

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

Judges (Part II)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

As the Book of Judges continues, we see that each of the judges raised by God was applied to a season or situation in Israel's life for a common purpose of bringing them back to Him alone again.

We see very clearly the sinfulness and weaknesses of the Israelites from judge to judge. We also see a very deep-seated problem of idolatry – seeking security and confidence in the wrong places and in the wrong things. Yet, we see a God who consistently extended his merciful grace and patience with his people. His kindness and sternness were balanced and measured.

In response, the Israelites could either repent or reject God's discipline. While in most cases they did repent, but their repentance were short-lived. Their forgetfulness of God could not be attributed to simply a lack of education or a lapse of collective memory. Rather, it was the effect of distrust and disobedience graduating into a deliberate rejection of their God.

God has every justifiable reason to cut them off. Yet, we must remember that God's promise in Judges 2:1 still holds true – "I will never break my covenant with you..." What amazing grace!

3 May
Deborah
Judges 4 & 5

10 May
Gideon I
Judges 6

17 May
Gideon II
Judges 7 & 8

Deborah

JUDGES 4&5

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Beyond the gates of Eden, the degeneration of human beings due to the effects of sin began. Here in this passage, the degeneration is in full throttle, where we see evil within God's so-called people, evil in the sight of the Lord to the extent where He gave them over into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan. The pattern here is the same elsewhere in the scriptures. God saves, in this case, through the most unexpected person in the form of prophetess Deborah and a woman from a supposedly "friendly" Kenite clan.

For Study and Discussion

Read through Judges 4 and 5 before starting the study.

1. Jabin, King of Canaan, and his military commander, Sisera (4:1-3)
 - a. How long did the Israelites suffer before they finally cried out to the LORD (v3)?

 - b. Why does it always take a long time for God's people to seek the LORD's help?

 - c. Would the Israelites been able to stay away from evil by their own strength without being turned over to Jabin (vv1-2; cf. Rom 3:23)?

2. Deliverance by a Prophetess (4:4-9)

The Lord delivers his people through the most unlikely means. Israel was then a highly patriarchal society. It is striking to see that he chose a prophetess named Deborah to lead Israel from their oppressor through a major war (4:4-9).

"At this point geography is instructive. The Israelites and the Canaanites were intermingled in Galilee and Ephraim with the Canaanites generally controlling the valleys and the Israelites the hill country. Deborah's instructions are as follows. Barak, living in Kedesh, roughly six miles north of Hazor in the hill country, is to lead ten thousand men to Mount Tabor some thirty miles south of Hazor. The region around Mount Tabor is relatively accessible to chariots, and the mere presence of ten thousand Israelites mobilized in such an area will suffice to "lure" Sisera to the region. God's sovereignty over human affairs is asserted in Deborah's promise that God will give victory."- Elwell, W. A., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, Jdg 4:4) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995)

 - a. What was God's command to Barak (vv6-7)?

- b. Did Barak trust and obey God fully (vv8-9)?
 - c. What were the consequences since he did not fully obeyed (v9b)?
 - d. Did God achieve his plan? How? Did he use the “best people” for the job?
3. The other woman that brought Israel victory (4:10-24)
- a. Sisera clearly did not know the relationship between the Kenite and the Israelites (Judges 1:16). How did Deborah’s prophecy recorded in verse 9 play out?

“It was a Kenite woman’s responsibility to pitch tents and take them down when it was time to move on, so she would have been swift and accurate in her use of the tent peg; Sisera did not stand a chance of survival.” – Robinson, S. J., *Opening up Judges* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), p. 28.

- b. What should we make of Jael – a heartless murderer?
 - c. Jael had two choices: (I) Giving refuge to a man who murdered, raped and pillaged God’s people, or (II) Bringing his life to a swift end. Would you have chosen the same option as her?
4. Victory Song of Deborah and Barak (5:1-31)
- a. In the days of evil, what did God raised amongst the Israelites (v7)?
 - b. God’s jealousy was swift in this case (v8). Describe the terrible situation that Israel found themselves in when they chose new gods.
 - c. Watch our hearts, let’s not be like the Israelites that requires a harsh whip before turning back to Him.

Discipleship Pointers

- Let’s not be like the Israelites that require a harsh whipping before turning back to Him.
- Pray that we will never see the horror of wars; pray for horrific wars that are happening even now that our brothers and sisters in Christ may have God’s protection. Would we also see God’s hands in shaping human history?
- Pray also that we never have to choose like Jael between two options – that we will have peace on earth. But should we have to choose, may we be God’s instrument no matter what.
- The horror of war is real; we hear of what’s happening around the world. The horror of hell is perhaps not taken as seriously, but it has much more serious eternal consequences. What are the things that we need to change in order that our lives reflect the genuine believe that hell is real?

Family/Group Moments

- How would you approach the subject of war with your children? How would you bring about the link between war and God’s great redemption plan?
- In the end, God will finish the job he started which climax with Jesus on the cross. How would we put that as the centre-piece in our believe system? How are we able to demonstrate that in our family/group life?

Gideon I

JUDGES 6

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

The Israelites history is full of a repeated cycle of sin, judgement, repentance, and deliverance. This sad pattern is not something that Christians today are immune of or unfamiliar with. Let us learn from this passage and take heed of its warnings and the “wages of sin”.

For Study and Discussion

1. Sin and Consequences (6:1-10)
 - a. Describe the conditions that the Israelites were living under in the time of Gideon. Imagine yourself living in those circumstances. What thoughts and feelings would overwhelm you? What might your responses be?

 - b. What caused Israel to be in that state? What pattern can you observe from the way the Israelites lived in the period of Judges (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)? What in-grained patterns are there in your own life (i.e. habits, behaviour & tendencies)? What decisive actions do you need to take as you heed the warnings from Israel's history?

 - c. Compare and contrast the conditions that Israel faced with what we face today. What similarities and differences do you see spiritually? Discuss what the church can do to help avert the problem of 2nd generation faith (cf. 2:10)?

2. Confirming God's Call (6:11-35)
 - a. Read 6:11-24. Who initiated that encounter between Gideon and the angel of the Lord? Which aspects of Gideon's response stood out to you? What do you sense were Gideon's deeper heart issues? How did God address them? What principles can you draw with regards to God's calling?

 - b. Read 6:25-35. Summarise in one statement what God instructed Gideon to do. Why was this necessary? What does it reveal about the grave state of compromise the Israelites were in? How did this help Gideon fight the Midianites subsequently?

- c. Have you been called to serve the Lord in certain specific way? What were your considerations? What does your response reveal about your heart? What idols in your heart do you need to cut down and cast away? Whom will you really worship and serve?
3. Discerning God's Will (6:36-40)
 - a. What did you think Gideon was trying to achieve here? Which phrases in the passage tell us he already knew God's will? Is Gideon's act an example of what we ought to do when seeking confirmation on God's will?
 - b. Why did God choose to do for Gideon what he asked for? How does that encourage you to lay before God all your inhibitions, inadequacies and fears? In your response, how will you seek not put the Lord your God to the test? Note that no response is itself a decision.

Discipleship Pointers

1. The evil that Israel did could be traced back to two major root problems. First, it was the problem of incomplete obedience. They did not completely drive out the Canaanites, destroy their evil practices and exterminate the culture of immorality prevalent in the land. They peacefully co-existed with them, tolerated their evil and inter-married with them. They were then drawn into worshipping idols instead of God alone. Consequently, Israel paid a heavy price for her unfaithfulness. Secondly, it was the problem of 2nd generation faith. The Bible teaches on the importance of passing on the faith to the next generation. Faith is not genetically inherited. We must actively teach our children to fear the Lord (i.e. a deep conviction that God is perfectly just and does not take sin lightly). Understand that the reality of God must be known personally and experienced individually.
2. God's call does not usually go out to those who are proud and self-confident but those who are humble and contrite in heart. He often chooses to use jars of clay to accomplish his purposes and display his glory. When men who recognise they are the finite, unclean, mortal encounter the infinite, holy and immortal God, there ought to be a profound sense of inadequacy, recognising how miserable and desperate we are. The only rightful response is that of lasting gratitude and humble servitude. Do you truly know God? Whom do you really serve?
3. Discerning God's will – guiding principles:
 - a. It must be aligned with Scriptures – God will never call us to contradict His own Word
 - b. It should conform to common sense rationality - the counsel of godly Christians can be helpful in this (e.g. you think God has called you to be a missionary in Timbuktu but you have never gone on any mission trip nor have you ever led someone to Christ....)
 - c. It befits the circumstances you are placed in – you do not have to anticipate God but just be faithful in what you are doing; being watchful of openings and closings; be prepared though for possible delays and testing.
 - d. It ought to give you an inward peace that surpasses human understanding, even though you may not feel comfortable or confident – God guides the whole person, both heart and mind in unison; if there is doubt or if the conscience is pricked, then beware.

Family/Group Moment

What do you need to put right in your home as you step out in faith to serve the Lord? What will you do vigilantly so as not to let the evil-one have a foot-hold in your home?

Gideon II

JUDGES 7&8

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

Gideon had received God's call, set up His altar and demolished Baal's altar back home. He is now ready to deliver Israel from the main Midianite threat, but only in such a way (God's way) that God alone is acknowledged as Israel's true Deliverer and King. How did he and Israel respond? What enemy greater than Midian lurked behind? How far did their faith last?

For Study and Discussion

1. Faith Developed (7:1-14)

While Gideon focused on tribal strength and military size (6:15, 34-35), God focused on the opposite. He chose the least member of the weakest clan and further reduced his sizable army to a mere 300 to fight an enemy likened to a swarm of locusts (7:12).

a. What was God teaching Gideon (personally) and Israel (as a whole) about Himself? (7:2, 7; 6:9-10, 16; cf. Jos 23:9-10)

b. Gideon's soldiers were afraid and left (7:3), and so was he (7:10). How did God address his fear and remove his doubt? What does it teach us about God?

2. Faith Blossomed (7:15-25)

a. When Gideon finally trusted God after receiving various divine confirmations, how did he respond? (7:15, 16-21).

b. What did he witness subsequently about God? (7:22ff)

3. Faith Compromised (8:1-27)

Gideon's campaign against the Midianite kings also ended up hurting his fellow Israelites (Ephraimites (almost), men of Succoth and Peniel). He also kept the booties of his enemies.

a. What moral/spiritual direction was he heading towards in these actions? (cf. Deut 7:23-26)

- b. To whom did the Israelites actually attribute their deliverance? (8:22)
 - c. How did Gideon's subsequent actions (8:24-27, 30-31; cf. Deut 17:17) contradict his honorable rejection of the crown? (8:23)
4. Conclusion: The story of Gideon's rise and decline (Judges 6 – 8)
The story closes with satisfactory relief. Israel subdued Midian and enjoyed 40 years of peace. Gideon did much good for Israel (8:35). But it also reveals tragic ironies and ends with a dark foreboding at the horizon (Judges 9).
- a. How did Gideon begin like Moses (Exodus 3) and end like Aaron (Exodus 32)?
 - b. How was he like the previous judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak) and unlike them?
 - c. Did Israel's deliverance from enemy oppression effect any lasting change in their relationship with God (even while Gideon was alive)?

Discipleship Pointers

1. Faith can be developed when facing God-given or God-permitted challenges.
 - While we intuitively trust and glory in human abilities and strength in numbers, God works to strip away all human self-confidence, calling us to rely on His presence and power. Natural and spiritual abilities are 'goods' bestowed by God to serve Him, not 'gods' to depend on and take pride in.
 - God takes into account our faith struggles when we do His will against certain odds. He graciously accommodates our weakness of faith, while also developing and deepening it. Such mercy and assurance do not justify our inaction, our testing of God, and our unbelief. Rather, it should spur our faith and prayer towards Him.
 - Faith in God brings us to worship Him, and moves us to work for Him. We then witness His presence and power in our lives, which further strengthens our faith.
 - Gideon's faith and obedience is commended as a model and testimony for Christians to live by faith in Christ, rather than shrink back under trial (Hebrews 11:32-34; 10:35-39).
2. Faith can be compromised after experiencing God-given successes.
 - Though God's chosen leaders should be respected and submitted, beware of focusing or relying on them, or attributing to them the credit and glory that belong only to God alone.
 - Beware that success and status in life and ministry can draw us into self-elevation, into seeking our personal agenda and desires, and away from relying on God.
 - Do not merely seek God to alleviate an uncomfortable situation or crisis, or to make life smooth-sailing and convenient, but go beyond those to focus on how God wants to develop our spiritual faithfulness and fruitfulness. This is God's agenda for His children (Hebrews 12:7-13).

Family/Group Moments

1. Does your lifestyle contradict your orthodox confession that Jesus is Lord of your life?
2. Is a sense of spiritual inadequacy and self-doubt a good or a bad thing in serving God?
3. Share an experience on how your faith in God was strengthened in the face of a challenge, or how an achievement or success led you to self-congratulation, instead of thanking God.