

Judges

Strength in Weakness

The Theme of Judges

- When we think of Judges, we tend to think of the famous Sin Cycle
- I'm sure that you've heard it before
- **S**in – **S**uffering – **S**upplication – **S**alvation
- Israel sins and wanders away from God and this brings God's judgment by bringing in a foreign nation to rule over them
- After enough suffering they get on their knees and repent and God delivers them by sending a savior
- This teaches us a good lesson for us to remember...
- The farther we move away from God the farther into trouble we get, and only God is able to save us and bring us close to Him again
- This recurring Cycle of Sin is not just in the Book of Judges, but it's all throughout the history of the People of Israel
- And, it applies every bit as well to you and I today
- But, that is not what I want to talk about this weekend
- I want to talk about a different Theme in the Book of Judges
- I prefer to see Judges as a story of...
- **Strength in Weakness**
- When I read through Judges I see a wonderful lesson of God using some of the most unimpressive instruments to bring about his victory and his Glory
- Judges is not simply a story of Man's weakness and God's deliverance, but a story of God's deliverance **THROUGH** man's weakness

- God specifically chooses some of the weakest, most flawed human beings to bring about great and miraculous victories
- At first you might think that this is a unique and interesting twist found only in the Book of Judges
- But, this is not the case
- God actually prefers to work in this way
- He did this in the time of the Judges, he did it all throughout the Bible, and he continues to do so today
- Not only am I encouraged by seeing that God can work through men who are weak in faith, make bad decisions in life and sin most dramatically...
- But, I'm also humbled by coming to realize that God almost exclusively does so
- I've come to realize that I am not that great, but God works in me nonetheless
- It's a principle that God speaks quite clearly about in the New Testament
- Look what Paul writes to the Corinthians

- 1st Corinthians 1:26-29

26) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; **God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;**

28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

29) **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.**

- Paul was spoken to directly by Jesus in Heaven
- He received amazing visions and revelations
- He was caught up into Paradise, the Third Heaven, and heard things that cannot be told, that no man can even utter
- And look what he says about that:

- 2nd Corinthians 12:7-9

7) So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

- 8) Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.
- 9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

- This is the same lesson that God tried to teach Israel 1500 years before
- This is the same lesson that God wants us to learn today
- Let's start our study of Judges in Chapter 1
- The whole story of the Times of the Judges is established in Verse 19
- They come into the land to take possession of it, and in Verse 19 we read...
- Judges 1:19

19) And the LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but **he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain** because they had chariots of iron.

- The Philistines had Iron, and the Israelites were unable to drive them out
- This inability to drive the other nations from the land is a recurring theme in Judges, and the source of a lot of the problems
- Look at Verses 27-34
 - 27 – The Canaanites were content to dwell in the land
 - 29 – The Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.
 - 30 – The Canaanites dwelt among them
 - 32 – The Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites
 - 34 - The Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain
- This tolerance of Pagans would be the downfall of Israel, and is in complete opposition to what Moses told them to do in Deuteronomy
- This mistake brings about their sin and ultimately, the Wrath of God
- The Israelites were soon infected with the pagan outlook and way of life
- Instead of the nations seeing the goodness of the Israelites and wanting to be converted to worshipping the true God
- They probably sat back and marveled at how quickly this nation would abandon

their God and assimilate every idol they came in contact with

- This didn't need to be...
- ***Ships sink not by being in the water, but by the water being in them!***
- They could have been a positive influence on their neighbors
- God had intended Israel to be a light for the nations
- He intended for them to show forth his greatness to all the nations of the world, and for people to come to them to learn of God
- He intended for them to preach by their example, just like he expects of us today
- They were in the world with all the others, but by their exceptional behavior, they were supposed to influence those around them to come to God
- Instead their neighbors influenced them

- Judges 2:12

12) And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. **They went after other gods**, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

- When it says that Israel went “Whoring after Other Gods”, it is not a figure of speech
- The pagan worship of the nations around them actually involved sexual practices
- So, God punished them for their infidelity
- The tricky part is that God USED the nations around Israel to bring about HIS punishment on them
- You often can't easily see God's Hand at work in your life if you only look on the surface
- The Jews would have thought it was the Nations attacking them, and not God punishing them
- We tend to see the surface level of our problem, and not the spiritual lesson behind it
- The people repented and cried to God for help and delivered them...

• Judges 2:16

16) Then **the LORD raised up judges**, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

- Judges were not like Kings
- Every King that ever sat on the throne had the blood of David in their veins
- The office of Judge didn't pass from Father to Son
- Judges **ROSE UP**
- Judges had to stand based on their own knowledge and wisdom
- Judges also differed from the Kings who came later in one main area:
- Judges could not **COMMAND** the loyalty of the people
- They could only **APPEAL** to the people for their loyalty
- Thus, the Judges are often more exciting, as they perform amazing exploits to try to get the people's attention, and inspire them to turn back to God
- And they are perfect examples for us trying to lead our Ecclesias
- You won't get very far trying to command your Brothers and Sisters to live Godly lives
- But, you CAN lead a good example and appeal to them to raise their standards
- But, alas the people of Israel would not learn!

• Judges 2:17

17) **Yet they did not listen to their judges**, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so.

- But, luckily God's love and His compassion for us is greater than our wickedness
- His perseverance to bless us is stronger than our persistence to sin

• Judges 2:18

18) Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from 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 afflicted and oppressed them.

- But, the limits of the Israelites wickedness knew no ends...

- Have you ever heard the saying, **“Out of sight, out of mind”**?
- One of the common problems that we all face is how easily we forget...
- We do good when we are being constantly reminded to do so, but left on our own, and we quickly slide back into our old habits...
- Judges 2:19
 - 19) **But whenever the judge died**, they **turned back** and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.
- God eventually got tired of this, and gives them up to have the nations live among them as a test to the Israelites
- And how does Israel respond to the test?
- Judges 3:5-6
 - 5) So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
 - 6) And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and **they served their gods**.
- It's at this point that the Judges enter the story
- They are referred to as **“Saviors”**... The Hebrew word for **“Judge”** means **“Deliverer”**
- In reality, they don't do much **“Judging”**
- It's more in the sense of how one person's righteous actions can convict others
- If someone is living righteously and you are living wickedly, then they “Judge” you by their lifestyle
- In the first few chapters of the Judges, we have stories of 7 Oppressors and 7 Deliverers
- You see this theme of **“Strength in Weakness”** firmly established in these first chapters
- The really neat part is that in each of the seven deliverances, we see God using some very “unimpressive” instruments to accomplish the deliverances
- We see that God uses:

- A Left Handed Man
- An Ox Goad
- A Woman
- A Tent Peg
- A Clay Pot
- A Piece of Millstone
- A Jawbone of an Ass

- The nations surrounding Israel had the absolute latest in military weapon design
- The strongest steel swords, the sharpest spears, the speediest chariots...
- And God uses a Jawbone of an Ass, a tent peg, and an ox goad to bring about deliverance
- This weekend we'll look at a few of these as examples
- The first period of Israel's suffering comes about just like all the rest...
- Judges 3:7

7) **And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.** They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

- And the result is just as you would expect...
- Judges 3:8

8) **Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel,** and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

- After eight years of subjection, the people come to their senses

- Judges 3:9

9) But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, **the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel,** who saved them, **Othniel** the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

- We now see something happen to Othniel that happens to each one of the Judges of Israel, and is the key to their success

- Judges 3:10

10) **The Spirit of the LORD was upon him**, and he judged Israel...

- God only does NOT deliver Israel through the hand of men, but it is also NOT through man's hand that they are successfully governed
- God leads the people by imparting courage, wisdom and military prowess to the Judges
- The Judges are unique in that they are the kind of people who allow God into their hearts, so that God can work through them, instead of trying to do it all themselves and failing in the end
- Othniel leads Israel for 40 years, for 40 years they have peace, and then Othniel dies, and guess what happens!

- Judges 3:12

12) And the people of Israel again **did what was evil in the sight of the LORD**...

- And again retribution for their actions comes upon them
- This time through the Moabites who were helped by the Ammonites and the Amalekites
- For 18 years the children of Israel serve Eglon, the king of the Moabites
- Finally the people cried unto the Lord, and he raised up a judge...

- Judges 3:14

14) Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, **Ehud**, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, **a left-handed man**.

- Ehud was Left Handed...
- Now, I don't want to offend anyone here that's a leftie...
- But, do you notice how it's specifically called out here in the story...
- In Jewish culture the right hand was the symbol of strength

- God is specifically showing that even though Ehud is going to use a sword to kill Eglon, the king of Moab, that he did so with his LEFT HAND
- God brings about deliverance... Even through a weak, little leftie!
- And Israel had peace for 80 years!
- We then see a few words about Shamgar... Literally...

- Judges 3:31

31) After him was **Shamgar** the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an **oxgoad**, and he also saved Israel.

- Shamgar does not come BETWEEN Ehud and Deborah, as Ehud lives the entire 80 years of peace, and is followed by Deborah
- Remember, these are not Kings, with only one on the throne
- It is possible to have several people all working together to deliver Israel
- The key lesson for us to remember is to open our hearts up to allow God into our lives
- God purposely chooses the **WEAK** things of this world to perform his glorious work
- Don't worry if you don't think you are good enough, or strong enough, or smart enough... THAT is the point exactly!
- God simply wants you to let Him USE you to do what He wants to do
- Instead of you thinking that you know the best way to go...
- Meanwhile, back in Israel the story continues in Chapter 4

- Judges 4:1

1) And the people of Israel **again** did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.

- The familiar apostasy brings the familiar retribution, and the familiar servitude
- In Deborah, we see a little different kind of "Deliverer"
- First of all, it doesn't appear that Deborah rose up like the others, but that she was already judging Israel at the time
- And she was more of a "Judge" than a "Deliverer"

- Judges 4:4-5

- 4) Now **Deborah**, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was **judging** Israel at that time.
- 5) She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.

- So, God had raised up Deborah, but she doesn't deliver the people, instead she acts more like a Judge and "holds court"
- She holds court in the remote hill region of Ephraim, where the domination of those 900 Chariots of Iron would not have been so severe
- Her first step is to call Barak to rally the tribes of the North, while she organized the tribes in the South
- We learn a lot about Barak by his response to her request:

• Judges 4:8

- 8) Barak said to her, "**if** you will go with me, I will go, but **if** you will not go with me, I will not go."

- What is your first impression of Barak by this response?
- If you're anything like me, then you think of Barak as unfaithful...
- Then how do you justify the verse in Hebrews 11?

• Hebrews 11:32

- 32) And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, **Barak**, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets...

- A good lesson for us to learn is that God looks for something different in people
- We look for someone big and strong to stand up and say, "I will do it!"
- God looks for people who possess the necessary characteristics of a child of God:
- What is it in a Child that God desires so much?
- We tend to always answer that question with wonderful thoughts like, "*Children are Sinless*" and "*Children are Obedient*"
- While those things are true, another thing to think about is:
- Most Children have an utter Lack of Confidence in Self, and implicit Confidence in

God and in the Leaders that He has appointed (no matter how poorly judged that Leader might be by those around you)

- When men choose a leader, they choose the big, strong man who literally stands heads and shoulders above the rest
- God looks upon the Heart
- Perhaps if Barak's faith had been stronger, he would have gone on his own, secure in the knowledge that since the inspired prophetess had blessed his mission then it was bound to prosper
- That is probably why Deborah replies:

• Judges 4:9

9) And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for **the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.**" Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

- Little does Barak know that Deborah is not speaking of herself...
- We know that the Israelites had no weapons to speak of
- So, with no chariots and the most primitive of weapons, and even a faith that didn't seem to be the strongest ever recorded...
- Barak moves forward
- Facing an incredibly strong enemy with no confidence and no strength
- The only hope you have is to trust in God
- The only hope you have is to **BELIEVE** in God's deliverance

• Judges 4:14

14) And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. **Does not the LORD go out before you?**" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.

- What a GREAT LESSON for US!
- ***Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?***
- Don't look for God to "***back you up***"
- Don't look for God to "***support you***", or to "***fill in the gaps where you leave off***"

- Trust that God has **GONE AHEAD OF YOU**

- Trust that God is able to fight the battle for you

- Look what Barak sees upon arrival:

- Judges 4:15

15) And the **LORD routed Sisera** and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot.

- Now, the tough question:

- Why didn't God simply route Sisera and all his chariots and army without Barak even having to leave his tent?

- God is capable, right?

- **AT BARAK'S ADVANCE**, the Lord routed Sisera...

- Our **OBEDIENCE** unlocks God's Power

- If we don't move forward **FIRST** in **FAITH**, then God does not respond

- If we don't attempt to advance on our own, **EVEN THOUGH** we are greatly outnumbered and outgunned by the enemy, then God will not help us

- And with God the victory is **COMPLETE**

- God doesn't do things half-heartedly

- God doesn't leave some people in the land to come back and trouble you later

- Judges 4:16

16) And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; **not a man was left.**

- How does God deliver?

- We know that he does it completely, but he also does it Naturally...

- That is why we often don't see it, and why we tend to take the glory for ourselves

- We see in the next chapter, that God brought a big storm up, and the rain caused fields full of deep mud

- The heavy Iron Chariots were quickly stuck in the mud, and sitting ducks for

Barak and his men

- Sisera abandons his chariot and flees on foot
- He knows a traitor who lives nearby
- He knows Heber the Kenite
- Kenite means “Smith” – What is a Smith? Hmm...
- What do we know about Israel under the domination of the Canaanites?
- They weren't allowed Metal, right? Yet, Heber was a Iron Smith...
- What obvious accommodations had Heber made to ensure the success of his business?
- But, no matter how much of a scum and traitor the husband is, that doesn't mean that the wife has to also become unfaithful to her God
- Jael is faithful and obedient
- She has patiently lived with Heber, observing his evil ways, and now she takes the opportunity to act, and to do something that will redeem herself from the years of quiet inactivity
- She has eaten the rewards of Heber's treachery, and now she is ready to spit it all out and cleanse herself and her family's tent
- She takes action...
- This time to correct a wrong, and to cleanse her conscience and her family name
- She moves forward in faith and does something that she surely didn't feel she was strong enough to do – Knowing that God would be with her
- She grasps the opportunity to correct a wrong, and to clean her conscience and clear her family name from her traitorous husband
- No matter who you are: An Alien. Newly converted. Or, even a WOMAN in a Male Dominated Country! You can have a great positive effect upon your Brothers and Sisters by serving the Lord with strong resolve and faith
- No matter where you are in your life and what mistakes you might have made, you can move forward and take action in your service to God
- This weekend we are going to look at some examples of people who allow God to work within them even though they were filled with Fear, even though they had made poor choices in their lives, and even though they had committed great sins

- God shows forth his **Strength in Weakness**
- So... Maybe it was **BECAUSE** they were fearful, sinners who constantly filled their lives with poor choices
- Maybe it was **BECAUSE** they were people just like you and me that God chose to work in their lives...
- We all make choices everyday in our lives
- Choices that shape and define our lives
- The Judges were just like us
- The Judges had to make choices everyday as well
- God chose to work within those frail, human, sinful characters
- And he will work with us as well
- This week we'll talk about God working in your life even when you make **Fearful Choices**
- We'll talk about how God can even work with you when you end up making **Poor Choices**
- And one of the most important lessons for us to learn, is that God chooses to work good in your life even when you make **Sinful Choices**