

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

When I think back on my past, my deepest regrets are the missed opportunities – the “*what ifs*”, the “*if onlys*”, “*the could’ve beens*” - the times when God set the table, but I didn’t come to dinner. I had a break, but I failed to seize the moment!

If you wanted to sum up the book of Judges in two words they would be “*missed opportunities*”. The years after Joshua’s death could’ve been a “*golden age*” for Israel, but instead it became one of the darkest periods in their history.

At the end of Joshua’s life the enemy was on the run. But rather than rise up in faith and drive’ em out as Joshua had instructed – the Hebrews disregarded God’s Word. They tolerated, then compromised with sin. They blew a golden opportunity!

The book of Joshua consists of 24 chapters, and covers a period of 30 years. Whereas Judges consists of only 21 chap-

ters, but covers a period of 350 years.

The book spans the period of time from Joshua’s death to the coronation of King Saul. There were 14 judges in all. Exposes’ of 13 appear in this book. According to tradition the 14th judge, Samuel, was the author of Judges.

There is an old Pogo comic strip that captures the message of Judges. Pogo goes off into the swamp to fight a battle. When he returns, he says, “We have met the enemy... and he is us.” The book of Judges proves that we’re often our own worst enemy. When all we can think about is ourselves, and put our own interests ahead of God - we miss out on opportunities to receive God’s blessings.

The last verse in Judges sums up the whole book. Judges 21:25 puts the whole problem in a phrase: “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

HERE COMES THE JUDGE !

The judges were not old men with legal credentials, dressed in black robes, and holding wooden gavels. The judges of Israel are not Supreme Court justices. These Old Testament judges were more like *virtuous vigilantes*.

The judges were common men and women with no credentials other than the calling of

God. They were people in whom God ignited a fire of freedom, a passion for holiness, a hunger for truth, a zeal for justice. They rally the nation, and lead Israel to victory against her enemies. The judges were Israel’s patriotic heroes.

WHEN IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

I love Judges 5:2. It explains what happened under the command of Barak, and it expresses the ideal for any church: “When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!”

When church leaders rise up in faith, and demonstrate the wisdom and courage to lead – when people trust their leaders, and willingly follow – it’s a combination that blesses God.

Leaders in the church need to lead, and

members in the church need to support the course the leader sets. It’s been said: “When you can’t lead, and won’t follow – all you do is make a dandy roadblock.”

We don’t need roadblocks - we need stepping stones, and bridge builders. It all came together for Barak – the leaders and people working together – each doing their part – and God won a victory!

Let’s pray it comes together for us!

Bible Scan - Judges 1-10

What About A Fleece ?

In Judges 6:34 we're told, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon". God is working in Gideon, but his faith is still weak. In verse 36 he asks for a sign, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said..."

God wants us to base our faith on His Word. But Gideon's faith needs to be propped up by a sign. He lays a fleece, or sheep's skin, on the threshing floor – and makes a deal with God. If the dew is on the fleece and not the ground he'll know it's God's will for him to lead the Hebrews into battle against the Midianites. The next morning the fleece is so moist he squeezes from it a bowl-full of water.

But that's still not enough for Gideon. He lays out the fleece a second night. This time he asks God to let the ground be damp, and the fleece stay dry. God goes along with Gideon's test, and provides him yet one more sign!

Now, when it comes to discerning God's will for our lives the question always arises – should we employ a fleece? It worked for Gideon, so why not us?

First, note God used the fleece to prop up a weak faith. Gideon's faith needed a crutch. God wants our faith strong enough to stand solely on the Word of God.

I won't say that God never speaks through a fleece, but be careful. This was an Old Testament phenomena, which was never practiced after the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. In fact, before the Spirit came upon the church the disciples cast lots – a type of fleece - to select a replacement for Judas. There's evidence they chose the wrong person. I believe Paul was God's replacement, not Mat-thias.

Let me also say, when I lay out a fleece before the Lord I'm really dictating terms to God – that's always dangerous. God may not want to follow my terms.

It's also interesting even after God responds to Gideon's first fleece it still doesn't settle the issue in his mind. He figured it could be a freakish occurrence. That's the problem with a fleece – it may or may not be God. For me, it's always better to trust in God's Word, and wait for the clear voice of the Holy Spirit.

Gideon - The Unlikely Hero

The first word out of Gideon's mouth is an admission of doubt. He says in Judges 6:13, "if the LORD is with us why has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles?..." God doesn't argue with Gideon, instead he challenges his faith. He announces He will use Gideon to deliver Israel. Gideon scoffs. He says in verse 15, "how can I save Israel?... My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Gideon asks for a sign. He takes meat and bread, and lays them on a rock. The Angel of the Lord takes the staff in his hand and with one touch starts a barbecue. Fire rises out of the rock and consumes the meat. Burger King is not the first to invent the "*flame broiled burger*".

God tells Gideon to tear down his father's altar, and chop up his wooden image as firewood – then offer a sacrifice to the Lord. This was a bold statement – a declaration of protest - equivalent to Martin Luther's 95 theses, or the Boston Tea Party. Gideon's faith is rising – but it's not yet where it needs to be. He obeys, but does the deed at night to remain anonymous. Gideon has applied for God's secret service - but God expects all His servants to be willing to go public.

As flawed as it may've been, Gideon's act of faith sparks a fire in the hearts of his fellow Israelis. Revival breaks out, and scores of Hebrews rally around Gideon.

Devotion Box - Thoughts for Parents

There was a generation gap... Joshua knew God - the elders knew the works of God - but their offspring knew neither. This will be the case later in the family of David. David followed God with his *whole heart*. But his son, Solomon, had a *half-hearted* devotion. And his son Rehoboam, had *no heart* for God at all. Apparently, second hand experiences of God aren't enough.

A son who sees God's work in answer to his father's prayers - who witnesses God in the life of his father – might be impressed enough to follow in his father's footsteps. But the third generation who only hears about God... forget it. Hearsay is never enough to capture a heart, transform a life, and take control of a person.

Every generation needs its own experience with God. Every true Christian is a 1st generation Christian. We all need to meet God personally, and experience His power for ourselves.

A wise parent knows this, and doesn't just impose his own convictions on his kids – rather, he helps them cultivate their own walk with God.

Devotion Box - How Is Your Follow-Through?

Judges 1:8 tells us, "Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire." In 1 Samuel we discover David has to take the city again 400 years later. This was indicative of Israel's problem... *a poor follow-through*.

My wife plays tennis, and every now and then I bless her with some free coaching. She's always so grateful. And one of the tidbits I keep telling her is "a good serve requires a good follow-through." The same is true spiritually.

Whenever you serve the Lord don't do it halfway – follow-through – complete the job. Don't leave it for a King David – or a Pastor Randy - to come back later and take care of what you neglected. A job's not over, until it's over!

Behind Every Good Man...

Barak Gets A Push

Until chapter 4 all the judges are men. But in verse 4 we meet Deborah...

"Now Deborah, a prophetess... was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. Then she sent and called for Barak... and said... "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'"

God promises victory to Barak. And take note, God calls a man to lead His people into battle. We learn in the New Testament that in the church and home God ordains male leadership.

And it's not a cultural accommodation. God explains it by taking us all the way back to creation. 1 Corinthians 11:9 says, "Nor was man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." At home and at church the man should lead, and the woman follow.

It's sad to find a church where the women have taken over. It usually happens because the wimpish men are dragging their feet. They lack the spiritual maturity and fortitude to rise up and lead. This shouldn't be. We men need to be caring and courageous, and willing to take on the responsibilities of servant leadership. I've never met a woman who resented a man wanting to be a *loving leader*.

But, when a man refuses to lead, God raises up a woman to do the job! God's work won't be hindered by the lack of a godly man. God uses women too!

Is Sisera Seeing Stars?

Judges 5:20-21 suggest Barak got some celestial help while fighting Sisera and his iron chariots. The stars, and their orbits, and a flooding Kishon fight for Israel.

God may've pelted Sisera with an asteroid shower, or large hailstones. The same phenomena that caused the long day of Joshua may've assisted Barak.

The Kishon is normally a dry riverbed. It fills with water only during heavy rains. Its flooding implies a thunderstorm. Imagine being one of Sisera's soldiers sitting in an iron chariot, stuck in the mud, in the middle of an intense electrical storm – lightning flashing all around you, and you sitting in an iron chariot! The chariot suddenly becomes more a liability than an asset. God has ways to turn the tide.

During the battle Sisera escapes, and hides in the tent of a woman named "Jael". When Sisera asks Jael for water, she gives him milk – a natural sedative.

The milk helps put him to sleep, and as he snoozes, Jael slips in and hammers a tent peg through his temple. You might say Sisera suffers a real Excedrin headache... and Deborah's prophecy is fulfilled.

Sin Cycle

Call it a vicious circle - that's what we have in the book of Judges. You can sum up the period of the Judges in five words:

SIN
SERVITUDE
SUPPLICATION
SALVATION
SERENITY

Here's how it works...

The people *sin* and follow false gods.

God causes their enemies around them to rise up and enslave them. They're forced into *servitude*.

The Hebrews though cry out to God to deliver them – they make *supplication*.

God brings *salvation* by raising up a judge to lead the Hebrews to victory.

A period of calm and *serenity* follows, until...

It's interrupted when the Hebrews sin again, and the cycle gets repeated.

It happens at least 7 times in the book.

Ehud - the Judge Who Was A Southpaw

In ancient times left-handedness was viewed as a handicap – a deformity. There are traces of this ancient notion even in our modern languages. The English word "*gauche*" means crude or uncouth – but it's the French word for "*left-handed*". The Latin word for "*left-handedness*" gets translated into English as the word "*sinister*", which of course means "*evil or wicked*".

The point is God chose a man who was viewed as inadequate to do His bidding. It made sure credit for the victory went to God Himself, and not the instrument He chose to use.

Notice too, God used Ehud's perceived weakness to win a victory. Ehud stabbed King Eglon with the dagger he held in his left-hand. God will turn our weaknesses into strengths when we turn them over to Him. Guys, stop using your handicap as an excuse, and learn to see it as an opportunity for God to show Himself strong.

Bible Scan - Judges 1-10

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org

Calvary Chapel Announcements - January 9, 2000

1/11 @ 10:00 AM Ladies Morning Bible Study: All Ladies are invited to attend. We are studying the Book of Genesis. Taught by: Kathy Adams. New Attendees: \$15 for study guide (Childcare is provided)

1/12 @ 7:00 PM HS Impact 7:30 PM Café: Bible Study by Pastor James, Special Music by Three Last Words

1/19 through 1/21 CHURCH LEADERS CONFERENCE: Guest Speakers: Chuck Smith-CC Costa Mesa, Gayle Erwin-Servant Quarters, Brian Bell-CC Murrieta, Ricky Ryan-CC Santa Babara, Don McClure-CC San Jose

1/28 through 1/30 Adult Ski Trip-High Pastures, N.C. \$130 per person. Price includes transportation, lodging, ski rental, lift ticket, and some meals. Register at the Information Counter. Deadline is 1/16/00. For additional information please contact, Pastor Randy.

Next Bible Scan- January 16- Judges 11-21

"And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel"

- Judges 10:16

Bible Scan Memory Verse

Devotion Box - So Much like God !

Judges 10:6 tells us, "Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths... and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him." The cycle starts over. First sin, then servitude. Finally after 18 years of oppression, the Israelis repent of their idolatry and cry out to God. But this time God reveals His frustrations with the people. In essence, He tells them, *"Hey guys, we've been here before. My deliverance is nothing new. But every time I drive out your enemies you thank me by serving other gods."* God reacts to their ongoing betrayal in verse 14, "Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

Wow, the truth hurts. We need to think the next time we cry out to God for His help. How can we ignore Him and brush Him off for weeks - continually put other stuff in front of time with Him - then suddenly in a crisis expect Him to come to our aid? Is God saying to us, *"Cry out to your television set, or the job you worship, or the people with whom you party - let them help you in your time of distress."*

In verse 15 Israel shows real repentance, "Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day... So they put away the foreign gods... and served the LORD." True repentance turns from sin, and accepts its consequences.

And notice God's response... this is so much like God... verse 16, "And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel." Yes, God felt hurt - He felt betrayed - but God is too merciful to let our sin quench His love for us.

Hey, it breaks my heart, and scares me spitless, to recall the ways I've hurt and betrayed the Master. But I can be sure the pain I've caused Him hasn't stopped Him from loving me. He wants to help us. His soul can't endure our misery.

Devotion Box - Are You A Glory-grabber ?

God chooses containers that don't distract from the contents. He puts His treasure in clay jars. He uses the foolish and weak to do mighty deeds. He overthrows armies with 300 ragamuffin foot-soldiers. God backs our glory-grabbing hearts into a corner. He creates impossible scenarios so when God finally comes through it's obvious to all that the glory belongs to Him. Imagine Gideon - a farmer turned general - outnumbered 450 to 1 - going into battle for the first time with a mere 300 soldiers - all of whom are a discredit to the uniform.

Then the battle is won with strange weapons - a jar, a torch, a trumpet, and a shout. God goes to great extremes to make sure He gets the glory for this victory. *Who gets the glory for the victories in your life?*

Deborah's Song

Hebrews 11:32 lists Barak in God's hall of faith. Obviously he wasn't a total wimp. Verses 6-9 tell us how defeated the people had become. For years they hid in their houses. In all fairness, Barak had to jump start a dead battery.

Verses 13-18 charts the participation of the tribes in the battle- those who chickened out, and those who were eager to fight for the Lord.

Verse 18 says Zebulun "jeopardized their lives to the point of death". Whereas according to verses 15-16, Reuben had "great resolves of heart", but ended up "sit(ting) among the sheepfolds". They had good intentions, but no follow-through.

I love how Deborah's song closes: "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength."