic cleansing today or even genocide. Now we've seen a number of genocides taking place in recent decades. There are genocides taking place even today and we are appalled rightly at the carnage and cruelty involved.

Memories of the Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s are still, I hope, very much with us. So we have to ask this question. How was it that God, the God of Israel, commanded his people to perpetrate this kind of ethnic cleansing on the inhabitants of Canaan?

Is this really the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who not only allows this thing to happen but commands the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites? I'm sure you've met people who've said that if the God of the Christians commanded the butchering of all these Canaanites then that these people would rather have nothing to do with the God of the Christians.

[25 : 12] Well, the answer to this problem is that we have to learn to view the conquest of Canaan from the Bible's own viewpoint which is the Lord's viewpoint. The modern agnostic or atheist will cry out how awful that these poor innocent Canaanites should be slaughtered like this.

But from the Lord's point of view the Canaanites were not innocent. From his point of view driving them out of the land of Canaan was an act of divine justice through which the Canaanites were justly punished and the Israelites were the instruments that the Lord used so as to bring his justice about.

Let me read to you a few verses from Exodus 34 and we'll see what the Lord had said to Moses about all this. Exodus 34 11 Observe what I command you this day.

Now notice the verb there what I command you this day. Behold, says the Lord I will drive out before you the Amorites the Canaanites the Hittites the Perizzites the Hivites and the Jebusites take care lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go lest it become a snare in your midst.

you shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherah poles for you shall worship no other god for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited to eat of their sacrifice and you take of their daughters for your sons in other words to marry them and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods it's a horrible verb to use isn't it but it shows the kind of addictive quality of the Baals and the Asherah now the Lord's command to Moses and the Israelites was that they should drive out the Canaanites completely the problem was not that the Canaanites would be an ongoing military threat rather the problem was that they would prove to be a spiritual cancer gnawing away at the vitals of Israel's pure trust in the one true God if they were allowed to remain in the land and those verses from Exodus make it clear that if the Israelites were to settle amongst the Canaanites and live cheek by jowl with them and share the land with them inevitably they'd become friendly with them and intermarriage would happen between their children and the Jewish children and that would make many of the Israelites worship these fertility gods and the whole principle of Israel being holy to the Lord would have a coach and horses driven through it the Lord says this to Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 9 not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out before you and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob so do you see in the Lord's view the Canaanites were not the innocent victims of genocide in Leviticus chapter 18 the Lord speaks of the land of Canaan vomiting out its inhabitants very powerful word isn't it vomiting them out because their behavior and their religious practices were so abominable in the sight of God to vomit something out is to expel it forcefully because of its toxic nature now I think it will help us to understand all this better if we think of the expulsion of the Canaanites in the wider context of God's righteous punishment of those who oppose him at the end of everything at the day of judgment

[29 : 08] God will send away to eternal punishment everyone who has stood against him everyone who has refused to bow to Jesus as their king and the sad fact is that great numbers of people will be sent away to eternal ruin these Canaanites who were killed by the Israelites in the 14th century BC will only be a small subsection of those who are finally condemned it's a reminder to us today that God is not to be trifled with the mindset of our modern world has so trivialized truth that people have almost lost the capacity to think that God could really be serious about heaven and hell but the Bible is about salvation and judgment and the command to expel the Canaanite tribes is all of a peace with the words of Jesus when he will say in the end depart from me you evil doers for I never knew you in other words you're strangers to me and you have no place in my kingdom let's be clear also that this necessary warfare against the

Canaanites was a unique one-off episode in Bible history nothing comparable to it is part of the agenda of the Christian church the weapon of our warfare is not the sword but the gospel and our target is not human beings but the lies of the devil well now with that in mind let's turn back to Judges chapter 1 because I think we're in a better position to feel the force of the final section of the chapter from verses 27 to 36 which is what I'd like to concentrate on now look with me at verse 27 Manasseh one of the twelve tribes of Israel did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshan and its villages or the other places named why not for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land verse 28 when Israel grew strong they put the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely and it was in not driving them out completely that they failed to obey the Lord and it's just the same in the next few paragraphs verse 29 and Ephraim did not drive out the

Canaanites who lived in Gezer so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them continuing of course to worship the Baals and the Asherah we'll think about them next week and what they were and then Zebulun verse 30 did not drive the Canaanites out of their allotted portion of the land and it's the same with the tribes of Asher in verse 31 and Naphtali and Dan now it's impossible to miss the tone of these final paragraphs of chapter one these paragraphs are not the calm objective analysis of a sociologist this is the voice of God's preacher the author of the book of Judges and he is lamenting the failure of his fellow Israelites he's saying to his readers alas that our forefathers failed to obey the command of God they lacked the vigor they lacked the determination to drive out the Canaanites completely even though the Lord had warned them of the dangers of allowing the Canaanites to remain there in the land so what happens next does the

Lord turn a blind eye to this compromising disobedient behavior thankfully he does not he does what he must always do under these circumstances he confronts his people with their sin and calls them to account and he does this by sending his angel to them in chapter two verse one an angel the representative of God comes hot foot from the Lord's presence and he delivers to the Israelites a message that is full of grief and anger just look at verse one I brought you up from Egypt I released you from your dreadful slavery there because I loved you and more than that I brought you into the land that I'd sworn in my covenant to give to your fathers I've been faithful to my promise I brought you to the beautiful promised land I said and here the Lord is reminding them of something he'd said repeatedly in the book of Deuteronomy I said I will never break my covenant with you and you in return shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land you shall break down their altars but and here's the

Lord's grief and anger but you have not obeyed my voice what is this that you have done now where have you first heard that question Genesis chapter three it's exactly the same question word for word which the Lord put to Eve in the garden of Eden when he called her to account for eating the forbidden fruit what is this that you have done now look at verse three in chapter two because it's at verse three that the angel delivers the Lord's decision about what he's going to do in response to their disobedience you'll see the message comes in the first person singular it's not the angel who's speaking it's the Lord himself so verse three now I say I will not drive the Canaanites out before you but they shall become thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare to you in other words you will reap as you have sown your sin will have painful consequences and you will have to live with those consequences the Canaanites will give you endless trouble they will lead you astray and you will start worshipping their worthless idols and your lives will be riddled with unnecessary disasters all because you refused to obey me thoroughly and what happens next how do the people respond to this dreadful message from heaven with a lot of tears there are tears all over the place look at verse four as soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to the people the people lifted up their voices and they wept in fact they wept so much that they called the name of the place bochim which means weepers i guess place names generally mean something don't they why is glasgow called glasgow does it mean beautiful green place pretty concreted over now i think we still have 63 parks don't we in glasgow it's pretty green anyway it says something about the city's past doesn't it but this place here was called weepers it was called tears and lamentation and heartbreak but were they the tears of real repentance did the people experience a revival of real faith as a result of the angels visit it seems not look on to chapter 2 verse 11 and the people of israel did what was evil in the sight of the lord and served the bales and they abandoned the lord the god of their fathers who brought them out of the land of egypt they went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and they bowed down to them and provoked the lord to anger well friends i said at the beginning that we would need to strap on our emotional armor because we're likely to have a rough ride here but it's not all gloom it's not all gloom i promise you it's not going to be all gloom so let me draw to a close this evening by making two observations on this first chapter of judges which i hope will be of real help to us first in the old testament god's people go through bad times and good times the book of judges records a bad period though even in the book of judges there are some fine moments of faith and courage which i trust we'll see in the coming weeks but taking old testament history as a whole there are good times and there are bad times the preceding book the book of joshua is by and large a good time there are some bad moments in it but the graph of the faith and obedience of god's people is a rising graph through the book of joshua whereas in the book of judges the graph sinks rather horribly there are some good moments the graph is a little bit like this as it goes down but it's sinking but despite this time of general disobedience and corruption the lord does not cast his people off he refuses

[37 : 40] to consign them to the dustbin of history because he has promised he's covenanted himself to be their god and to bring his purposes for them to completion as he does finally and fully in the coming of jesus some 1300 years later now in the same way in our own time this era between the first and the second comings of jesus there have been great times in the history of the lord's church and there have been terrible times and some of the greatest revivals of real bible faith have followed hard on the heels of times of failure and disappointment so let's not be too perturbed when we see times of decline in the fortune of god's people perhaps even in our own lifetime we can be sure of this that god will work out his purposes and he will bring his people to our final resting place in the end no times of failure on the part of god's people can thwart him or deflect him from doing what he intends to do now secondly let's allow this first section of judges to thrust into our hearts once again this great lesson that disobedience to the lord brings disaster whereas obedience to the lord brings blessing great blessing now this is true always on the level of individual experience if a christian person establishes patterns of disobedience in his life there will inevitably be trouble and heartache and only radical repentance will restore that individual but here in judges one and two is not so much an individual thing it's a corporate thing the people of israel as a body fail to obey the lord thoroughly they start off in the right direction as we've seen but they fail to follow obedience to the lord through they don't press it home and we have to ask how could this possibly have happened to them after all they'd seen so much of the power of god think of the exodus the parting of the red sea that was a pretty recent national memory the crossing of the river jordan was even more recent along with the miraculous conquest of jericho how could they have witnessed all this and then just a generation later started to abandon the lord well let's take this as a shot across our own bows there's a lesson here about how quickly disobedience can set in to the people of god as a corporate body true faith and corporate obedience can be corrupted in less than a generation so how can we as a as a congregation as a body of christ's people avoid falling into this kind of trap let me suggest two ways first by lovingly taking responsibility for one another and steering one another away from idols so when we see a fellow christian beginning to wrap his soul around some idol let's take him or her tenderly but firmly by the scruff of the neck and let's pull him or her back so we're going to say something like this brother or sister don't start worshipping at that worthless shrine it's the road to death if you wrap your soul around money or your career or for a young man it could be pornography it could be some innocent hobby it could be the cultivation of chrysanthemums but whatever it is if the soul is wrapped around it rather than the lord jesus there is trouble let's lovingly guard one another's hearts as well as our own hearts and then secondly as a church whenever we face some big decision which involves making a choice between obeying the lord and disobeying the lord let's make sure that we go the way of obedience

and we had to face a big and painful decision of just this kind a couple of years ago by the grace of god we did the right thing which was to turn away from a powerful modern idol the idol of sanctioning and welcoming sexual immorality into the church now who knows what similar kind of decisions may await us in the coming years when again we may have to choose between some idol and the teaching of the true god the devil is never on holiday we need to be prepared judges one teaches us that thorough going obedience is an essential part of the life of god's people obedience brings blessing and joy and unity to the fellowship and energy to the lord's people whereas disobedience will bring decline and finally disaster and it will bring in the end that haunting question from the lord what is this that you have done that question first spoken to eve and then here to the people of israel but by the grace of god may that question never have to be spoken to us let's bow our heads and we'll pray dear god our father it gives our own hearts pain to think of the way that your people who had been so blessed by you were able to turn away so quickly and to worship false idols we're conscious of the danger that the christian churches stand in all the time but we thank you so much dear heavenly father that you've promised to be with us indeed for those who are truly yours you live within our very hearts in the power and person of the holy spirit and we pray therefore that you will so be at work in us both individually and as a body of christians that we may delight to serve you that we may lovingly look after each other and keep each other from idolatry so that we may serve you with unity with energy and with great joy and we ask it in jesus name amen no it so that it is not children