

Undeniably Faithful: God in the Book of Judges

if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2:13 NASB

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Hebrews 11:32-34 NASB

1. *God remains undeniably faithful to his will, his covenant promises and his word in spite of and even through the sins of his people.*
 - a. *Adam*
 - b. *Noah*
 - c. *Abraham*
 - d. *Moses*
 - e. *David*
 - f. *New Covenant—through Jesus*
2. *Challenge is the context. Struggle is designed to help us remember who God is and what He has done for us.*
3. *Idolatry is displacing God by making good created things more important than God.*
4. *Cultural accommodation leads to assimilation.*
5. *God works through sinners and sinful situations.*
6. *It is possible to have spiritual gifts but not spiritual fruit.*
7. *We often see people with great spiritual gifts but are shallow in regards to holiness and character.*
8. *Every generation is responsible to teach and model God's ways. We must manage our human impulses and be examples for the next generation. Humanity's perplexities and complexities are our own undoing. God brings clarity and order.*

The Book of Judges reveals that the Bible is not a 'Book of Virtues.' It is not a book of inspirational stories. The Bible is not a book about following moral examples or becoming a better person. The Bible is about God.

The Bible is about the God of mercy and long-suffering who stays committed to the relationship with humanity despite our constant resistance to his purposes. There is one hero in this book and he is divine.

Living in the time that we do, the book of Judges has a certain flavor and application for our time. God worked to rescue an undeserving people through their maddening and often unrelenting sin. God stayed faithful even when the people were faithless and had completely forgotten him. Judges is a book that can rattle our spiritual senses to come alive and cut through religious nonsense to the very bone.

Themes

- 1. God relentlessly offers his grace to people who do not seek, receive or deserve it—even after they have been saved by it.*
- 2. God established there shall be no other gods but him—He wants lordship over every area of our lives and will work tirelessly to help us overcome and remove the barriers to our relationship with him. But, we have to do the work.*
- 3. There is always tension between grace and law—love and justice—between conditionality and unconditionality.*
- 4. There is always a need to keep our spiritual fires lit—renewal of our spiritual lives is an on-going prerequisite to living a vibrant, flourishing committed spiritual life.*
- 5. We need a true Savior, to which all other saviors point, through their flaws, weaknesses, strengths and powers.*
- 6. God is sovereign, even though it may appear otherwise.*

Allow the narrative to speak for itself. God's word is powerful for the individual and for the congregation. The stories are often depressing and disturbing. Some content is not appropriate for children. It is always exciting and unpredictable. You will discover Jesus is present throughout the narratives in creative ways. Jesus is the ultimate Judge and we are to live out our lives pleasing and honoring him especially as we live and love in the pluralistic societies in our post-modern world.

The Structure of Judges

There are two introductions, narratives and two appendixes.

Intro One Judges 1:1-2:5

Intro Two Judges 2:6-3:6

Narratives Judges 3:7-16:31

Appendix One Judges 17-18

Appendix Two Judges 19-21

In some ways, the death of Samson was the end of the Judges story. His death is the last chronological event in the book. We are left with a dead judge and an incomplete story. There are five more chapters which include the departure from the narrative structure. The stories give us an overview of what happened when the Israelites “did evil in the sight of the LORD.” (3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)

The narrative passages revealed how God rescued his people. In the last two sections we are given descriptions of the spiritual condition He rescued them from. The last five chapters rarely mention the LORD. These chapters reveal what life was like when Israel was left to its own devices. The example is to show us what humanity is like without God. These sections are so bleak—we rarely read them.

We discover why idolatry is forbidden and problematic. An image of any kind cannot express the full range of God or His glory—which is His presence. Our view of God will be distorted. Worshiping God with images reveals an inward spirit which does not want to surrender to God as he is, but desires to **pick and choose attributes** in order to create a God who is palatable to us.

The real problem: to shape and revise God—creating a god that is to our liking. It is a blatant refusal to allow God to be himself. We filter out things that we cannot accept. This is the **main sin of our time**.

“I don’t believe in a God like that—I like to think of God as...” We make an image. The most serious way we do this is by consciously rejecting part of the scriptural revelation of God. “We can no longer accept a God who does this...or forbids that... We get wrapped up in the mantle of post-modern progress. We reshape God to fit us.

Our culture’s dislike of something means we drop it or cancel it and act as if it does not exist or live as though the actions never happened. Culture then writes a new narrative.

Subjective Worship

A previous condition existed where the Israelites did their own worship: while the Israelites were in the Wilderness they worshipped as they saw fit. Once they were to take ownership of the Promised Land, there was to be one place of worship and one kind of worship which the LORD prescribed in Deuteronomy 12:1-14.

You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes," Deuteronomy 12:8

Subjectivizing Morality: comprehending the spiritual condition of people: "everyone did what was right in their own eyes." (Judges 17:6 and 21:25)

Key point: Subjective morality ignores the LORD's commands, his word and his rationale. People will follow the LORD only so far as it does not conflict with their personal convictions about morality. This type of attitude makes it impossible to have a truly personal relationship with God. In an interpersonal relationship, the other is a real person who can contradict and upset you—which leaves you wrestling through conflict in order to reach a deeper level of intimacy.

Ignoring the parts we do not like means we never wrestle or enter into a meaningful relationship. We live within a comfortable bubble where we worship a comfortable God who exists only in our mind.

The true goal:

The goal of true faith is to give God access to our heart. Our religious efforts are to get access to God so that we can get God to do what we want him to do or to hold him accountable to a subjective rule where the list of acceptable attributes and behaviors are not consistent and reliable but always changing according to the circumstances or situations that arise. Religion's goal is to get God to serve you. The gospel faith's purpose is to form our hearts into beating and living for Him.

Self-made religion will always disappoint us. We are all worshippers. Whatever we make our god—relationships, money, position or even a reduced man-made version of the biblical God—will never deliver. Ultimately, death removes all false gods to which we look for blessing. There is always something missing. There will always be an emptiness.

The main point:

The great reminder for us all as worshippers is who or what is the thing we look to for ultimate meaning, purpose and blessing? What is the thing which—if it were taken away—we could never live without.

The banality of evil:

Evil does not make people violent or wicked. One can do evil without being evil. Sin is often a subtle drift away. Sin makes us hollow—externally proper, nice and kind—but underneath the surface we are irritated, aggravated and power hungry.

C.S. Lewis *The Abolition of Man*

“These are men without chests.” (People without chests)

They may have reason (represented in their mind) or visceral feelings and drives (represented by their gut) but they do not have hearts. They are not really choosing, but rather being driven by desires and impulses for power or gain, they are ruled by their fears and anger.

We are all in danger of being banal (bland, dull, flat, unoriginal, unimaginative drifters), hollow and uninteresting if we insist on creating God in our image and ultimately worshiping ourselves or things we create and call good.

Only by worshiping the true and real God can we escape the boring fate of those who create idols of their own choosing and create a religion from the presupposition of to ‘do what is right in their own eyes.’ (Judges 17:6 and 21:25)

“No other book of the Old Testament offers the modern church as telling a mirror as this book. This book is a wake-up call for a church moribund in its own selfish pursuits. Instead of heeding the call of truly godly leaders and letting Jesus Christ be Lord of the church, everywhere congregations and their leaders do what is right in their own eyes.” Daniel I. Block, Judges-Ruth, page 586)

We need a King who is the Savior and Rescuer:

We wonder why God doesn’t send revival or unity and we tend to look everywhere but ourselves. Submission, surrender and repentance are keys to maturity in Christ. The whole book of Judges reveals how we are the problem. We cannot be our own solution.

God may be employing the author of Judges to show us the realities beyond our conscious and deliberate intentions. The writer has shown us we need a rescuer, deliverer and savior. It is up to us to whom we look. Following the book of Judges is a continued narration which includes a long line of human kings who lead people either toward obedience to God or away from it. By the end of the story, we recognize the need for a king beyond David.

For now, we all search for a king to rule over us and someone to rescue us. There is only One. We must look to the greatest King and ultimate Judge or we will serve a false one.

Each of us must get to the point of saying, “I serve at the pleasure of our King, Jesus.”

Key verses

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. (Judges 21:25 NIV)

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. (Judges 2:11 NIV)

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:13 NASB)

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Hebrews 11:32-34 NASB)

Series Order

1. Introduction to the Book of Judges
2. Half-hearted discipleship eventually leads to no discipleship. (Judges 1-3:6)
3. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar: repent, renew, restore (Judges 3:7-31)
4. Deborah and Barak: God can use anyone, anytime, anywhere (Judges 4-5)
5. Gideon: a Deeper look into what went wrong (Judges 6-9)
6. Jephthah: what the people worship enslaves them (Judges 10-12:7 with 12:8-15)
7. Samson: the most flawed and weakest victor (Judges 13-16)
8. Men without chests and people without a king (Judges 17-21)

Week One:

It is essential for us today to learn from the experiences we read about in the Bible and to use the examples God chose to apply sacred wisdom to our day and our personal lives. We must realize we are *aliens and strangers in a foreign land*. (1 Peter 2:11-12) To abstain from sinful desires and things that pagans value and honor is our calling to live holy and honoring lives of faith.

Questions:

1. Why do we read the Bible?
2. How has the Bible impacted you?
3. What did Peter mean by mentioning that we are *aliens and strangers in a foreign land*. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Challenge: Why is this book even in the Bible?

Answer: Because it is the gospel.

Content:

Judges is not a book of virtues, inspirational stories or a fierce moral code. Judges is a book about God. Judges reveals God's mercy and long-suffering toward the people of his choice—His *Chosen People*—while they continually resisted and rejected him.

We will discover heroes in this book. The greatest is God.

Salvation has an element of rescue within it. God rescued his people from the mess they made by rejecting Him and worshipping other idols. The People made mistakes. Individuals made mistakes. Leaders made mistakes. They lived during a time when there was a variety of gods to worship and to love, trust and obey. Cultural influences made it acceptable to blend into the Canaanite fabric already woven by the presiding beliefs, rituals and religions.

Even though the time period of the Judges was 1375-1055 BC, their cultural influences were not so different than our own in 2022. There were men and women who were committed to God. They stood out as alternatives to the social norms and are colorful reminders of the cost of discipleship.

Men and women were employed by God as rescue agents and some ruled in honorable ways, while others ruled in the shadows.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do things go wrong in churches?
2. Why do things go wrong in society?

Scripture Trail:

Judges 1: 1-36

-Make a list of the reasons, either mentioned or hinted at, why the tribes of Israel failed to settle in the Promised Land.

-Notice there is a glimmer of hope in Judges 1:12-16. What examples of whole-hearted obedience are mentioned here?

Personal application:

It's not a lack of *our* strength that prevents us from enjoying God and his blessings. It is our lack of belief in *God's* strength. We tend to take things into our own hands and then try to manage situations from our own strength, knowledge or experience.

Godly wisdom. This is the purpose of God's Word:

*for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;
for giving prudence to those who are simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young—
let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—
for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools[c] despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:2-7 NIV)*

-How do these words impact you?

-Why do *you* read the Bible?

The Impossible Situation: Judges 2:1-5

God is basically saying, “You have put me in an impossible situation. I have sworn to bless you as my one and only—my beloved—in an exclusive relationship. I have made conditions and also sworn to not bless you as you disobedient and uncommitted people. I promised to love you with an eternal love as my chosen people. But, I have also promised that I will judge sin.”

-How is God supposed to solve this *divine dilemma*?*

-Read Romans 3:23-26 and 2 Corinthians 5:21.

-How does God answer this dilemma?

Judges Second Introduction: Judges 2:6-3:6

There is a cycle of behavior we will discover throughout the book of Judges. There is no guarantee that each generation will serve God. Within a generation, Israel had descended from being a people who ‘served the LORD’—who is YHWH (Yahweh) to a people who served the Baals and Ashtoreths (gods of other people).

There is no automatic passing of faith from generation to generation. Each generation has to make their own declaration of faith to the LORD/YHWH.

-How are we to cultivate faith in the lives of each generation?

-Read Deuteronomy 6. It includes powerful mandates and places the responsibility onto the parents and community to teach and become examples of how to live.

What do you notice? How do these passages impact you?

What do we need to do in order to pass on the biblical faith to the next generation?

Tragically, Israel failed in their relationship with YHWH. They lived among other nations and they became like them. Israel yielded to their desires, regardless of their commitments. Our challenges are similar today.

What comes to mind as you acquaint yourself with Judges?

Week Two: Half-hearted Discipleship

Israel is living in the Promised Land alongside the people who worship other gods, because they did not *fully trust* God and so did not *fully obey* him. The author of Judges describes the '*tension*' between God's holy commands and his loving, faithful promise throughout the first two introductions. Israel descended into a pattern of decline. YHWH continually admonishes them for their sin and also rescues them from their situation.

1. What are your values?
2. Where do you feel the most tension?

Challenge: God called his people to live a life of *brave spirituality*.

Solution: Discipleship calls us to a life of risk-taking and following God in directions which require us to trust Him fully. It is difficult to live a life of *brave spirituality* without faith in God. This type of trust doesn't arise out of adventurism, heroism or cruelty. Brave spirituality must be anchored in a radical awareness of God's sovereignty and His ability to work through all situations and circumstances.

Scripture Trail:

Read Judges 1:1-36

Do we hedge our bets or do we believe God? Chapter one includes the successes and shortcomings of nine (9) of the twelve (12) tribes of Israel. Almost immediately, Judah fails and they invite their brother Simeonite tribe. This may sound like common sense military strategy. But, God is looking for *faithfulness*. Judah does go but they go with their brother tribe, the Simeonites. Judah believes but they do not go alone. Their discipleship and trust is part-way.

Note: It is important to understand that throughout the Bible and history, the people are given over to the consequences of their decisions and actions.

Read Judges 1:4-7 Ironically, it is Adnoni-Bezek who illustrates the accountability and acceptability for his actions.

- Who holds you accountable?
- What is acceptability and accountability so important to brave spirituality?

Read Judges 1:12-15

The story of Caleb and his daughter, Acsah, is sandwiched between Judah's conquests. It focuses on a *spiritually brave family*. Caleb wants a life of covenant faithfulness and courageous obedience for his daughter. Caleb is focused on giving the next generation a reason to stay committed and remain in the Promised Land. Caleb offers Acsah as a bride to a man who is likely to continue the path of *being a spiritually brave family*.

Acsah reveals she is her father's daughter. Othneil, whom we will read of later, steps up to the challenge and wins. Acsah and Othneil marry. Acsah urges her new husband to ask her father for a field and springs of water. Her requests demonstrate her desire to *settle in and enjoy* the blessings of living in the Promised Land.

Read Judges 1:16

The Kenites, along with Acsah and Othneil, will stand as examples of faithfulness in a land surrounded by other religions, beliefs and idols.

1. What comes to mind as you read this story?
2. How would you compare Caleb's story with your own?

Read Judges 1:19-36

Perhaps if the author of Judges finished at verse 18, the story would have a 'happy ending.' But, the rest of chapter one goes downhill fast. Judah, as the tribe, does not trust in God's strength and acquiesces. They fail to push the people out. The Tribe of *Benjamin* also fails. **We must understand this point:** *when God says He will do something, we are to follow his commands and He will be faithful to make it happen through us.*

We are often tempted to rely on ourselves and our own ways. When we rely on common sense, ourselves, and base our spirituality on our own calculations instead of simply being obedient, we discover ourselves in the camp with Judah. Compromise becomes second nature.

Othneil attacked a city in God's strength. The Tribe of Judah concluded they would not do it. The Tribe of Judah demonstrated part-way discipleship.

Halfway or part-way discipleship leads to no discipleship at all.

The virus of half-hearted discipleship spread to the Tribe of Benjamin. The Benjaminites fail to route the Jebusites. The Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh follow suit. Northern tribes of Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan join in the part-way discipleship. Chapter one ends with the borders being defined by the Amorites, not the Israelites. God's people have become less brave than Israel's enemies. They have trusted God less and trusted in other gods more.

Note: forced labor or slavery is never a God-honoring choice. This illustrates a major failure to follow God. (verses 27-28)

There seems to be great advancement for Israel as we finish chapter one. Take into consideration that Israel has now moved into the Promised Land and settled into tribal geographic locations. Israelites suffered for 400 years under the yoke of slavery. YHWH had rescued them time and time again. Israel did not respond as YHWH would have desired. Instead of living in a land where they could worship God freely and live their lives in their new customs, the Israelites now live side by side with other people and their gods.

Buried like landmines, *idols* lay dormant until they are ready to explode in the spiritual lives of God's people.

1. Consider a time when you were most brave with regards to your faith.
2. When you find it is most challenging to follow God?

Read Judges 2:1-5

Angels tend to show up and capture our attention. Gilgal was the place where the Israelites made their covenant with God. (Joshua 5) Gilgal was a place of forgiveness and grace. When the angel appears, it is a reminder that God is the one who is the Rescuer, Promise-keeper and Faithful God.

The purpose of the military campaign was to rid the Promised Land of the Canaanites and their idols. God wants lordship over every area of our lives. He wanted the new land cleared so Israel would be free to become the People God intended them to become. God wanted them to become an exclusive relationship with Him alone.

The People did not do what YHWH asked which reveals they had not totally rejected God but did not totally accept Him either. Halfway, partway discipleship and compromise cannot last.

Partial obedience leads to no obedience.

Personal Application: Judges 2:1-5

Refusal to listen and follow through leads Israel toward a path of destruction. These verses are very challenging to us. There are many things we think we are unable to do—which are simply our refusal to do. God remains undeniably faithful even in our disobedience and rejection.

Remember: God sees our failure to obey as a failure to remember who He is. The root of our disobedience is essentially failing to remember who YHWH is and what He has already done for us. As long as we remember who he is...we will serve not out of obligation or half-hearted attempts but from a whole and committed heart.

Idolatry: is making a good aspect of creation—marriage, mountains, business, or anything else—the ultimate source of security, identity and power.

When we make an idol of something, it continually makes us miserable. If we fall short or if the idol falls short—we lose our joy. Idols are snares. Idols trap us, enslave us and bind us to them like an addiction.

Remember the tension of the Divine Dilemma:

God is holy and just. He cannot tolerate or live with evil. God is loving and faithful and cannot tolerate the loss of his people that He committed himself to. This tension will be revealed throughout the entire book of Judges.

The Cross is the only way we can understand how God is able to resolve this Divine Dilemma. Our sin was given— *imputed*—to Jesus so that his righteousness could be imputed to us.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

On the Cross, God's wrath was satisfied.

On the Cross, both justice was served and loving faithfulness were combined.

Through the Cross, God could be both justified and justifier.

Through the Cross, God can love us both conditionally and unconditionally.

The Cross is where find freedom to accept ourselves without pride or prejudice and challenge ourselves to live each day through brave discipleship.

Without the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified, we will always either complacently give into sin or live under the burden of sin's guilt and fear. The Cross is where we discover the tension of the Divine Dilemma resolved and we are free to live forgiven, obedient lives despite living sinful, disobedient lives.

What comes to mind as you meditate on these words?

Week Three

Living among the idols can be dangerous to our spiritual health.

God is no longer the priority.

Society and culture have serious impacts on the Israelites. A cycle develops as the Israelites no longer prioritized God and what God had already done for them. Naming a few acts like the Exodus, parting the Red Sea, crossing the River Jordan, and the walls of Jericho falling down became passé. "That was so yesterday." The People failed to remember or even mention the day to day care God gave to the people.

Doing evil, liking it and being good at it.

It is easy to do evil when we think no one is watching or listening. It is quite another thing to 'do evil in the sight of the LORD.' God defined evil as turning to love and serve idols, mini-gods, or non gods. This is a very different definition of *doing evil* than we use. The people practiced a blatant *disregard for the LORD in his presence*.

Inconsistency is a like a bull-horn blasting for everyone to hear. Evil is easy. Let everyone do it. Let everyone do evil together.

Half-hearted worship or discipleship leads to none at all.

Generation to generation, we are responsible to lead God-honoring lives personally, at home, in our work place, our community and throughout the world.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:17)

Each generation is responsible for claiming and making God their priority. Correction and discipline are keys that are necessary for following God and necessary for discipleship: discipline = discipleship

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid. (Proverbs 12:1)

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11)

Exclusivity in a world of pagan freedom.

God called us to a life of exclusivity. Exclusivity is a theme throughout the entire Bible and what caused problems from the first day until now. Minor mistakes often lead to major mistakes.

Paganism accepts the existence of the LORD but not exclusively. The LORD could be one of many gods. But, He could not claim exclusivity. The Promised Land was meant for worship of God alone but it became a place of worship the **LORD...plus...**

***The greatest danger, because it is subtle and enables us as church members to feel like there is nothing really wrong, is not that we or anyone else become atheists. But that we ask the LORD to co-exist with other idols, mini-gods and non-gods in our hearts.

Commitment is replaced by **complacency** and then by **compromise**.

Do Not Miss This: serious consequences

The LORD released them to the gods they wanted to serve instead of him. As a result, there was oppression by their enemies. Various people groups plundered and enslaved them. The Israelites didn't want God nor his protection nor his benefits. So they did what was evil in God's eyes (his definition not ours). They worshipped other idols, mini-gods and non-gods.

Bitter irony: the very gods they wanted lead them into slavery.

STOP the Sin Cycle!

Evil in the sight of the LORD is two-fold: to turn away from Him as to forget Him and serve someone or something else. (False gods who promise but enslave.)

Remembering and forgetting have spiritual significance.

We may intellectually know with our mind and even believe God exists. But, we do not allow Him to reign over our heart and change our lives.

When forgiveness and repentance live within you, you will live out your life according to God's standards and God's design.

Replace 'D' words with 'R' words

Distress. Disease. Disenfranchisement. Disillusionment. Disruption. Divorce. Downward spiral.

1. Repentance

2. Renewal

3. Restoration

4. Revival