**INTRODUCTION**

**The nation is in distress; its people live in constant fear. The streets and highways aren’t safe at night for men or women. Roving gangs assault people and steal their belongings. There are accounts of mass murder, gang rape, and dismemberment. There is moral confusion – no sense of what is right or wrong. People live by their own rules. The nation itself seems defenseless before its enemies and has suffered defeat after defeat. There is a growing level of dissent with the current form of government – people are looking for a strong, charismatic, and autocratic ruler who has all of the answers and is “smarter than all the generals”.**

**Is this a description of some 21st century foreign country? Does it describe *our* nation? In fact, this is a description of the nation of Israel during the time of the Judges. The Book of Judges covers the period of Israel’s history between the death of Joshua and the anointing of Israel’s first king, Saul. From a time (or chronological) standpoint, it lasted about 300 years. Under Joshua’s leadership, Israel enjoyed a season of victory as they crossed the Jordan River into the Land of Promise. The Canaanite nations who inhabited the land were powerless to stop them. Having defeated all of their kings and armies, the twelve tribes of Israel parted ways, with each tribe settling into its allotted inheritance. Then Joshua died.**

**For about 300 years after Joshua’s death, Israel experienced weakness, divisions, defeat, and oppression by their increasingly powerful and hostile neighbors. WHAT HAPPENED? Understanding the failures of Israel (God’s first covenant people) to overcome their national enemies can help the church (God’s new covenant people) learn to live more victoriously over our *spiritual* enemies (read I Corinthians 10:1-11).**

**BACKGROUND**

**Most of us are familiar with the history of Israel. As a brief review, here are some key highlights:**

* **God calls Abram and his wife Sarai from their home to go to the land of promise (read Genesis 12:1-3) and changes their names to Abraham and Sarah, giving them a son, Isaac (read Genesis 21:1-7).**
* **The promise is confirmed to Isaac and his younger son Jacob (read Genesis 28:10-15).**
* **Jacob and his large family move to Egypt under the care of his son Joseph, who has become a powerful assistant to Pharaoh (read Genesis 46:1-7).**
* **After Joseph’s death, a new Pharaoh conspires to destroy the rapidly growing population of Jacob’s descendants, whom they call Hebrews, by placing them under severe servitude (read Exodus 1:8-22).**
* **God raises up a deliverer – Moses (read Exodus 3:1-17).**
* **The liberated nation of Israel crosses the Red Sea and the wilderness of Sinai to enter the Promised Land, but the unbelief of the adults condemns Israel to an additional forty years of wilderness wandering (read Numbers 14:26-39).**
* **After the death of Moses, Joshua is chosen to lead Israel into the Promised land (read Joshua 1:1-9)**

**God gave Israel the right to occupy the Promised Land – but there were conditions. These were spelled out repeatedly through the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They were given specific instructions about their relationship with God, each other, and the inhabitants of the land they were about to enter.**

**Relationship with God**

**They were to worship God EXCLUSIVELY. They were entering a land where a multitude of “gods” were widely worshipped. Chief among there was Baal and his female consort Asherah (also called Ashtoreth or Astarte). There were idols set up almost everywhere, usually on hilltop clearings called groves. Their manner of worship involved feasting, drinking to excess and sex (read Numbers 25:1-9; I Corinthians 10:7-8). In sharp contrast, the worship of God was to be orderly, solemn, and reverential. The centerpiece was the sacrifice of an animal, which looked forward to God’s sacrifice of His Son (read Hebrews 9:11-15; I Peter 1:18-21). All worship and sacrifice was to be conducted by the priests (descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother) in or near the Tabernacle.**

**Relationship with Each Other**

**The Israelites were to LOVE EACH OTHER as they loved God. All forms of exploitation were forbidden. Even non-Israelites who worshipped God were to be treated as brothers and sisters. Kindness, generosity, compassion, and justice were to be the guiding principles of everyday living (read Leviticus 19:9-18, 32-37).**

**Relationship with the Canaanites**

**There was to be NO COMPROMISE with the sinful inhabitants. Idol-worshipping Canaanites were to be evicted from the land. There were to be no treaties with them, no living among them, and no participation in their idolatrous lifestyle (read Leviticus 18: 1-25; Deuteronomy 7:1-6, 22-26).**

**CONCLUSION**

**As they entered the Land of Promise, Israel had every assurance from God of His help in displacing the Canaanite inhabitants. God was true to His promise. But how true were the Israelites to their promises to God? Read Chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Judges and be prepared to discuss the curse of compromise with evil.**