

Route 66

Judges: A Cycle of Sin

Part 7 - May 10, 2009



Genesis

In Genesis, mankind rebels; God promises a Savior, chooses to use Abraham's family, and moves them into Egypt when Abe's grandson Jacob/Israel is an old man. In Exodus, the Israelites are enslaved even as they multiply into a great nation. God delivers them, defines righteousness for them, and comes to live with them. And He gives them *this* warning concerning the inhabitants they will encounter when they enter into the Promised Land:



Exodus

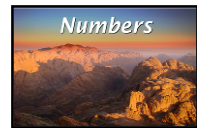
Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, **or they will cause you to sin against me** ... - *Exodus 23:32-33 NIV*

And sadly, this is the story of the Israelites in "Judges".



Leviticus

Leviticus is about the priesthood, sacrifices, and festivals. Numbers is about the rejection of the Promised Land and 40 years of waiting. In Deuteronomy, Moses dies after inspiring a new generation of Israelites to seize the Land. And in Joshua ... they seize it! And Joshua divvies up the land between the twelve tribes, but the enemy still has several strongholds in the land.



Numbers



Deuteronomy



Joshua

So, just before he dies Joshua warns the people to stand firm and resist the urge to conform and compromise with the enemy.

... if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become **snares** and **traps** for you, **whips** on your backs and **thorns** in your eyes ... - *Joshua 23:12b-13a NIV*

Same thing God had warned them through Moses.

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. - *Joshua 24:21-22 NIV*

And this is where the book of "Judges" begins ... with *enthusiasm!*

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?" - *Judges 1:1 NIV*

The tribes of Judah and Simeon! And they struck down 10,000 men at Bezek! That's where they cut off the thumbs and big toes of Adoni-Bezek (who had done the same to seventy *other* kings). They took Jerusalem, Sheshai [SHEE-shigh], Ahiman [uh-HIGH-muhn], and Talmi [TAL-migh], totally destroyed Zephath [Zee-fath], and then seized Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron.

And remember 85-year-old Caleb who refused to retire? He went to Hebron and drove out the three sons of Anak! But then things begin to take a turn:

When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. - *Judges 1:28 NIV*

It's the old trap of thinking you know better than God: "When He made those commands, He didn't fully consider *my* situation." "It's *forced* labor!" FREE! Like how *we* were to the Egyptians!" And all it took was *one* generation ...



Canaanite Altar to Baal

They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. ... They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. - *Judges 2:12a & 3:5-6 NIV condensed*

Here's the progression that led to their downfall: They allowed the enemy to dwell among them. They built up relationships with the enemy. And they ended up worshipping the enemy's gods.

The enemy here doesn't represent our unsaved friends and family; it represents anything in our lives that will eventually and ultimately pull us from God *if* we allow it to dwell among us. And there's one last item in this progression: They were once again enslaved by the enemy.

And sadly, this is what it took in order to turn them back.

The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim [KYOO-shan-RISH-uh-THAY-im] king of Aram Naharaim [AHR-uhm NAY-huh-RAY-im], to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, **Othniel** [AHTH-nih-el] son of Kenaz [KEE-naz], Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. - *Judges 3:8-9 NIV*

Othniel obviously takes after his Uncle Caleb!

The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, so that he became Israel's **judge** and went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died. - *Judges 3:10-11 NIV*

And so began a cycle that would typify the Israelite's first 350 years in the Promised Land.

1. They drift away from God.

Do you know why false gods and idols are so appealing? *I* must serve *God* ... but, false gods and idols serve *me*! It's self-serving. They'd use an idol or a false god to try and control *its* power for *their* purpose. Not to mention the side benefit of the sex rituals!

2. God permits oppression.
3. They repent and pray for deliverance.
4. God raises up a Savior.

That's what the judges were. And that's why this book is called "Judges". It spans the judges/leaders from Joshua's death until Israel crowns Saul as her first *king*.

That four-part cycle happens *seven times* in the book of Judges! But, even with the ingratitude, idolatry, the immorality, God is ever-faithful to deliver His people. "Judges" is all about mankind's constant failure met with God's constant mercy.

Even many of the *judges* were unfit. This isn't God's "Plan A" for Israel. He's keeping Israel from extinction through assimilation into the culture (in order to protect His plan of redemption).

Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord ... - *Judges 3:12a NIV*

This is a common phrase throughout the book of Judges. This time they were subject to the King of Moab for 18 years before God sent them a left-handed judge named Ehud [EE-huhd]. Ehud made an 18" sword, strapped it to his thigh (under his clothing), and snuck it in with a tribute to the pagan king.

At the idols near Gilgal [Ehud] turned back and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." The king said, "Quiet!" And all his attendants left him. - *Judges 3:19 NIV*

Guess what the secret was.

That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years. - *Judges 3:30 NIV*

When it says that the "land had peace" that means that Israel worshipped the Lord as they should. Out of the 350 years, about 100 years were lived in open defiance.

After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. - *Judges 4:1 NIV*

This time a king named Jabin cruelly oppressed Israel until God raised up a judge named *Deborah*. A woman! And Debbie turned to a commander named Barak and gave him God's orders to fight.



Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." - *Judges 4:8 NIV*

She went, and Barak's men defeated 900 iron chariots on Mount Tabor (*aka Mount of Transfiguration*).

King Jabin's commander, Sisera fled to the tent of a woman named Jael [JAY-uhl] and hid himself there. But, while he was asleep, Jael took a tent peg and hammered it through his head! The moral of this story: Don't mess with Jewish women!

And, the land had peace for *forty* years.

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. - *Judges 6:1 NIV*



And then comes Gideon. Gideon and Samson are the two most well-known of the judges; and they couldn't be more opposite. Samson is all he-man. When we meet Gideon, he's hiding in winepress, threshing wheat. An angel appears, calls him a "mighty warrior", and tells him to go save Israel out of Midian's hand.

"But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." - *Judges 6:15 NIV*

That statement has to do with authority - or a lack of it. But, God wants to use Gideon to demonstrate *God's* authority! And Gideon wants proof. So, he sets some fleece out overnight and asks God to make the ground dry and the fleece wet. And God does. And Gideon wonders if that's just what dew does. So, he asks God to reverse the process - and make the ground wet and the fleece dry. And God does. And Gideon gathers together 32,000 men to fight the Midianites.

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands." - *Judges 7:2 NIV*

God wants to make sure that He gets the credit. So, Gideon tells the men that any who are nervous (they're outnumbered four-to-one) should go home. And 22,000 leave! Now *Gideon* is nervous! But God is just getting started. He tells Gideon to watch the men drink water from a stream, and keep only those who lap with their hands to their mouths.

Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. - *Judges 7:6a NIV*

Gideon led a nighttime raid against 135,000 Midianites who became so confused they killed one another and fled for their lives! And the land enjoyed peace for *forty* years.

No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. - *Judges 8:33a NIV*

Gideon's son, Abimelech murdered all 70 of his brothers; and died when a woman purposely dropped a millstone on his head.

Tola son of Puah [PYOO-uh] the son of Dodo [DOH-duh], rose to save Israel ... He led Israel twenty-three years; then he died ... - *Judges 10:1-2 NIV*

And that's all we know about that. Again the Israelites did evil in God's eyes. Again they found themselves in the hands of the enemy. And again they cried out to God to rescue them. But I like God's answer this time:

Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!" - *Judges 10:14 NIV*

He won't turn His back on His people, so He sends an idiot named Jephthah [JEFF-thuh]. Great warrior. Gets the job done. But he vows to sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his house, which turns out to be his only child, a daughter. And then, against the clear command of Deuteronomy 18:10 he does it!

There are twelve leaders mentioned in "Judges"; but only seven follow this cycle of sin: Othniel [AHTH-nih-el], Ehud [EE-huhd], Debbie, Gideon, Tola, Jephthah [JEF-thuh] and finally, Samson.

Supernaturally strong: he killed a lion with his bare hands, and tore off two massive city gates just to taunt the men of Gaza! And no judge is more *pathetic* than Samson. He wastes every gift he's given; he's motivated solely by lust and revenge; and he puts his trust in a Philistine prostitute instead of the Lord. He ends up blind and bound, grinding away in a Philistine prison instead of delivering Israel from their 40 years of oppression. The closest he got was killing 3000 pagan Philistine worshippers in their temple, as he brought it down on his own head.

By the end of Judges, they've completely forgotten that God has chosen them for a purpose. It's like Sodom and Gomorrah. Civil war breaks out when the Benjamites protect a group of men who rape and murder a woman who visits their town.

And the very last verse of Judges sums it all up:

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. - *Judges 21:25 NIV*

And we can all see where that got them: blind and bound! It's the same for us; do *you* have a King? If not, how's that working for you?