

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Judges | *The Downward Spiral of Sin and Our Desperate Need for a Savior*

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I want to begin this morning by telling you a story titled, “**Assassin in the City**”

Once upon a time, there was a man named **Ehud**. His people had been oppressed for by the evil king **Eglon** for 18 years. After gathering three armies together, King Eglon invaded the land where Ehud lived, and he set up his throne in one of their most beautiful cities called “**the City of Palms**.” Over the next 18 years, while Ehud and his people lived as servants, King Eglon sat on his throne getting **fatter** and fatter. Not only was it miserable being oppressed by a fat, evil king, but what made it even worse was that this king was their **blood relative**. And year after year, King Eglon made his oppressed relatives bring him a **tribute** (a gift) to show their submission and allegiance to his authority.

After 18 years of this oppression, Ehud makes a move to set his people free. Right before the yearly tribute, he made a **double-edged sword** about **18 inches** long (*one inch for every year that his people had been oppressed*), and he hid it under his clothes on his **right thigh** – because he was **left-handed**. He didn’t tell anybody his plan. When the time came to bring the tribute to evil Eglon, Ehud went with. His plan is extremely risky because the palace was covered with guards.

After the group finished presenting their tribute, they turned to leave. But while they were on the return trip home, Ehud found a place to sneak away from the group and return to the evil king. The king was curious to see Ehud back so soon (and all by himself), and Ehud said, “***I have a secret message for you, O king.***” The king was intrigued, and so he told the guards to leave the room.

When the two of them were alone, Ehud said, “***I have a message from God for you.***” Well, that got the fat king’s attention, so he rose from his seat. But as soon as he was standing, faster than you could blink your eye, Ehud grabbed his dagger and thrust it into the king’s belly. And the king was so fat that his belly swallowed the entire knife – even the handle.

While the king was in shock (and before he could cry for help), Ehud grabbed the keys, exited the room, and then quickly locked the doors behind him. When the guards saw Ehud walk by, they went to go check on the king, but when they reached the king’s door – they found that it was **locked**. They assumed that the king must have locked the door after Ehud left and that he was probably going to the **bathroom**. So, they waited. And they waited. And they waited. Finally, when they were embarrassed at how long it was taking the king to finish up in the bathroom, they decided they should probably go check in on him. So, they took their key and opened the door. And when they stepped inside, there was their master...**dead** on floor.

But it was too late to catch Ehud, because while they had been waiting for their king, Ehud had escaped. He made his way into the mountains. There in the mountains, he blew a trumpet and gathered all the warriors of his people together. With the evil king dead, their enemy had no leader. And before they could appoint a new leader, Ehud led his people into battle. That day, Ehud and his men killed about **10,000 warriors** and won back their freedom. For the next 80 years, Ehud and his people had rest from their enemies.

How many of you have heard that story before?
Does anybody know where that story is found? *Judges 3:12–30*

Judges is one of the most dynamic books in the Bible.

- **Superhero stories:** like Samson killing a lion with his bare hands (**14:5–6**) or killing a thousand bad guys with the jawbone of a donkey (**15:15**)
- **Underdog stories:** like Gideon facing an army (that was so large it couldn't be counted) with just 300 men (**7:7, 12**)
- **Stories about heroic women:** like Deborah leading God's people into battle (**4:9–10**) or Jael killing the commander of an army with a tent peg (**4:21**) – *but we'll come back to that story in a minute.*
- **If you like passwords:** there is a really unique story in **12:5–7** where people had to say a password in order to enter into the land.
- **History, Romance, Miracles, War, Music...**

But when you look at the book of Judges from our window at 30,000 feet, the picture that we see is heartbreaking. Yes, there are many amazing stories in this book, but the overall storyline is about the downward spiral of God people into a black hole called sin (*which means that it's a lot like every other book that we've seen so far*).

The heart of man is like a magnet that's drawn to sin. That's what we see in this book. But that's not the only heart we see. We also see the heart of God, and His heart is like a magnet that's drawn to save.

The book of Judges exposes the hearts of people and the heart of God:

- My heart is predisposed to sin.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
~ *Jeremiah 17:9*

That's what we see in Judges.

- But we also see that God's heart is predisposed to save.

The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.
~ *Zephaniah 3:17*¹

As we spend these few minutes in Judges this morning, lets **PRAY** and ask God to open our eyes so that we might see **the total depravity of our hearts** (*which should cause us to repent*) and so that we might see **the steadfast love of His heart** (*which should cause us to rejoice*).

¹ See also 1 Tim. 2:4

Recap: *what have we seen so far?*

- **Genesis:** God *chooses* Abraham & his family to be His special family
- **Exodus:** God *rescues* His family from slavery & teaches them how to love & worship
- **Leviticus:** God makes a way to *dwell with* them through purification laws & Tabernacle
- **Numbers:** God *leads* them to the edge of the Promised Land, but they choose fear instead
- **Deuteronomy:** God *reminds* the next generation of the choice between blessings & curses
- **Joshua:** God leads them into the Promise Land, drives out their enemies, and *gives rest*

1. Genesis God chooses His people
2. Exodus God rescues His people
3. Leviticus God dwells with His people
4. Numbers God leads His people
5. Deuteronomy God reminds His people
6. Joshua God gives rest to His people

- **Judges:** *the downward spiral of sin & our desperate need for a Savior*

Outline:

The story starts strong...

- Joshua is at the end of his life, but the Lord raises up the tribe of Judah as the next leader. And under the leadership of Judah, they continue the conquest of the land that God had promised to give them, and God was giving them victory after victory.
- You remember back to Deuteronomy where God commanded them to utterly destroy everything that would tempt them to sin...?

He told them,

But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance,
you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive,

but you shall utterly destroy them:

The Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite,
just as the Lord your God has commanded you,

lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods,
and you sin against the Lord you God.

~ Deuteronomy 20:16–18

This seems drastic to us – because it isn't the mission that God has given to the church.

- On this side of the cross, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation,²
- However, this is still *exactly* what it looks like for God's people to fight against sin.

² See 2 Corinthians 5:18

- We are called to “utterly destroy” anything in our hearts that would cause us to turn away from God.
 - And that’s really hard to do.
 - It *feels like* war.

The point of God’s command was for His people to destroy everything that would draw their hearts away from Him.

And that’s exactly what they were doing.

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.
~ *Judges 1:8*

And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites
who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it...
~ *Judges 1:17*

They were being obedient to the Word of the Lord, and God was blessing them at every turn.

But then something tragic happens.

- They begin to offer God partial obedience.

And it came to pass, when Israel was strong,
that they put the Canaanites under tribute,
but did not completely drive them out.
~ *Judges 1:28*

They are conquering the cities – like God commanded,

- But they stop driving out the people who lived there.

Q. What happens?

A. Their lives became intimately intertwined with people who didn’t love God or believe in God and have any desire to serve God, and they drew the hearts of God’s people away from Him.

Lesson: the people you spend time with change you – for better or for worse.

- It matters who your friends are.

Do not be deceived:
Evil company corrupts good habits.
~ *1 Corinthians 15:33*³

³ See also: Proverbs 12:26; 13:20; 22:24–25; James 4:4

- The same is true when it comes to dating & marriage: *the kind of person you date will almost always be the kind of person you marry. And the person you marry will either draw you closer to God or further away from God.*
 - Which is why I want my boys to be really careful & prayerful about who they date when they turn 21. 😊
 - Because it matters who you date!

Chapter one ends with a list of all the nations that God’s people didn’t drive out. They made room for a lifestyle of sin within the Promised Land.

Q. What about you? Have you given space for sin to live and dwell in your heart?

- What about the movies you watch?
- What about the websites you look at?
- What about the music you listen to?
- What about the language you use or the conversations you have?
- What about the places you hang out?

When you give space for even the smallest amount of sin to live in your heart, it won’t stay small.

And that’s exactly what happened with God’s people in the story of Judges. They gave space for a culture of sin to live in the land, and the story goes begins to spiral from bad to worse...

Eventually Joshua and that whole generation dies (**2:7**), and the story takes a nosedive:

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers,
another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord
nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,
and served the Baals;

and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers,
who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and
and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them,
and they bowed down to them;
and they provoked the Lord to anger.
~ **Judges 2:10–12**

An entire generation arose who did not know the Lord (**2:10**). *How does that happen?*

- Where were the parents who were supposed to be teaching them?
- Where were the parents who were talking about the works of God?

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children,
and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way,
when you lie down, and when you rise up.
~ **Deuteronomy 6:6–7**

- Where were the parents who were training them in godliness?
- Where were the parents who were discipling & disciplining their children?
- Where were the parents who were teaching them the works of God?

How does an entire generation arise that doesn't know the Lord?

1. When their parents don't diligently teach their children about the Lord.
2. And when their parents make peace with sin instead of destroying it.

We often think of **sin** as *the bad things that we "do"*

But sin almost always begins with *the good things that we "don't do"*⁴

- Maybe I yell at my wife when I get home from work...
 - *a bad thing that I did*
 - but I didn't spend any time praying for her when I got up morning
 - *which is a good thing that I didn't do*
- Maybe I lie to my parents about cleaning my room...
 - *a bad thing that I did*
 - But the only reason I was tempted to lie in the first place is because I didn't obey them when they told me to clean my room.
 - *which is a good thing that I didn't do*

- *that's a purely hypothetical scenario...obviously 😊*

When this life is over, you and I will not only give an account for the things that we **did**...but we will also give an account for the things that we **should have done**.

In Judges, their sin starts with not driving out the people of the land, and then it escalades to actively following and worshipping their false gods.

As a result of their sin, they no longer had God protecting them from their enemies (2:13–14).

- God does not bless those who reject Him.⁵

Yet, God doesn't abandon His people.

Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges
who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

...

And when the Lord raised up judges for them,
the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies
all the days of the judge;
for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning
because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

~ **Judges 2:16, 18**

⁴ Sins of commission vs. sins of omission

⁵ Which is why I have a very hard time singing songs like "God Bless America."

That's why this book is titled, "**Judges**". It tells the story of **twelve different judges** who God raised up to save Israel from the consequences of their sinful rebellion.

- Some of them have really short biographies (like Shamgar⁶ & Tola⁷), and some have much longer stories (like Gideon⁸ & Samson⁹).
- But the story is the same for each judge:
 1. God's people reject Him¹⁰
 2. God fights against their sin by sending other nations to oppress them
 - a. The *Arameans* (**3:7–8**)
 - b. The *Moabites* (**3:12–14**)
 - c. The *Canaanites* (**4:1–3**)
 - d. The *Midianites* (**6:1–6**)
 - e. The *Philistines* (**13:1**)
 3. They cry out for a savior¹¹
 4. God raises up a judge to save them.
 5. They are faithful to God during the lifetime of that judge
 6. When that judge dies, they rebel against God

We see that downward spiral twelve times throughout the book.

- Twelve times we see this heart of rebellion...
- And twelve times God's amazing faithfulness toward His rebellious people as He raises up a judge to save them...

The Judges:

- **Othniel** (3:7–11); **Ehud** (3:12–30); **Shamgar** (3:31)
- **Deborah** (4:1–5:31)
- **Gideon** (6:11–8:32)
- **Tola** (10:1–2); **Jair** (10:3–5)
- **Jephthah** (11:1–12:7)
- **Ibzan** (12:8–10); **Elon** (12:11–12); **Abdon** (12:13–15)
- **Samson** (13:1–16:31)

As you read the book, pay attention for the downward spiral. Sin isn't just a cycle; it's a cycle that takes a nation (or a heart) deeper and deeper (**2:19**).

By the time we read of Samson's death in **chapter 16**, God's people are no longer even calling out for help. Their hearts have grown so cold and callused that it seems they would rather be oppressed by the Philistines than repent and cry out to God for help.

⁶ Judges 3:31

⁷ Judges 10:1–2

⁸ Judges 6:11–8:32

⁹ Judges 13:1–16:31

¹⁰ Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:33; 10:6; 13:1

¹¹ Judges 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10

The book ends with these words:

In those days there was no king in Israel;
everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
~ *Judges 21:25*¹²

How should you read this book? ¹³

- With a heart of humility and repentance.
- Because it's not just their story; it's your story. It's my story.
 - It's my story because my heart is just as rebellious as theirs.
 - *“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”*
 - And it's your story because your God is just as faithful as theirs.
 - He will never leave you.
 - He loves you with a fierce love.
 - He fights for you, and so He fights against your sin.
 - He is quick to listen when you cry out to Him with a repentant heart.

God reminds us that, while sin will continue to destroy many, many lives, it will not have the final word. Because His promise in *Genesis 3:15* will still come to pass. In a world full of sin, a Hero will come (from the Seed of the woman) who will crush the head of sin and evil for good.

And we are reminded of that promise because something similar happens twice in this book.

- Jael kills the commander of the enemy by pounded a tent peg through his temple (**4:21**)
- And a certain woman crushes the skull of the wicked king by dropping a millstone on his head (**9:53**)

¹² See also: Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; 30:12.

¹³ How should you *feel* when you read this book?

1. The first feeling you should feel is sadness. This book is full of heartache that comes from sin:
 - a. Families are ripped apart...
 - b. Relationships are destroyed...
 - c. Young men grow up to be haters of God...
 - d. An entire tribe is wiped out because of civil war...
 - e. And God's people become slaves over and over again...

This book should make you weep for their sin and misery

- Sin ruins everything, and when you see the total devastation caused by sin, it should make you weep
 - There are stories in this book that are almost impossible to read because of how heartbreaking they are.
 - And that's the point.
 - God means to break our heart for what breaks His.
 - You will never celebrate the glory Gospel until you have first wept over the devastation of your sin.
2. There is another emotion that you should feel as you read through this book, and that is hope.

Though sin & sadness cover the landscape like a dark plague, glimmers of gospel hope shine throughout the story.

This isn't the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise, but it's a reminder that God's promise will come true.

- The Savior will come & He will deliver His people from the power of the enemy forever.
- The Hero will come (from the Seed of a virgin), and He will crush the head of the enemy.
- He will judge His people with perfect truth and justice.
- And His people will have rest forever because this Judge will never die.

As for us, may God give us eyes to see the depravity of our hearts and our desperate need for Him to save us – not just from hell, but from a life that is wasted in a downward spiral of sin, and may He give us the grace to turn from our sin and to live for Him alone.

If you have never done that...if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior and Judge, there is no reason to wait.

The Bible says...

If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
~ 1 John 1:9

And that...

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
~ Romans 10:13

Friend, if God is speaking to your heart right now, if He is convicting you of sin and calling you to repent and to trust in Him, don't wait. Don't put it off until tomorrow because tomorrow might be too late.

Today (*right now*) is the day of salvation!
~ 2 Corinthians 6:2

It's not easy for sinners to repent...but it's not complicated either.

Just open your heart to God by faith, and say something like this:

*“God, I confess that I am a sinner. And I can't save myself.
I'm tired of living life my own way, of doing what is right in my own eyes.
I need You. Please save me.
I believe in Jesus. I believe He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.
I believe that He died on the cross to save me from my sin,
And I believe that He arose from the grave three days later.
And by faith I am trusting in Jesus Christ right now as my Judge and my Savior.
Thank You for saving me. Thank You for grace.
Amen!”*

CLOSE IN PRAYER