

# Foundation of Apostasy

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**Bible Text:** Judges 1:1-36

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Big gates swing on little hinges. You all knew that, didn't you? All you need to do is look at a door and you can see along the side there is usually three hinges, not that big, and if you took all of them collectively in contrast to the size of the door, you would find that those hinges comprise a very small part of that size of that door, and especially the weight of the door. The doors to our building today are steel doors and they are heavy, three hinges to a door. Big gates swing on little hinges. Some of us who have a farm background, we recognize that, don't we? The big gates of the farm, small hinges, sometimes only two hinges on them, on the post and a long, large gate swings on it.

Well, I didn't bring that up just to give a description of door hardware or farm gates. It also describes life. Doesn't it? Big gates swing on little hinges. And you can think back in your lives to times when what seemed like a small decision, a small occurrence in life, a small business transaction had significant impact and results and consequences. Sometimes for good, sometimes not so good. Little things can have big consequences.

We see it in the history of Israel. We have studied over the past few weeks several different events in the history of Israel. We come to a time of, in the history of Israel, when little decisions had long lasting severe consequences upon their history.

When they first came into the Promised Land, God was with them. They conquered their enemies and they took over the land. And they saw God work and they saw him perform miraculous deeds on their behalf. They had seen it way back in Egypt and how God had protected them from the plagues that he brought upon the Egyptians. And then they saw his power as he took them across the Red Sea and through the wilderness and brought them into the Promised Land. And yet we come to occasion that we find recorded in the book of Judges, a time when little decisions had severe, long lasting, significant consequences upon the nation of Israel.

We read in Judges one verses one and two, it says that Joshua died. Not too unexpected. He was 110 years old. Time it die. Joshua died. And 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.”<sup>1</sup>

They had no replacement for Joshua. When Moses died, God identified Joshua to take his place. Joshua led them into the Promised Land and through many victorious battles. When it came time for Joshua to die and he died. We don't see anyone assuming the leadership position and role after Joshua. But the people had learned by observation and by experience to call upon the Lord. They had observed it with Moses. They had observed it with Joshua. And so they inquired of the Lord. “Lord, what do we do? Joshua our leader is gone. We have no one to take his place. What shall we do?”

And God said to them, “Judah will lead you.”

Now that wasn't one man, Judah. The tribe of Judah, the generations after Judah the son of Jacob, his children, his offspring, they would lead you into battle. And we find as you would read through the next few verses if you have read through the Scriptures starting in verse number three down through verse number 26 you would find the Lord with Israel.

I didn't print that out for you. I thought it would take up too much space. I will just summarize it for you very quickly. They encountered 10 battles and they won all 10 of them. The Lord was with them. They had 10 battles. They had 10 victories. They knew the presence, again, of God with them, God helping them, God granting them victory as he had promised, as he had promised to Moses, as he had promised to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob.

“I will give that land to you.”

And he promised it to Moses. He promised it to Joshua. He said, “Wherever your foot shall tread, I will give you that land.” And here after the death of Joshua they experienced again the promise of God on their behalf, granting them victory after victory after victory. And they saw God work and they trusted God and they believed him. They obeyed him and God proved to them, once again, his faithfulness to his promise, his power, his omnipotence overcoming the enemies that they faced, his grace, his kindness on their behalf. Why them? Because he chose them, because he loved them, the Scriptures tell us.

We also find described for us God's justice against sin. He had said that he would drive out the Canaanites and the occupants in this land and he told us why he would drive them out. He didn't drive them out because of some ethnic cleansing and some in our day would describe it. No, he drove them out. He brought Israel in to drive them out because of their sin and their rebellion against God and their refusal to bow and to worship before God the creator.

And so we see God's justice displayed as the children of Israel overcome the inhabitants of the land of Canaan that God gave to his children.

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 1:1-2.

Now I said in those verses three to 27 there were 10 victories, and there were. However, one of them was tarnished. One of the victories was tarnished, because it wasn't a complete victory. It was a partial victory. And we find it described for us in verse number 19, the second item on your list of references. It says:

“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.”<sup>2</sup>

What? You mean God couldn't overcome chariots of iron? Was God feeble? Was God somehow unable to drive away chariots of iron? He could defeat individuals who simply had helmets and shields and spears? God was ok there, but he couldn't drive out the chariots of iron? Is that what it is describing for us? Or is there something else at play here?

God had told the children of Israel through Joshua, his leader and you can find it recorded in Joshua chapter 17 verse number 18. He said, “When you come down from the mountains to encounter those in the plains, don't be afraid. God will enable you to destroy the chariots of iron.”

What happened? What happened? How come they could not defeat the chariots of iron? They didn't believe God. They didn't believe God. They failed to trust him. All throughout their battles they had trusted God to provide for them the victory and in the days that are recorded among those verses God enabled them, once again, as they trusted him to defeat the enemies, to overcome them. And all of the sudden they encounter chariots of iron and, oh, my goodness. What are we going to do? And their hearts melted and they failed to believe and trust God to defeat even the chariots of iron that seemed like an impossible foe.

After all, they had seen the walls of Jericho fall. They had seen God work on their behalf on numerous battles and occasions previously. Chariots of iron presented no problem to God. They just failed to believe him.

Big gates swing on little hinges. The rest of this first chapter and the rest of the book of Judges describes for us the severe consequences that Israel suffered because they failed to believe God.

We will read verses 27 to 36. And notice as we go through the description provided for us.

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam 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

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<sup>2</sup> Judges 1:19.

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 Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon or of Ahlab or of Achzib or of Helbah or of Aphik 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. 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 Shaalbim, 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 Akrabbim, from Sela and upward.<sup>3</sup>

Did you notice some things in those verses as I read them to you? No mention of the Lord. No mention of God. No mention of his presence. No mention of his intervention on his behalf, not one occasion.

Did you notice a second thing? Did you notice not one of them were victorious? Not one of them experienced victory.

Did you notice a third thing? They assimilated together. If we go back and look at the beginning of it all, we find that doubt led to disobedience. God said, "Drive them out. Destroy them. Don't make them slaves. Don't let them live in the land amongst you. Don't cooperate with them. Drive them out. Destroy them utterly. Leave nothing left."

Their doubt drove them to disobedience. Their disobedience brought decline. Decline brought desertion from God. God's presence not displayed on their behalf.

Oh, it seemed like such a little thing at the time. Oh, we will just let this little tribe down here, we will let them be. That is not big territory down there. After all, we do have the mountains. Maybe we will let them have little plot of land down there. Maybe if we don't... maybe we will curry their favor a little bit by letting them have that little plot of land down there and they will cooperate with us.

No. Doubt. Disobedience. Defeat. Decline. Desertion.

Big gates swing on little hinges.

And as we look back over these verses we see that as long as the children of Israel believed and trusted in God and obeyed him, God manifested himself to them and on

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<sup>3</sup> Judges 1:27-36.

their behalf. They experienced victory over their enemies and over sin and evil and they knew God's presence fellowshiping among them, displayed mightily on their behalf. When they doubted God, questioned him, thought their ideas superior to his, they suffered severely. And the justice that God brought up on the children in the land of Canaan the enemies of God who had sinned against him, how his justice began to reveal itself against the children of Israel, because they sinned and God had warned them.

"If you fail to obey me, I will become your enemy," he said.

Oh, I don't know about you, but I don't want God as my enemy. I can't even stand for myself, let alone resist God and fight against him.

Why do you think God moved upon the author—theologians believe it was Samuel—to write this record that we see in the book of Judges, especially this section as we have examined this morning? God wanted to reveal to the ages not just the children of Israel as they read the book, but others who would follow and read the record, how God would bless those who believe and obey. And now he would judge severely those who doubt and disobey.

He wanted us to see also the character and nature of God. God is faithful. He keeps his promises. When he keeps a promise, he keeps it. He wants us to see the evidence of his glorious presence among his people when they obey and when they trust him. He also wants us to see the disastrous results of doubt and disobedience, judgment, God's judgment.

The children of Israel are revealed as helpless in their own strength. Only could they experience victory as they trusted and obeyed God. When they doubted they experienced defeat.

How does this connect to Jesus? Because Jesus told his friends on the road to Emmaus, "You need to believe all the Scriptures and what they have said about me." And it says, "Beginning at Moses and all of the prophets..." Samuel was a prophet and a judge. "He began to explain to them all the way that they revealed him."

Can we find Christ anywhere in this passage and in these series of events?

Well, before we answer that question, we need to go back to the beginning. When God created the heavens and the earth and all things in it, visible and invisible, and placed creatures and animals upon his creation, he had a purpose behind it all. The purpose behind it was to glorify himself and to manifest himself to his creation. And we read how God came down and visited Adam and Eve, his first human creation and how he walked with them and talked with them and they knew that intimate fellowship with him. That describes God's plan. For he told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth. Go throughout all of the earth and that, I will remind you, came before they sinned. God's design was for his creatures to go throughout all of the earth with his presence so

that his glory would go throughout all of the earth through his creation and with his creation.

Sadly you know the story, how Adam and Eve sinned. They doubted God. They disobeyed. And big gates swung on little hinges. One small bite. God in his mercy promised a champion.

“I will send someone, the seed of the woman, who will crush the head of that serpent who tempted you into sin and disobedience.”

And as God began to further progressively reveal his plan of how he would fulfill that, he chose Abraham. And he told Abraham, “Through you and through your seed, I will reveal myself and manifest myself to all of creation, to all of the nations of the earth.”

These are the children of Abraham, the seed of Abraham. Part of that plan for God to restore his presence and his fellowship with mankind throughout all the earth included the children of Abraham inhabiting the Promised Land according to his promise. And in the fashion in which he described it, “Drive out all of the enemies and I will give that land to you and to your seed and you live, bless all of the nations of the earth from there.”

They failed. They failed. Did God have to go to plan B or plan C or plan D? No. God in his sovereignty knew what the children of Israel would do despite all of his warnings. And he used even their failures to bring about his plan. He turned their failures for good.

In the process of their failure he revealed to them their helplessness without him, that they, indeed, needed a Savior, they indeed needed a champion on their behalf. For they had no chance against evil in their own strength. And God used it in the children of Israel to prove to them their sinfulness and the necessity for them to trust God and his provision on their behalf. And throughout the ages the history of judges reminds us the sinfulness of man and the necessity of a Savior.

We find another example a few centuries beyond the book of Judges when another man, leading the children of Israel by the name of King Saul, when faced with the command of God to destroy an enemy, the children of Amalek, destroy them all, Saul, don't leave anything. Don't even save any of the animals or the creatures or any of the children. Destroy everything. And Saul had a better idea. Saul's better idea was to save some of the sheep, the best of the sheep, the best of the cattle and we will use those for our sacrifices instead of our own sheep and cattle. And, oh, yes, he preserved alive the king of the Amalekites, Agag, by name.

God saw that and he sent Samuel to him and said, “Samuel,” he said, “Saul, how did you did in your battle against Amalek?”

“Oh, we had great victory. We destroyed all of the people, but we did save the king.”

And Samuel said to him, "Saul, Saul, what meaneth the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle in my ears? What am I hearing? You didn't obey God. You didn't believe him. You didn't trust him. And you saved out what you thought good that God called wicked. And because you, Saul, failed to believe and to trust God, you will no longer serve as the King of Israel. God will replace you with someone after his heart."

Oh, we cannot take chances with God, my friends, because big gates swing on little hinges, both for good and for evil. And God, by preserving this record for us reminds us through warnings the example of the children of Israel how doubt brings about disobedience and disobedience brings defeat and it brings decline and it brings disaster and desertion from God.

Ah, but it also shows us the reward of faith and obedience, God's presence with us. And it gives to us a picture of the Lord Jesus, the necessity of a Savior. And we find it ... finding its fulfillment in the birth and arrival of Christ, the Savior, the one who once again restored God's presence in glory on the earth in human flesh as he originally designed it in creation. And all who come to faith and trust in Christ experience that, experience the reality of that living presence within, not without.

How does that correlate to you and me in our day and age? We can learn from the error of the children of Israel. And we can heed the warning and be reminded on the one hand of the disaster of doubt and disobedience. Ah, but on the other we can also gain comfort and encouragement from the effects of belief and obedience, God's presence, God revealing himself to us and in our midst, as collectively and individually.

How can the Spirit of God apply these truths in your life today? He can open your eyes to see that which is false and point out error and identify it to you. It looks so simple, so little, so insignificant. This little thing won't hurt very much. Oh, yes it will. Yes, it will. God wants total, absolute faith and obedience, not just apart of the time or in some of the things. We can also see displayed for us the truth, the effects of faith and obedience.

And the Spirit of God can take these truths and comfort us, encourage us to believe and to trust. He can also convict us and point out to us our failure to trust him and to believe him.

In the time of Jesus some of the scribes and Pharisees came to him and said, "Show to us the works of God that we may do them."

Do you know his answer? Very simple. "Have faith in God." That is the works of God. That is the thing he wants to see in your life and in my life. Have faith in God. And the Spirit of God can take these truths and he can make us uncomfortable and show to us those areas in our lives when we have failed to have faith in God.

How will you respond? Well, you can deny it all and say, "Oh, well, that was an interesting story." You can delay and say, "Well, there were some things there that were worthy of thought, but maybe tomorrow. I will think about them on another day. You

know, I have got a lot on my plate today. I think maybe I will just kind of set it aside and in another day I will think about it.”

I would remind you, as I have reminded you every Sunday, tomorrow never comes. You only have today. You don't have tomorrow. You do have today. So how will you respond today? You can take comfort in the truth. And some of you have taken comfort in the truth. And you know the reality of God's presence as he promised and his faithfulness and his grace and his mercy in your lives.

I don't know all of you, however. And I can't see down into the inner parts of your heart and your mind. I don't know what is there. And maybe that you have never really trusted Christ. Oh, you have heard about him. You like him. You know about Christmas and Easter and you try to do good things. But you have never trusted him. Trust him today. Don't put it off till tomorrow. Don't wait for a better day. There is no better day than today, because a better day will never come.

I pray that the Spirit of God will take these truths, open your eyes to see them, to understand them, to see where you have failed, like the children of Israel, in something you thought very insignificant and yet God views it as very significant. And I pray that the Spirit of God will bring you to where you trust him completely, wholly, that as Jesus responded to his accusers, the works of God have faith in God. Trust his provision in Jesus Christ for people like you and like me. And find his faithfulness true in your life today.

Let's close in prayer.