

Place: Lurgan Baptist

Reading: Judges 1:1-4, 2:1-10

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Foot and mouth disease is the scourge of the cattle industry. Last year in our nation, we looked at our T.V. screens in amazement as we saw cattle being destroyed, herds being decimated because of this awful scourge.

When this disease hit one cattle farm several years ago the authorities clamped on a strict quarantine to isolate and control the problem. There was one farmer who was determined to save his animals. He carefully sprayed every building on the farm, every room of his house, and every vehicle on his property. He then moved all his animals into a disinfected building padlocked the door and restricted all contact with the outside world. No visitors were allowed on his property and he even went to the point of picking up his newspaper at the front gate with sterile gloves then baking it in the oven to kill any bacteria. Yet despite all his efforts within three months some of his cows became ill and the entire herd had to be wiped out.

As one health officer, noted " *The virus is transmitted through the air and you cannot quarantine the wind.*" In our time the winds of " ***The Me Generation,***" are blowing a strong and deadly virus. " *Doing your own thing,*" has been enshrined as the national lifestyle. Our

society is increasingly pagan and vigorously anti-Christian. My if ever a verse has the ring of the 21st century about its the one thats hanging at the backdoor of the book of Judges. " *In those days there was no King in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" (21:25) Judges has been called one of the saddest books of the Bible. It records the story of a nation that had once known the wonderful works of God, a nation with a glorious history, but a nation that turned away from its grand heritage to reap a grim harvest. Now there are several things that I want you to notice by way of introduction to our study this !

(1) The HISTORY of the Book:

The second main group of books in our English OT is called the Historical books. Judges is the second of the twelve historical books, and it was written around 1000 BC. It was obviously written after Israel began to be ruled by a king for the key phrase of the book says, " *In those days there was no king in Israel,*" implying that there was a king when the history was published. (17:6 18:1 19:1 21:25) This book covers a period of some 300 years and Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship to Samuel. (1)

(2) The SUMMARY of the Book:

The summary is given in (2:11 2:23) Did you recall when you were a child ? Your parents would have taken you to the park and put you on a merry go round. Thats the best way to describe the book of Judges. For in this book we go round in circles. Its the

same cycle that's repeated over, and over, and over again.

Look at (2:13) There is SIN: (2:14) SUFFERING: (2:18) SUPPLICATION: (2:18) SALVATION: Look at the same cycle in (Ch 3) (3:7) SIN: (3:8) SUFFERING: (3:9) SUPPLICATION: (3:10) SALVATION. Now that cycle is repeated at 6 times in the book of Judges. So you have (1) (2)

(3) The MORALITY of the Book:

Was it not cruel and unjust for God to **command** Israel to exterminate the nations in Canaan ? How terrible that Israel butcher innocent Canaanites, grab their land, and all at God's command ! (Deut 20:10-18) Do you not hear that sort of talk today ? If Israel seeks to route out the suicide bombers, the whole world rises up against them ? Those who bemoan the poor Canaanities forget one vital factor. The Canaanites were not innocent.

(Deut 18:9-12 20:16-18) God didn't want the filth of the Canaanite society and religion to contaminate His people. That's why Israel was to demolish all their worship centres, *every Saint Baal on the Hill Shrine, and our Lady of Harvest Chapel !* (Deut 7:1-5)

Secular history as well, as Biblical history, informs us that the practices of the nations of Canaan were intolerable, even to other heathen nations. One author writes, *" Many of the Canaanite cities have been dug up and one can see the statuettes which were worshipped by the Canaanite's at this time were*

perverse. The worship was wrapped up not only with complete rebellion against God but with all kinds of sexual sin. The statuettes were as pornographic as some of today's worst pictures. And in its violence their culture became equal to ours. So in Moses time, God said, " All right its time for the judgement."

(Gen 15:13) Israel would give the world the knowledge of the true God, the Holy Scriptures, and the Saviour. But if Israel was polluted how could God accomplish His purposes ? **" God is perpetually at war with sin,"** wrote G. Campbell Morgan. **" That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites."** Maybe, you're saying, *" Fair enough, but what has this book to say to us today ?"*

(4) The RELEVANCY of the Book:

" Family feud leaves 69 brothers dead. Powerful Government leader caught in love nest. Gang rape leads to victim's death and dismemberment. Girls at party kidnapped and forced to marry strangers. Woman judge says travellers no longer safe on roads." Sensational headlines like that are usually found on the front pages of tabloids, but those headlines describe some of the events that occur in the book of Judges. In 1973 Dr. Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled *" Whatever became of Sin."* This psychiatrist sensed the loss of old fashioned morality in the unrestrained permissiveness of modern society and expressed his alarm. Well, how do you live in a society without fixed standards ? When, everyone is doing that which is right in their own eyes, how do we believers keep on track ? Doing that which is right in the eyes of the

Lord ? I believe answers to that question lie on the neglected pages of this OT book.

You see, book is so relevant because it provides us with living examples of people who faithfully served God in dark and ugly times. Did you know that when the writer of Hebrews listed O.T. characters who walked by faith in their generation he mentioned the major judges.

Gideon, Berek, Samson, Jephthah ! Now these men were not perfect, some of them committed grave sins, yet they were used by God and they challenge us with our limitations and failures to have an impact for righteousness in our society. (1) (2) (3) (4) Now our first study is all about " **SETTING THE SCENE.**" I want to give you three pictures that will help us to do this. A picture of God, of the Nation, of Faith.

(1) A PICTURE OF DIVINE ADEQUACY

Now we get this picture in (Ch 1) Judah receives Divine Direction (1:2) and Divine Assurance (1:2) Judah also experiences the Divine Power (1:4) and the Divine Presence (1:19) My is that not a picture of Divine Adequacy ? Now how does this Divine Sufficiency show itself ? I want to suggest to you that God is adequate in a time of:

(a) *HISTORICAL CRISIS:*

Look at how the book begins. (1:1) Another translation puts it like this. " *Here's what happened*

after the death of Joshua." Now lets stop there for a moment. For this is not only a helpful historical note this statement indicates a drastic change in the life of the nation. You see, although the books of Joshua and Judges stand side by side on the pages of Holy Scripture they are poles apart in what they record of Israel's obedience to God. Joshua is the record of the exploits of Israel as they obeyed God. *Joshua is a book of Victory, Judges is a book of Defeat. Joshua is a book of Freedom, Judges is a book of Slavery. Joshua is a book of Faith, Judges is a book of Unbelief. Joshua is a book of Progress, Judges is a book of Declension. Joshua is a book of Obedience, Judges is a book of Disobedience. Joshua is a book of joy, Judges is a book of Sorrow. Joshua is a book of Strength, Judges is a book of Weakness. Joshua has a Strong Leader, Judges has No Leader. In Joshua God's Word is Central, while in Judges God's Word is Peripheral.* What a contrast !

But now Joshua is dead. Have you ever noticed how new beginnings are punctuated by the earthly end of the servants of God ? What do I mean ?

Exodus begins with the Death of Joseph !

Joshua begins with the Death of Moses !

Judges begins with the Death of Joshua !

1 Samuel begins with the Death of Eli !

2 Samuel begins with the Death of Jonathan !

1 Kings begins with the Death of David !

2 Kings begins with the Departure of Elijah !

Yet for all that God's cause does not collapse not even

when God's most useful servants are taken home. That's the witness of Judges. (1) Joshua died but do you notice what God said? (1:2) "*And the Lord was with Judah.*" God buries His workmen, but His work must go on. My the point should not be lost on us.

Our help is in the name of the Lord not in the name of your favourite preacher or writer. Even when the Lord Jesus went away it proved a boon for His church. Do you recall His words? "*It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you.*"

(Jn 16:7) Joshua is dead but God is Adequate!

Historical Crisis! Is that not where we are at *Internationally?* Who knows what kind of holocaust will be unleashed on this world? Is God adequate? Yes! ***Historical Crisis!*** Is that not where we are at *Locally?* Who knows what the future holds for our land? Is God adequate? Is God still on the throne? Yes! ***Historical Crisis!*** I wonder is that where you are at Personally? Are you facing a crisis in your business?

In your home? In some relationship? Is God adequate? Yes! The Lord will never let us down, and never let us go. (Rom 8:38-39)

(b) MORAL CHAOS:

Let me show you the key verse or phrase in the book of Judges. (21:25) Now four times over we have this significant phrase, "*in those days there was no king in Israel,*" and twice the inevitable consequence, "*every*

man did that which was right in his own eyes." (17:6 18:1 19:1 21:25) You see, no one was in control. No one gave the orders. No one was responsible to anyone, as a result every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Mind you, not that which was wrong for the tragedy is that man's idea of what is right and wrong is often the opposite to God's. My for Israel this was the worst of times. Have we got murder today? They had it in the period of the Judges. (9:1) Have we got rape today? It happened in the Judges. (19:1) What about homosexuality? Well, it was there also. (19:22)

This was a society without standards, and a time without truth.

How similar to our generation. Have you heard what the new Archbishop of Canterbury has had to say? He does not mind marrying or appointing gays to the ministry in spite of the fact that the Word of God says, "*It is abomination.*" (Lev 18:22) Do you recall what Paul had to say to Timothy? (2 Tim 3:1) Enoch lived in such a day. He lived on the very verge of rapture. It was also an age of permissiveness. People did their own thing. Society imposed no restraints. Crime, lawlessness, flourished, immorality was an accepted way of life, polygamy was introduced yet in a society without standards Enoch walked with God. He walked with God just before the Rapture. One of these days God is going to reach down and take home not just a Champion, but a Church. Are you ready? What about your walk with God? In a day of moral chaos are you walking circumspectly? (a) (b)

(c) SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE:

Here's the Theme of the Book. "*Failure through Compromise.*" How did it all begin ? Well, in this opening chapter we are given nine and a half tribes who settled in Canaan who did not destroy or drive out the nations as God commanded. (Deut 20:16) They allowed them to remain. Now do you recall:

1. Their PAST DEVOTION:

Look at (Joshua 24:14) There's something solemn about the servant of God coming to God's people for the last time. Joshua has rehearsed the acts of God in their presence, now he presents them with a challenge. (24:15) Look at the peoples response. (24:16, 21, 24)
What wonderful promises they made. My have you ever made promises in the presence of God ? Have you kept them ? 1.

2. THE PRESENT DECLINE:

Look at (3:7) In the book of Joshua, "*We will not forsake the Lord,*" in the book of Judges, "*the people forgot the Lord.*" The result ? Spiritual Compromise ! What happened to Israel so often happens to us ! We also make sincere promises in God's presence, with God's people. Promises to serve, to give, to evangelise, to visit, to pray, to reconcile with our brother. We are full of good intentions, but often the results are the same with us as with Israel. We talk big, we live little. Oh, we mean what we say but when it comes to driving

out the enemy we can find a dozen rational reasons for acting otherwise. Yet in a day of (a) (b) (c) God is adequate.

" *Our sufficiency is of God.*" (2 Cor 3:5) (1)

(2) A PICTURE OF HUMAN APATHY

The Book of Judges begins with a series of victories and defeats that took place after the death of Joshua. The boundary lines for the 12 tribes has been determined years before. (Jos Ch 13-22) but the people had not fully claimed their inheritance by defeating and dislodging the entrenched inhabitants of the land. When Joshua was an old man the Lord said to him, "*there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.*"

(Jos 13:1) The people of Israel Owned all the land, but they did not Possess all of it, therefore they could not Enjoy all of it. What ***a picture of human apathy***, is set before us in these opening chapters ! Indeed Israel failed on three accounts.

(a) They Failed to CONQUER THE LAND:

The early victory of (CH 1) is followed by a record of repeated defeats. Did you notice that time and again the Lord keeps pounding out the message ? "*They did not drive them out.*" (1:27,28,29,30,31,32, 33) Now is this what God told them to do ? No ! (Deut 7:1-6) Now why were Israel to drive them out ? "*Lest they make thee sin against Me,*" saith the Lord. (Exod 23:33) Is that not exactly what happened ? The nations in the Land of Canaan became ***THORNS*** that afflicted

Israel and **TRAPS** that ensnared Israel. You see, the Jews eventually became so accustomed to the sinful ways of their pagan neighbours that those ways didn't seem sinful any more. (2:11-13) Then they became interested in how their neighbours worshipped, until finally Israel started to live like their enemies and imitate their ways. ***The Thorns had become Traps !*** For believers to day, the first step away from the Lord is "*friendship with the world,*" (James 4:4) which then leads to our "*being spotted by the world.*" (1:27)

The next step is to "*love the world,*" (1 Jn 2:15) and gradually become "*conformed to this world,*" (Rom 12:2) This can lead to being "*condemned with the world,*" (1 Cor 11:32) the kind of judgement that came to Lot (Gen Ch 19) Samsom (Jud Ch 16) and Saul (Ch 15, 31) My ... have the thorns become traps in your life Personally ? Things that you have allowed to remain in your life are now bringing you into bondage !

Several years ago I used to preach quite a lot in different Nurses Fellowships around the country ! Indeed I think it was in one of those fellowships that I met Catherine for the first time. But in that fellowship in Banbridge Catherine had a close friend.

She was a sound Christian, had been baptised and belonged to one of the Brethren assembles in the community. She was also the leader of the Nurses fellowship. We had some good times together. Then a very nice young man started to take an interest in her, nice but not saved. The alarm bells started ringing in

my head. I spoke to her about it, and I'll never forget her reply, "*Denis, you have no call to worry, this is purely platonic, its harmless.*" But that little thorn grew, until it entrapped her. She married that guy, and today she is nowhere spiritually ! My ... the Thorns so easily become Traps Personally and Corporately ! H. Bonar once said, "*I looked for the church and found it in the world and I looked for the world and found it in the church.*" My ... we need to beware of falling standards.

Sometimes I hear Christians say, "*I don't care what way they come to the meetings as long as they come.*"

Is that how God feels about His people ? I'm not talking here about how the unsaved. Get them in whatever way you can. But does God have standards for His people ?

Yes ! What a responsibility we as parents have, to bring up our children in the light of the Word of God, not in the light of the Ways of the World. (a)

(b) They Failed to CONSIDER THE LAW:

This was the reason for their failure and defeat. You see, God promised Joshua constant victory and success if he honoured the book. (Jos 1:7-8) And Joshua repeated this promise to the nation ere he took his leave of them. (23:5-11) He said, "*Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left.*" But do you see what happened in Judges ? (2:2) ***What was***

Central in Joshua became Peripheral in Judges ! My ... is God's Word central in your life ? Someone has said, " *The Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't.*" Did you notice one of the tragic results of neglecting God's Word in (2:10) ? They had not even won their own children to the Lord. They had failed to teach them the Word of God as God had instructed them. (Deut 6:1) How often that happens in nations, in families, in churches, how easy it is for the younger generation to fall away from the Lord if the older generation is not faithful to teach them. My ... the Word of God must be Central in our churches, in our homes, in our lives. Yes, they failed (a) (b)

(c) They Failed to CLEAVE TO THE LORD:

Look at (2:11-13) All through their history Israel was plagued by Baal worship for once it got into them, it was difficult to get out of them. You see, the main deity in Canaan was Baal, god of rainfall, and fertility and Ashtoreth was his spouse. If you wanted to have fruitful orchards and vineyards, flourishing crops, and increasing flocks and herds, you worshipped Baal by visiting a temple prostitute. You see, this combination of idolatry, and immorality, and agricultural success was difficult for men to resist, which explains why God told Israel to wipe out the Canaanite religion completely.

(Num 33:51-56) My ... are these failures not apparent among us to day ? Instead of being " *overcomers,*" we compromise, and let the enemy drag us down. Often we deliberately disobey the Lord. Many times we fail to love Him and cleave unto Him with all our hearts.

Like Robert Robinson we have to sing,

***" Prone to wander Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love."***

The amazing thing is this. The Lord still loves us. He loved Israel, that's why he raised up judges to deliver His sinful people and to call the nation back to Himself.

So we have here not only (1) (2)

(3) A PICTURE OF FAITH'S ACTIVITY

For in this dark day of failure, there was faith. Side by side with compromise runs the story of men and women who knew what it was to live by faith in difficult times.

Many of the great heroes of faith enrolled in (Heb Ch 11) come from the period of the Judges. Dr. Harry Rimmer used to say, " *Straight ahead lies yesterday,*" and then he would add " *Future events cast their shadows before.*" In other words, its all happened before. My ... are we not living in a period similar to the Book of Judges ?

* *There is no King in Israel:*

* *People are doing what is right in their own eyes:*

* *God's people can't seem to work together:*

" People are in bondage to various enemies:

But here and there God is raising up men and women of faith who believe Him, confront the enemy and win the victory. Now these judges:

(a) WERE ORDINARY:

1. They were Ordinary MEN:

The Hebrew word translated "judge," means "to save, to rescue, to defend and to deliver." Now when we think of judges we think of the Courthouse, dignified officials wearing stately robes, but these folk weren't like that. Do you recall the old westerns ? Wyatt Earp and Matt Dillion, well, the judges were probably more like them. They were like Western Sherrifs with forceful personalities. In (2:16) they are called "deliverers," and that was often their function. God's men for dark days ! Men just like us !

2. With Ordinary MEANS:

Think of the means God used in this book. He used a left-handed man. (3:15) An ox-goad. (3:31) A woman who was good with a hammer and a nail. I've one like that too. (4:21) Three hundred untrained men with no weapons. (8:20) A millstone. (9:53) The jawbone of an ass. (15:15) Listen: the Lord can use the weakest, poorest instruments to bring about His wonderful purposes. You see, God chooses the foolish things, the weak things, the base things, the things which are despised, the things which are not. Why ? That no flesh should glory in His presence ! (1 Cor 1:27) (a)

(b) WERE EXTRAORDINARY:

1. They were Extraordinary in their PURPOSE:

Why did God raise these judges up ? (2:18) I tell you it would have been easier to discard a people with a record like Israel, but then God does not break His covenant. (2:1) You see, over against the covenant breaking nation, we have the covenant keeping God. My God does not desert His people, God keeps His promises ! How do we know our sins are forgiven ? God said so. How do we know we have eternal life ? God said so. We can trust the Word of God because the God of the Word is behind it. 1.

2. They were Extraordinary in their POWER:

You see, God not only raised them up but God was with them. (2:18) Seven times in this book we read about the Spirit of God. (3:10 6:34 11:29 13:25 14:6 14:19 15:14) My is this not who we need in this dark day ? The Spirit of God to flow in, flow through, and flow out of these lives of ours ? (Zech 4:6)

The Book of Judges not only foreshadows the evil of this present day. (21:25) It also gives us the reason. " *There was no king in Israel.* " My sin, violence, lawlessness, immorality are rampant because the King has not come yet, but the fact that all is going so wrong down here, is a sure sign of the Nearness of His Appearing. You see, *the only true remedy for the period of the Judges was the Coming of the King.* (Ruth) As it was then, so it is now. We are on the threshold of the glorious age of the Coming of the

King whose right it is to reign. (Jer 23:6) The King is
Coming. "*Marantha,*" our Lord is coming. In the
light of that, will you be like that the judges. Will you
be available to Him ?