

## **Devotion, Week of July 9, 2023**

### **Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

We have been looking at the various judges during the 200 years between Joshua's leading of the people into Canaan at the end of the return from exile in Egypt to the rule of Saul, who became king about 1025 BCE. The book of Judges is part of what is called the Deuteronomistic History, which begins with the book of Joshua. The first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch ("penta" means five) are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomistic History was written, it is believed, by religious authorities in the southern kingdom after the northern kingdom had been conquered by Assyria in 722 BCE. These authorities are believed to have moved to Jerusalem and produced an early version of texts. Later, during the Babylonian exile that began in 586 BCE, when the prominent people and religious authorities were taken from the southern kingdom, these texts were edited and other material written.

These materials are called Deuteronomistic History because they refer to the code of religious law included in Deuteronomy. This history has two themes: exclusive worship of Yahweh as a prerequisite for Israel's continued possession of and prosperity in the Promised Land, and worship only in "the place that the Lord your God will choose." Worship of other gods will inevitably result in divine punishment, as we see throughout Judges. And worship is connected to the ark of the covenant. Once it is moved to the temple under Solomon's rule, worship should be in the Jerusalem temple exclusively. Later in this history, a third theme is introduced, Yahweh's covenant with the dynasty founded by David. The Deuteronomistic History includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, which we also call the Former Prophets. The Latter Prophets are the books named after individual prophets who appear during and after the time of exile, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Part of the concern with the Deuteronomistic Historians is to try to understand why the Jewish people were taken into exile in Assyria, and later, Babylon. What had they done to make God punish them in this way? These writings reflect a look back at what the people did to cause this punishment. The answer always goes back to the people not worshipping Yahweh exclusively. We read in Judges repeatedly that "the Israelites did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord and worshiped the Baals." As we continue to look at other judges in the next few weeks, you will see this theme expressed, followed by God providing a judge to help turn things around.

*Jeanne*