

Don't Judge Me, Lead Me: The Book Of Judges

Judges 1:1-8

Would you rather be judged or led?

Well, we are about to do a deep dive into the Book of Judges, and find—once again—than an Old Testament book points ahead irrefutably, not to stern judge and the pounding of a gavel, but to Jesus the Good Shepherd, the One Who leads us from God's ultimate wrath and judgment and death to the safe pasture of grace, mercy, and everlasting life with our new Father God. Indeed Jesus did not come to condemn us, but to save:

John 3:17

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

As we sojourn through the Book of Judges, we will meet a cast of unlikely, dysfunctional characters who in and of themselves do not seem qualified to judge—or more accurately, *deliver*—Israel from the consequences of their perpetual deliberate apostasy. And if we stay the course and study out the whole of this exciting Old Testament book, and sow it deeply to our hearts, we shall avoid much of the peril, and many of the pitfalls and punishment that the Israelites suffered as a result of their rebellion. We will reap instead the eternal grace of God, glorifying Him here and now through our lives of humility and obedience.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Have you ever found yourself in a scenario in a church context wherein you felt guilty, condemned, and outright judged? Were you able to, at that time, discern that condemnation did not come from the Lord but from flesh and the devil? Why or why not? Perhaps if you are in a crisis like this right now, memorize this verse and allow it to heal and close the cracks of your broken heart:

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Why God chooses to use broken, fallen, fleshly people to lead or deliver His flock at any point in history remains a mystery. But we know that God desires for us to know Him more and more, day after day by experiencing Him while we are here on planet earth, and then enjoy Him forever—for all eternity!

Hosea 6:3

Let's recognize him as the LORD. Let's keep trying to really know him. You can be sure the sun will rise. And you can be just as sure the LORD will appear. He will come to renew us like the winter rains. He will be like the spring rains that water the earth."

So, one way we can come to know Him more deeply is to witness through Scripture His miraculous supernatural power enabling the unable and unlikely to accomplish His perfect will. The Book of Judges is a textual 410 year account of the nation of Israel, *post-Joshua*, now without clear leadership, yet still having to deal with opposing forces. These snares that Israel constantly needed deliverance from came courtesy of their past partial obedience of not completely eliminating enemy tribes as God instructed. We are about to witness the consequences of partial disobedience all through Judges 1:1-2:5.

As a preface and a poignant reminder, all of human history—right up to today and to earthly future—is rife with rebellion against God and the subsequent suffering of the awful consequences. Partial obedience to God's clear and unchanging Word has always been and always will be a most wicked affront to His holiness. As has been said:

"Partial obedience is an affront to a holy God. It's as if we are saying, "I don't know if I can trust You, God. I need additional assurances. I need to protect myself in case Your promises fail." (Source unknown).

Listen to this passage from James 1:5-8:

James 1:5-8

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Partial disobedience is the result of double-mindedness. God has made the choice of strife in life or His peace clear and simple to us. In any moment of our lives, we must choose to follow the flesh or the Spirit:

Galatians 5:16-17

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Now to today's text.

Judges 1:1

(KJV) Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

(NIV) After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?"

Interesting to note that it was a common ancient Near Eastern practice for military commanders to enquire of their particular god for specific marching orders. In this case, the Israelites turn not to idols for help but the one true, living God:

1Thessalonians 1:9-10

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

We have to ask ourselves: Why are the Israelites having to fight against the Canaanites in the first place? *Because they didn't completely obey God and eliminate Canaanite occupancy in their promised land!* Beloved, yes we are called to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) and to be an expression of God's love in this world. But we have to remember that God has set His children apart for holiness (1 Peter 1:16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Remember, beloved, that our Father in heaven is 100% committed to our sanctification into the image of His dear Son Jesus. Therefore, we are to stay clear of evil and keep short accounts with God in that regard:

Ephesians 5:11-14

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Since their God-dependant, faithful leader Joshua had died, the Israelites now—in their desperation—call out to the Leader of Leaders, Yahweh Himself. In a sense, this is one of the few wise decisions the Israelites made!

Israel, like all of us outside of the grace of God, is disturbingly predictable. We will see these cycles of sin, consequences, and crying out through an acronym I've called COARD (roughly sounds like COURT) in the text throughout our study in Judges:

IN ORDER:

C=compromise

A=apostasy

O=oppression

R=repentance

D=deliverance

For those of us who need more clarity on how this cycle might relate to us today in 2024, here we go:

COMPROMISE=our besetting, unrepentant sins (lust, pride, envy, covetousness, gossip, etc.) that we allow into our walk with God, hardening our hearts (Hebrews 3:12) over time, leading to...

APOSTASY=we venture further and further from God through our presumptuous sins giving the Evil One access to our minds and hearts, yielding...

OPPRESSION=we experience spiritual oppression through the lies of the devil taking hold in our minds, through the betrayal and rejection of others, through unexplainable painful events, and through it all it may seem like God has taken His hands off your life, leading to brokenness, and...

REPENTANCE=we call for help, for rescue from Jesus. When we approach Him with broken, contrite hearts he will not despise us (Psalm 51:17). When we ask Him, Jesus provides ready forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness (1 John 2:1; 1 John 1:9).

DELIVERANCE=we are delivered from the penalty of our sins—but not always spared of the consequences or lasting pain that our sin has caused ourselves and others.

Judges 1:2

(KJV) And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

(NIV) The LORD answered, "Judah shall go up; I have given the land into their hands."

Here we see that God is not only Commander-In-Chief, but is merciful to His children here and gives them wisdom as a Father of Lights (James 1:17). All the Israelites have to do is obey completely.

Judges 1:3

(KJV) And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

(NIV) The men of Judah then said to the Simeonites their fellow Israelites, "Come up with us into the territory allotted to us, to fight against the Canaanites. We in turn will go with you into yours." So the Simeonites went with them.

The alliance between the men of Judah and the Simeonites proved logical in a geographical sense, and allowed this strong melding of military forces to experience a significant victory:

Judges 1:4

(KJV) And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

(NIV) When Judah attacked, the LORD gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands, and they struck down ten thousand men at Bezek.

Allowing God to do a proper and complete housecleaning of the promised land, both the Canaanites and the Perizzites were to be completely eliminated in this battle. It was to be a God-sized victory for which God Himself would receive glory. So here the Israelites

are about twelve miles south of Jerusalem in Bezek. They are experiencing what is truly God's victory as they take down ten thousand enemy soldiers.

Judges 1:5

(KJV) And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

(NIV) It was there that they found Adoni-Bezek and fought against him, putting to rout the Canaanites and Perizzites.

Judges 1:6

(KJV) But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

(NIV) Adoni-Bezek fled, but they chased him and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

God enables the Israelites to find the lord and leader of Bezek, sending his troops scattered, scared, and doomed to death. They take Adoni-Bezek prisoner and torture him through dismemberment—an act of bizarre brutality and human retribution—before allowing him to die a humiliating, painful death. While this particular horrendous act may have been questionable to us, the leader of Bezek reckoned this very dismemberment due punishment from God, given his past *modus operandi*:

Judges 1:7

(KJV) And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered *their meat* under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

(NIV) Then Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** We all are familiar with Hollywood movies, and the explicit violence portrayed therein. But how do you react when confronted with such graphic brutality in the Old Testament, or with the harrowing torture and crucifixion of Jesus? Do you think this kind of gory detail is warranted in Scriptures? Why or why not?

***STUDY POINT:** Conduct a personal Bible study based on Old or New Testament historical accounts of battle. Select a passage or two and reconcile with Scripture why these battles played out as they did.

King Adoni-Bezek was well aware that this form of brutal punishment would render the recipient disqualified for public office, virtually unable to handle a weapon, and too tipsy to navigate battle grounds. This dismembered person would instead be subjected to humiliating slave service to their captors until dying a slow, painful death.

Judges 1:8

(KJV) Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

(NIV) The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire.

And set the city on fire. It would seem that for the Israelites to seize the city by sword and then set Jerusalem afire, this would be an indication of a job well done to completion. And God would be pleased.

But beloved, if we know the Israelites—or ourselves—at all, we know the story's not over.

Tune in to the Teaching Room next week as we continue our travels through the Book of Judges.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland