

God's Message to Us in Judges 1-21

Halifax, NS

25 February 2018, 2:00 PM

Introduction

This afternoon, I am pleased to continue our sermon series in which we are taking a week or two to look at how each of the sixty-six books of the Bible speaks to us today.

- One of the advantages of this series is that you get to look at the big picture in each book without getting lost in the details.

The book of Judges, which we come to today, is a book that has a very clear overall theme that is presented again and again, almost like a chorus in a song that plays over and over again.

- It is a constant cycle of Israel rebelling, God handing them over to their enemies to chasten them, and then delivering them by the hand of those called *judges*.
 - It is a translation of the Hebrew word *shaw-fat* (or *shaw-fa-teem* in the plural)
- The *shaw-fa-teem* were not the same as what we think of as judges.
 - We think primarily of someone who adjudicates matters in a court of law.
 - but the judges in the book of Judges not only did that, but they were also reformers and deliverers—even saviours empowered by God.
 - They are very much pictures or types of Jesus Christ, the ultimate *shaw-fat* who came to deliver us from our sin and who constantly rescues us today when we go astray.
 - Over and over, He calls us back and delivers us from our enemies into whose hands we have fallen when we go astray.

I. So let me begin by showing you this recurring pattern in the book of Judges of rebellion, bondage to enemies, deliverance by a judge, and then more rebellion.

A. Here is how this 323 year period of Israel's history covered in the book of Judges begins:

1. In the opening chapter, you find that Israel, as we saw in Joshua last week, has been given their inheritance in the land of Canaan.
 - Principally, Israel has control of the land and each of the tribes of Israel has been given their portion.
 - However, there are still Amorites and Canaanites and Philistines and others in the hills or at the borders of their inheritance.
 - You will remember that God had told Israel all along to utterly destroy these people as His judgment against these nations because of their wickedness.
 - They were nations that had rejected God for idols—and they had detestable practices with their idols:
 - Their worship of them involved perverse fertility ceremonies with male and female prostitutes...
 - and things like burning their children on altars as sacrifices!
2. The people of Israel have been sternly warned by Joshua and Moses not to make alliances with these people or to worship their gods, but rather to destroy them.

- When Judges opens, we see some progress being made in this direction after the death of Joshua.
 - But we also see that almost all of the tribes do not finish driving out these remaining enemies.
 - It is much easier to get on with enjoying their inheritance and just leave them—perhaps making them pay some tribute or something.
 - But also, and this is very puzzling, we are told that Israel is not able to drive out some of these enemies!
 - We are told that some of them have iron chariots and that some of them are simply determined not to leave.
3. Naturally we want to know why Israel would not be able to destroy them.
- a. We saw clearly in Joshua that it was the LORD who gave them victory over their enemies!
 - It was not by horses and chariots, but by His might and power.
 - The walls of Jericho fell down by marching around them and blowing trumpets—clearly supernatural!
 - The five kings that formed an alliance and came against Israel all at once were mostly destroyed by hailstones that fell on them.
 - So how could it be that they were not able to finish off these remaining inhabitants?
 - b. We are given the explanation of why Israel could not drive out some of these remaining Canaanites in Judges 2:1-3.
 - The narrative actually backs up here to tell us what happened when Joshua was still alive...
 - This is clear because Joshua is the one who dismisses the assembly according to verse 6.
 - Look with me at Judges 2:1-3:
 - **Josh 2:1-3: Then [probably better to translate “And”] the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: “I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. ² And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? ³ Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be *thorns* in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’ ”**
 - So there it is!
 - Israel was slack in driving out all of their enemies, so the LORD punished them by making them unable to drive them out.
 - That’s how it was in Numbers—when they *refused* to go into the Promised Land and then were rendered *unable* to do so for forty years.
- B. In the rest of chapter 2, we are introduced to the recurring theme I mentioned before that characterises the book of Judges.
1. God uses these remaining idol-worshipping people to test Israel’s faithfulness to Him—whether they will worship idols or not...
 - and Israel does not do well with this test!

- Let me read to you from Judges 2:10-19 where it shows us the pattern Israel fell into during the three centuries that are covered by the book of Judges—1418-1095 BC.
- 2. Listen to what it says—Judges 2:10-19:
 - **¹⁰ When all that generation [Joshua and the elders who served with him] 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. ¹¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; ¹² and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; 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. ¹³ They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.**
 - 1) Let me mention at this point who Baal is...
 - He is the God of the Canaanites and the Phoenicians.
 - His name means “Lord,” and as he had different forms in different places,
 - for this reason, he is sometimes referred to in the plural.
 - He is known to be the son of El, the chief of the Canaanite Pantheon
 - In Syria, he was called Hadad, and in Babylonia, Adad.
 - He was believed to be a god who gave fertility to women and rain to the soil.
 - Storm clouds were said to be his chariot, thunder his voice, and lightening his spear and arrows
 - He was worshipped by prostitution and child sacrifice.
 - Israel forsook the true God to worship these Baals!
 - 2) I should also say something about Ashtoreth...
 - She is a female deity of the Canaan, and the consort of Baal
 - She was associated with the evening star and is said to be the beautiful goddess of war and fertility.
 - She is Ishtar in Babylon, Athtart in Aram, Aphrodite in Greece, and Venus to the Romans.
 - Her worship involved extremely lascivious practices.
 - Now I will continue our reading from verse 14 where we are given the wretched pattern that Israel fell into that is found throughout the book:
 - Judges 2:14-19: **And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

3. So there you have the pattern that we find over and over in Judges...
 - Israel rebels.
 - God is angered by Israel's rebellion...
 - He delivers them over to their enemies who greatly oppress them...
 - Then He raises up a judge to deliver them...
 - They serve the LORD again as long as the judge remains...
 - Then they rebel after the judge dies and another generation grows up that does not know the Lord...
 - God again delivers them to their enemies—
 - They are greatly oppressed and cry out to Him...
 - He raises up a judge to deliver them...
 - and so on and so on!

C. Now let me show you this pattern through the book.

1. You can see it in Judges 3:7-11 where we have Israel's first judge, Othniel, who was Caleb's son-in-law:
 - **Judges 3:7-11: So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. ⁸ Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years. ⁹ When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. ¹⁰ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. ¹¹ So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died."**
 - And then look what happens in verse 12...
 - We are right back to where we were in verse 7 as they cycle begins all over again: **And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD... so the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel...**
2. And then the pattern goes on and on with each generation...
 - You have Shamgar who delivers them from the Philistines in verse 31,
 - Then Deborah in Judges 4-5 who was judge from 1298-1258 BC.
 - She delivers them from Jabin or Hazor who oppressed Israel...
 - Then there is Gideon in chapter 6-8 who is judge from 1258-1251 and delivers them from the Midianites.
 - When God called Gideon to deliver Israel, his first task was to destroy the image of Baal his father had made—which he did.
 - Then Gideon (who kept asking God to assure him that he really would be able to overthrow the Midianites who were at least 135,000 strong) was able to raise up an army of 30,000 against them.

- But God objected that Gideon had too many lest they should think that they had won the battle without God, so He reduced them to 300 men who completely defeated the Midianites.
 - After this, Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons, became a self-appointed judge.
 - He was not called by God, but was a usurper until he was brought down.
 - Then Tola followed by Jair were judges covering the years of 1215-1170.
 - After this, Israel was brought under the rule of the Philistines and the Ammonites as we are told Judges 10:6-7:
 - Judges 10:6-7: **Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. 7 So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon.**
 - First we are told about how Jephthah (Judge from 1152-1146), the son of Gilead, was able to deliver them from the people of Ammon—this is in chapter 11-12.
 - Then we are told how God used Samson to deliver them from the Philistines starting in chapter 13 and running to chapter 16.
 - Chapter 13 opens with the very familiar refrain: **Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years.**
 - And then tells of Samson, the famous man that God gave tremendous physical strength to—so that singlehandedly,
 - he delivered Israel from bondage to the Philistines through a number of twisted events—Samson himself being an example of a man who did what was right in his own eyes, yet still looked to the Lord and prevailed.
 - He died around 1101 BC which is about the time Samuel came along—his life is recorded in the book that bears his name.
- D. In the rest of the book of Judges, chapter 17-21, you have two striking examples of the terrible state of chaos that Israel was in because they were “doing what was right in their own eyes” instead of following the Lord.
1. In chapter 17 & 18 there is the pitiful account of Micah whose mother curses the person who stole her money until she learns that it was her son Micah...
 - Then Micah uses the money (to her delight) to set up an idol and hire a priest!
 - But only until some from the tribe of Dan learn about it and steal the idol and take the priest for their own worship.
 2. Then in chapter 19, we are told of another Levite who has a concubine that runs home to her father...
 - He goes to find her and as he is returning home, he spends the night in Gibeah where a group of men from the tribe of Benjamin come to sodomise him...
 - and hands his concubine over to them to appease them...
 - And these vile Benjamites ravish her so that she dies.
 - The Levite cuts her into pieces and sends her parts to the other tribes to call them to war, and they end up nearly wiping out Benjamin entirely.

3. These stories are given to illustrate how low Israel had fallen!
 - The conclusion of the whole is in the last verse of the book of Judges:
 - Judges 21:25: **In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.***

TRANS> So you see here the recurring cycle I was talking about over these three centuries:

- Israel turns to idols.
- God turns them over to their enemies who oppress them.
- Israel cries out to God.
- God raises up a judge who delivers them from their idolatry and their oppressors...
- Then the judge dies and they return to their idols again...
 - It is both pitiful and appalling!

II. What lessons are we to learn in reading this?

A. First, we learn from this the tendency we have as God's people to run after idols.

1. To read about it rightly causes us to be appalled—because it is appalling!
 - Here you have these people who have been redeemed by the Lord and given an inheritance where they are to serve Him as their God!
 - He had taken them to be His people and had promised to bless them, and had shown them through the ceremonies and promised that He is their Saviour.
 - They cannot save themselves—only He can save them.
 - But instead of serving Him and being filled with thanksgiving for His salvation and mercy, they keep turning to idols!
 - It seems as if they can't wait to run after idols.
 - They are worse than the Gentiles because they go after all the gods at once:
 - Judges 10:6 is striking in this regard: **Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.**
2. But we do the same thing in the church today!
 - a. We are uncomfortable with the true God who tells us that we cannot save ourselves, but can only be saved by Him!
 - We want a God that we can manipulate and bargain with.
 - We want to have some control.
 - We want to set some of the terms about what is required of us and about how we should live.
 - b. Just look at the church today.
 - What has become of most protestant churches—the Anglican, the United, the Baptist, the Lutheran—and yes, the Presbyterian?
 - Most of them have rejected the Bible as God's word.
 - They began to add their own innovations to God's worship.
 - They began to deny the wrath of God against sin and when they do that, they began to look at Jesus as a social reformer instead of the Lamb of God who died on the cross to atone for our sins.
 - Though they worship God in name, they are not saved.

- They have more and more done what is right in their own eyes—
 - Feminism told them that women should be ministers, so they said sure.
 - They accepted sex outside of marriage, divorce for any reason, abortion, homosexual conduct... the list goes on and on...
- c. Churches start to drift away from the true God because there are people in them who are unregenerate—
 - a generation grows up that does not know the Lord or His wonderful works—especially His saving work in Jesus Christ...
 - And as they do, they are more and more attracted to idols.
 - That is why there is this recurring pattern in Biblical churches—just like the recurring them we see in Judges.
 - In almost every generation, they start to drift away;
 - and if they do not cut off those who are turning to idolatry, the idolaters soon drive out the ones who are following Christ.
 - It should not surprise us to see this—it goes all the way back into the ancient history of Israel.

TRANS> Idolatry has a pull on us just like it did on Israel.

- That is the first thing we learn from the book of Judges.
- What else do we learn from Judges?

B. We learn the need we have of a shaw-fat (a judge—a deliverer—a Saviour)—yes indeed—of how much we need THE shaw-fat: Jesus Christ!

1. With Israel, we see how they have to be rescued again and again!
 - Without the shaw-fat, they would have been absorbed completely into Canaanite culture and become just like the Canaanites...
 - Or they would have been wiped out by the oppression of their enemies.
 - God raises up one judge after another to rescue them—to bring them back.
 - They are like sheep constantly going astray and having to be rescued time and time again—
 - And without the shaw-fat, there would be no rescue.
2. You can be sure that God's point in showing us this is not to show us how great these judges were in the Old Testament.
 - They had major problems.
 - They had their own sins to deal with—it almost seems like they get worse as you go along.
 - Gideon ends of marrying a bunch of wives and has Abimelech who is the usurper judge I mentioned before...
 - And you have Samson who himself did what was right in his own eyes and was more of a warrior than a reformer.
 - But the worst thing about them is that they died.
 - And as soon as they died, Israel again did evil in the eyes of the Lord and turned to their idols.
3. God is showing us how much we need the LORD Jesus to be our Judge who lives forever and ever and who has no sin!

- Yes, we absolutely need Him as the one who died on the cross to atone for our sins—we need Him as our priest and as our sacrifice for sins...
 - But Judges shows us that we also need Him to deliver us from our enemies and to keep calling us back to God so that we don't go astray.
- Remember what I said before about the church today and how we keep going off, but then eventually a group will break away that follows God?
 - Well here is the reason—we have the LORD Jesus as our shaw-fat in heaven—our deliverer, our rescuer, ever calling us back to God when we have gone astray.
 - He brings conviction to His elect people through His Spirit and Word and we are broken and we repent and we return.
 - He calls us back and He keeps us.
 - Without Him, we would be completely given over to idols.

TRANS> What else do we learn from the book of Judges as we see this pattern of straying and being restored by our shaw-fat?

C. We learn the importance of teaching our children about Jesus.

1. The book of Judges goes through the generations with each judge.
 - God raises up the judge that delivers His people and they have peace for as long as that judge lives and then they turn to idols again.
 - But who turns to idols?
 - It is the next generation.
2. This is brought out clearly right the start of Judges.
 - Look with at Judges 2:7-12... I did not read these verses before.
 - **Judges 2:7-12: So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸ Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. ⁹ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; ¹² and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; 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.**
 - Isn't verse 10 terribly sad?
 - A generation grew up in Israel that did not know the Lord!
 - Their parents did not tell them about the LORD!
 - They just assumed that their children would follow on.
 - They did not realise the tendency that is in all of us to turn to idols.
3. Parents, I hope all of you are diligently teaching your children!
 - I hope you fathers read God's word in your family every day and discuss it and how it applies to you and the members of your family.
 - I hope you tell them what Jesus has done for us in dying on the cross for us and that you talk to them about how we are to love Him with all our heart.

- I hope you listen to them and ask them questions and that you know what they think about the Lord.
- I hope you teach them the Catechism—the things that we believe from the Bible that they need to understand so that they won't be swept away by idolatry—even if it is just in its early stages.
- What a terrible thing it would be for your children to grow up in your home and to not know the LORD because you did not tell them about Him!
 - That is what happened in Israel and that is why they worshipped the Baals... it was easier than the true religion.
 - I already showed you that we naturally gravitate to idolatry—and that is true of our children and reason we must teach them to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - Don't hide our precious Lord from your children!

TRANS> So there are three things we learn from Judges...

- First, that we naturally go after idols...
- Second, that we need Jesus to be our Judge and deliver us from idols...
- Third, that we need to teach our children about the LORD... lest they go after idols.
- And now a fourth lesson (and the last one we will look at) is that:

D. The book of Judges shows us how ready God is to restore us as soon as we return to Him.

1. The sheer number of times that the LORD restores them is a clear testimony of His love and patience with us...
 - though let me warn you not to presume—there are many in the church who die in their sin—they die without ever being born again—they die in their apostasy and unbelief.
 - Remember, I have spoken to you about the way there comes a time in Biblical churches when the church has gone astray and there is a split in which people come back to the truth...
 - But there are a lot of people that don't come back to the truth!
 - So you need to be sure that you are with those that are restored and not with those that die in their sin and go to perdition.
2. But let me say to all of you and any of you who want to be restored to the LORD, no matter what you may have done—He is very ready to restore us.
 - I was struck by the sheer number of times that He keeps on restoring them as I read through Judges this past week...
 - But I was especially struck in chapter 10 where God at first refused to restore them and then changed His mind.
 - It shines the light on His tenderness even more—
 - **Judges 10:10-16: And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, “We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!”** ¹¹ So the LORD said to the children of Israel, **“Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines?”** ¹² Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. ¹³ Yet you have forsaken

Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. ¹⁴ Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress.” ¹⁵ And the children of Israel said to the LORD, “We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.” ¹⁶ So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

- Isn't that marvellous?
 - The Holy God says that His soul (He speaks as a man) could no longer endure the misery of Israel!
 - This is your God!
 - This is His love!
 - Come to Him with a broken and a contrite heart...
 - He will not reject you!
 - He will welcome you!
 - He will restore you!
 - He never forgets His covenant.
 - He never forgets the suffering of His Son for our sins—He sees His sorrow bearing our sins, and He says, “It is enough!”
 - And He receives us back to Himself.
3. What a grand thing if what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:25 can be said of you:
- **1Pe 2:25: For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**
 - Can it be said?
 - Do not stay away from Him if you have strayed. There is no need for it.
 - Come to Him and you will find Him to be a very welcoming God.