

Judges: A Few Good Men... And Women

The Story: part 8

October 30, 2016

DAY ONE: The cycle of sin

1. The book of Judges shows a disturbing trend in human nature. The trend is illustrated six times, over a three-hundred-year period of time.

Judges 2:10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.

¹¹ *Then the Israelites **did evil** in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.*

¹² *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 provoked the LORD to anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.*

¹⁴ *In his anger against Israel **the LORD handed them over to raiders** who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.*

¹⁵ *Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.*

¹⁶ *Then **the LORD raised up judges**, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.*

¹⁷ *Yet they **would not listen to their judges** but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands.*

¹⁸ *Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.*

¹⁹ *But when the judge died, **the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers**, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.*

2. List the major steps in the cycle of sin. Include what the people did and what God did.

3. What strikes you about what the people did?

4. What strikes you about what God did?

DAY TWO: Commitment to the good life over relationship with God.

Judges 3:7 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. ⁸ The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

⁹ But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

1. The cycle of sin in the book of Judges is usually:
 - a. The people rebel or disobey God.
 - b. God raised up an enemy to discipline.
 - c. The people cry out for deliverance.
 - d. God raised up a judge who brings deliverance over Israel's enemies.
2. As you look at that list, what's wrong in it?

3. The glaring problem is not that the people rebel or that God allows or raises up enemies. The glaring problem is step "c". The people call out to God for *deliverance*, not *repentance*!
4. What's the difference between calling out to God for deliverance or calling out to God in repentance?

5. What did the people fear most? Loss of relationship with God or loss of blessings?

6. Isn't most of what we pray for related to the following?
 - * An easier life * Comfort * Sense of well-being
 - * Getting rid of feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, pain.

7. Because "the good life" is most people's highest good, when God is angry with the people and raises up opposition to get them to see their sin, admit it, and repent the people just get angry at God and walk away, until He brings "deliverance."
8. What's your biggest take away from the cycle of sin?

DAY THREE: Gideon: part 1

1. The story of Gideon is one of the best known stories in the book of Judges.

Judges 6:6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. ⁷ When the Israelites cried to the LORD because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me."

2. They cycle of sin continued when “God gave them into the hands of the Midianites.” It was eight years before the people called out to God. For what did they call out to God?

3. How did God answer the people’s call for “help?” (vv. 6-7) What was God hoping would happen?

Judges 6:11 The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." ¹³ "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." ¹⁶ The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."

4. How would you describe Gideon at the beginning of this story?

5. In what ways did God deal with Gideon’s fears?

6. God gives Gideon a task that requires courage Gideon doesn’t have (Judges 6:25-32). Then God pares down Gideon’s army from 32,000 to 300 (Judges 7:1-8). Why do you think God gave Gideon such daunting challenges?

7. What was God trying to build in Gideon?

8. Do you sense God gives you daunting challenges as well? Why?

DAY FOUR: Gideon: part 2

1. Gideon leads his army of 300 to victory over the Midianite army of 120,000! You would think that all the other people in the land would be delirious! Ah, but you overestimate human nature!

Judges 8:1 Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply.

2. Only after Gideon flatters them does this happen...

Judges 8:3 ...At this, their resentment against him subsided.

3. While they are receiving criticism, they keep up the army's pursuit!

*Judges 8:4 Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. ⁵ He said to the men of Succoth, "Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." ⁶ But the officials of Succoth said, "**Do you already have** the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? **Why should we give bread to your troops?**" ...
⁸ From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Succoth had.*

4. The awfulness of human nature finds an infinite number of ways to inflict criticism and blame on those who are trying to do something for the Lord. To his credit, Gideon perseveres until the defeat and rout of the Midianites is complete!

5. How do you think the people would respond to God for His mighty deliverance from the hands of the Midianites?

6. And how do you think they would respond to the leadership and courage of Gideon, who put his life at risk?

Judges 8:33 No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and ³⁴ did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. ³⁵ They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them.

6. Do you forget God's victories and return to the way of life you prefer, instead of living for Him and the things important to God?

7. Do you fail to show kindness to those who have followed God for your benefit?

DAY FIVE: Holiness, the only route to real happiness

Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

1. In our pluralistic, postmodern culture, the statement in Judges 17:6 would be a flattering statement, a statement of independence, individuality, something to celebrate. In the scriptures, it's as damning a statement about human nature as one can make. It's the repudiation of the scriptures as the basis for morality, and as a system for what is right and wrong.

2. Philosophers would call Judges 17:6 "pragmatism." "What works *for me* is what I'll do and think. *I* become the final arbiter of truth, right and wrong, good and evil. Nobody tells me what to do, not even God. If it's right for me, it's right, period."

3. The book of Judges details six cycles of sin in story form. Six other judges are mentioned by name but their story is not detailed.

4. The last three chapters of Judges are independent stories, meant to illustrate the horrific downward slide that God's people took in the land after Joshua died.

5. "Christians" may claim to be doing what Jesus would do, but they often pursue what they want to do, justifying it anyway they can, oftentimes with the "wouldn't God want me to be happy?" idea.

6. And secularists continue to complain about the God of the bible being a God of judgment. When God judges a people, He does so for different reasons than what secularists assume.

Hebrews 12:10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

7. And here's the rub. While we think our highest purpose is our happiness, God sees that happiness can only be achieved through *holiness!* To pursue happiness at the expense of holiness insures you will end up with neither!

8. Holiness consists of loving God and not demanding to use God as you see fit, and of loving others, of sacrificing your well-being for theirs. (Holiness is your path to joy, the only path).

9. We're more afraid of losing "the good life" than of losing (or even gaining) a close relationship with God. Do you not yet see that being with God is your greatest blessing, no matter what else may be happening in your life?

10. What strikes you most from today's devotional?