

"WALK THRU THE BIBLE: JUDGES."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

July 7, 2024, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Judges 2:10-19; 17:6

Last week we ended the book of Joshua with the death of Joshua and the people of God settled into life in the Promised Land. What would be our normal expectation after God led His people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land and gave them victory over the peoples of the land?

God's people should have settled down to an existence of peaceful contentment in total dependence of their good and gracious God who provided everything they needed. After 400 years of bondage in Egypt and 40 years of wilderness wandering and living in tents, what would their new found freedom and new prosperity be like?

The book of Joshua should end with, "And they lived happily ever after." But if you are looking for a warm, cozy fairy tale ending. This isn't it. Judges is about as bleak a story as you will find in the Bible. If Judges were made into a movie, it would get an R rating.

Judges is a 21-chapter downward spiral into deception, oppression, idolatry, murder, human sacrifice and betrayal, gang rape, scandal and apostasy, just to name a few sins.

It is an embarrassment to our modern sensitivities, so primitive, so violent. It starts badly and then goes from bad to worse to terrible. Even the best known heroes of the book like Gideon and Samson turn out to be flawed heroes at best.

No wonder the book is skipped in sermons and Sunday School lessons.

Time of Judges.

We should think about judges as both a book of the Bible and as a period of time. Someone has referred to the period of the judges as the dark ages of Israel's history. The book begins soon after the death of Joshua and ends in the years just before the entrance of Samuel onto the scene, a period of over three centuries (from roughly 1382 BC to 1065 BC). The book records the exploits of the first thirteen judges.

The period of the judges began after the death of Joshua in the early fourteenth century BC (Joshua 24:29) and continued until Saul was crowned king of Israel by the prophet

Samuel in 1051 BC (1 Samuel 10:24). I Samuel gives the exploits of the final two Judges, Eli and Samuel.

Although there is no mention of an author, according to Jewish tradition, the most likely author for the book is Samuel.

What is a Judge?

Forget about our paneled courtrooms with gowns and gavels, recording secretaries and juries.

Judges were not serving as legal decision makers, as we might think of a judge, they were warrior rulers, deliverers, saviors, leaders in Israel until the time of the kings. Only Deborah served in more a judge-like role.

Judges 3:9 When the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a *deliverer* for the people of Israel, who *saved* them.

They were not the ordinary leaders of the people, but people raised up by the providence of God for this specific purpose and time. They were more extraordinary ministers of God to deliver Israel, but Israel's heroes were human. Not like Greek heroes who take on mythological characteristics. Life is messy, and the lives of spiritual leaders' are messy.

Who is the hero of Judges? Is it the thirteen judges, is it Gideon or Samson? All human heroes are flawed, God is the real hero. He is the one who achieves and gives all the success.

Book of Judges.

The book of Joshua is linear. God supplied a faithful leader to Israel, and he took them into the land, and conquered it. The book of Judges is quite different. The structure of the book is more theological, than chronological. This is not a continuous history, but several snapshots of the divine dealings of God with a rebellious people.

Joshua had no successor, there was no government, no capital. What follows is a crisis in leadership and consequently a crisis in faithfulness to God.

Judges 2:10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.

Judges 8:34 The people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side,

In this we see man's constant sin and failure, and God's relentless love, grace and mercy as He pursues His people and rescues them again and again.

A theme for the book of Judges could be "when every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Judges 2:11 The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The author of Judges is a true historian, recording the unvarnished actual events, with all the gory details. As a true historian the author interprets the facts of the events with a true understanding of the philosophy of history.

History is not a meaningless chaotic progression of events, leading nowhere. The history of human civilization is not deterministic or fatalistic or organic.

History is the record of divine providence, there is a Lord of history and of nations. Nations rise or fall according to obedience and judgment. There is judgment on sin and blessing on repentance.

God is fully and completely in control, leading and guiding his people through the moral fog toward his desired outcome. His sovereign purposes cannot be thwarted by man's wickedness and foolishness (Aaron Gray).

History's only hope is in history's God and in the coming of the one true judge and king, Jesus Christ.

Judges 1 – 3:6

All Israel's troubles were due to disobedience and their failure to drive out the enemies of God in the land. As a consequence, they became corrupted by their morals, religion, gods and fell into disobedience and idolatry.

Judges 3:4 They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

God was testing and disciplining Israel, exposing their lack of faith.

Yahweh had guided them all through the wilderness and provided for all their needs, but now they are settled in the land of Canaan. Baal was the fertility god and the god of crops and livestock and he seemed to them to be better suited to provide for them in this agriculture land so they sought to appease their god.

They worshipped him through the fertility rites and rituals for better crops and harvests, which included ritual prostitution and child sacrifice.

How often are we distracted by or attracted by worldly things, worldly paths, worldly philosophies, worldly alternatives to what God has said? How often are we taken in by the empty pleasures and promises of the world, to what is soul depleting.

The world is constantly trying to get us to take our eyes off God, off His will and His ways, to knock us off the path of life and unto the path of darkness and death.

We appease our own national gods accepting our cultural wisdom over Gods, what world says to do contrary to God's Word.

Roles of men and women, discipline of children, marriage and sexuality, porn, abortion.

Our hearts are idol factories, we must constantly be vigilant against false worship, false allegiance, false security.

Judges 3:6-16:31

It is a book of *seven cycles* of relapse, retribution, repentance, and rescue. "In depressing and distressing detail, Judges recounts Israel's repeated fall into apostasy, its devastation at the hands of foreign enemies, its cries for help, the Lord's gracious provision of a judge and a season of rest, before the people fall again into sin" (Stan Guthrie).

Judges 17-21

If it is even possible, the book ends with even more depressing stories of idolatry and godlessness.

These two events are like an appendix meant to illustrate just how far the fall of Israel was and the depth of the apostasy they committed. It shows a complete transgression of

the Ten Commandments. These events may have happened toward the beginning of Judges.

This is the bitter fruit of what happens when everyone does what is right in his own eyes, what is evil in his own eyes.

Compromise and confusion in the religious life of Israel as they worship a metal image. Compromise and confusion in the moral life of Israel, rape, murder, war.

Jesus and the Gospel.

Judges bears witness to and testifies to the person and work of Jesus Christ

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

John 5:46-47 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Luke 24:27 Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:44 He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Christ has died and risen in such a way as to deal with the treacherous hearts of men forever. We can concentrate on His mercy.

The most shocking feature in the book of Judges is not the horror of the sin of God's, but the glory of salvation from that sin accomplished by the God of patience, mercy, compassion, steadfast love, and faithfulness (Ex. 34:6). Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.

Judges points us to the last great judge who like Samson was raised up by God to lay down His life in order to deliver God's people, save us from our sin and defeat all our enemies for good.

The terror of sin is outshined only by the glory of God's salvation worked through these judges, who will somehow point us to Jesus Christ.

Implications and application.

We are called to be a holy people and flee from the disastrous consequences of compromise.

God created us in His image to be His people, set apart from the world for holiness. We are not to mix with the world, we must not be syncretistic, but holy sacrifices to God. We must be killing sin, warring against sin and unrighteousness and disobedience and idolatry.

I Corinthians 6:14-16 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

I Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God's reasons for all this driving out and conquering the enemies was not geographical or pragmatic, but spiritual. If they stay they will lead you astray and make you to sin against me.

Don't be cozy with sin, don't make friends with sin, don't even make peace with sin. Be killing sin or it will be killing you. Tear down all the altars and idols and places of ungodly worship.

Partial obedience is disobedience. Slow obedience is disobedience. Small sins later become great sins.

Our lives follow a similar pattern and cycle of sin. We don't do what we want to do and we do what we don't want to do. Sin is always right there crouching, waiting, tempting.

Samson and Deliah

1. Judges 16:4-20 . . . Sin will always take you farther than you wanted to go.
2. Judges 16:2 . . . Sin will always keep you longer than you wanted to stay.
3. Judges 16:30 . . . Sin will always cost you more than you were willing to pay.

We should come away from the book of Judges with a true fear of forgetting God and not fearing God. We should have a horror of sin and the sinfulness of sin. How quickly has our own nation forgotten God?

God's delight to use the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the strong and wise.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

God used a left-handed assassin, Ehud; a woman, Deborah; an obscure man from the smallest tribe and with the smallest army, Gideon; and a strong fool with a jaw bone, Samson.

The don't resent or despise the discipline of God.

Proverbs 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Hebrews 12:5-11 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

“The book of Judges attests to that, that even though God chastened His people, He was chastening His children whom He loved. And though they felt forsaken for a season, God did not utterly abandon them. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), but it is a judgment that is disciplinary, not destructive. It’s designed to move us to repentance and faithfulness. And the era of the judges shows us that the Lord will not fail to rescue and preserve His church when His church repents and cries out to Him” (RC Sproul).

Every foreign aggression/oppression was an instrument in God’s hands to begin about humility, repentance and receiving of God’s generous grace. But it is against this dark backdrop that the glory of God’s faithfulness shines as He continues to save and deliver His people from their sin.

This is always how it is. A people who deserves destruction, death, judgment and hell, instead receive undeserved, unmerited mercy and kindness from God.

The judges in the book of Judges, like the kings that come after them remind us again and again our messiah is not coming on Air Force One. Our savior will never be found in government, politics, business or education. All human leaders are flawed, and they will all fail us. Our only hope is in the soon coming King of kings and Lord of lords.