



Exploring God's Love through the Bible: Love in the Midst of Unfaithfulness (Judges)

Sep 4, 2016

EXHORTATION CONCERNING GOD'S LOVE

At the end of Joshua, we see God's love manifested through loving warnings and a renewed covenant:

*Therefore, be **very strong** to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. **Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God.** For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, **know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.** (Jos 23:6-13)*

*"Now therefore **fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.** Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Then the people answered, "**Far be it from us** that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. **Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.**" But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." **And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD."** Then Joshua said to the people, "**You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.**" **And they said, "We are witnesses."** (Jos 24:14-24)*

THE CONTEXT OF JUDGES

1. The Book of Joshua closes with his death and burial. Judges (so named because of the people God raised up to save Israel throughout the book) picks up afterwards.
2. The people began pretty well, obeying Joshua's command to continue the land conquests (Jos 23:4-5, Judg 1:1-26), although they eventually stopped (Judg 1:27-34). This was a bad sign of things to come.

3. Judges, spanning some 300 or so years, is essentially the story of a **leaderless** Israel in **rebellion** and subsequently in bondage, harassed and enslaved by foreign powers. The overall theme of the book is given in the very last verse:

***In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
(Judg 21:25, also 17:6)***

4. God, in love and mercy, consistently raised up individuals to **deliver** his people (Judg 3). However, one must be careful in attempting to establish doctrinal patterns for the Church from these narratives. Narrative is not **normative**. After reading through Judges, to that I say “hallelujah!”
5. The point is this: God demonstrated great **love** in Judges, even in the midst of the people's rebellion and sin. He did the same for us:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6-8 KJV)

LOVE IN THE MIDST OF UNFAITHFULNESS: THE JUDGES

We pick up the narrative in Chapter 2:

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.” As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD.

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. (Judg 2:10)

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. 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. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against

them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. (Judg 2:11-15)

Again, in love, the Lord raised up judges:

*Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. **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. 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 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.** (Judg 2:16-19)*

THE JUDGES: IMPERFECT PEOPLE IN REBELLIOUS DAYS

- One can see God's **compassion** in this Book through the repeated pattern: 1) The people choose full-fledge rebellion against God. 2) Their disobedience brings pain and suffering. 3) They cry out. 4) God sends a temporary judge to deliver. 5) Repeat.
- It's actually quite sad, and is a commentary on the contemporary **church** in many ways.
- God gave them judges like Othniel, Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, about whom we know little (Judg 3:7-11, 31, 10:1-5, 12:8-15). Some were military leaders who saved Israel from various enemies.
- We are given more detail about others...

Ehud (Judg 3:12-30): A judge who, via the pretense of giving an offering to the fat King of Moab (Moab was oppressing rebellious Israel), got near enough to him to stab him in the belly, "the fat closing over the blade" before his escape.

Deborah (Judg 4): A judge and prophetess who, after 20 years of cruel oppression by the King of Canaan, sat under a palm and gave counsel to the fearful military leaders of Israel and judgement to the people. Sadly, many fail to see Deborah's story as a rebuke, as she herself told Barak (Judg 4:9).

Gideon (Judg 6-9): A fearful judge who was called by the angel of the Lord to fight the Midianites. In his fear, he needed signs (the fleece) to believe, even though he had been commissioned by the Lord, and needed to hear the dreams of his enemies to have the courage to engage in the battle. He later made an unauthorized ephod out of gold, which became a snare to the people. His son (Abimelech) by his concubine killed his 70 brothers on a stone and was made King of Shechem for three years, doing all sorts of evil until he was killed with a millstone thrown by a woman.

Jephthah (Judg 11-12): A judge who was the son of a prostitute, who was kicked out of his father's house by the "legitimate" brothers. "Worthless fellows" followed him. He fought against the Ammonites, defeating them, but tragically, offered his daughter as a burnt offering because of a rash vow.

Samson (Judg 13-16): A judge who possessed God-given "super" strength who God used against the Philistines, but who was plagued by pride, anger issues and violent tendencies, lust (going in to a prostitute) and poor choices in women! :) Remember, Samson and Delilah were not married.

Micah, the Levite, and the Danites (Judg 17-18): This is a sad story of a man (Micah) who, just because he wanted to, asked a Levite to be his personal priest in his home, complete with a carved image. In a convoluted turn of events, a group of people from the tribe of Dan took the priest and the image from Micah, set up the image for themselves in further violation of the Law of God. *"In those days, there was no king in Israel. EVERYONE did what was right in his own eyes."* (17:6)

The incident at Gibeah, like Sodom and Gomorrah revisited (Judg 19-21): Another terrible narrative. The book of Judges closes out with **sin** unrestrained; wickedness that's hard to understand. It's as if, through the Book we see the grace of God slowly lifting...

- A Levite had a concubine who was unfaithful to him. She went away to her father's house for several months until her husband came to get her. On his return trip he stopped in Gibeah in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin.
- While staying in the home of a kind stranger, the house was surrounded. "Worthless fellows" in Gibeah surrounded the house and demanded to have sex with the man.
- In desperation (and maybe cowardice), the concubine was thrown to these wolves who abused her all night. She died as a result.
- The man divided up her body and sent the twelve pieces to the twelve tribes.
- The rest of Israel was incensed. They mustered 400,000 men to fight Benjamin, who incredibly, was UNREPENTANT! (20:12-14)
- Even more incredibly, when the battle began, Benjamin was winning, killing 22,000 in the first engagement and 18,000 in the next.
- Israel, desperate, wept at Bethel. During this time, even a righteous cause won't be blessed by God. They fasted, worshipped, and offered burnt offerings. God eventually gave them victory, killing 25,000 Benjamites and destroying their cities and livestock.
- Chapter 21 recounts the SAD, SAD history of repopulating Benjamin, including wife-snatching! When you read it, you'll see the truth of Judges 21:25.

PREACHING CHRIST IN THE TEXT AND AN EXHORTATION FOR THE CHURCH

Despite the less than ideal nature of the conditions in Judges, many judges are in the “faith hall of fame” in Hebrews 11:

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—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (Heb 11:32-34)

The writer of Hebrews also declared:

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. (Heb 11:39-40)

May we be encouraged that God is merciful, hears the cries of His people, and sent the ultimate Deliverer and Judge, Christ Jesus, to save us from our wickedness and sin:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matt 1:21)

Because of our sin-nature, we remain like the people in Judges: prone to idolatry and wanting things our own way. May we live for Jesus in love and obedience, because of His great sacrifice and the grace and mercy of God.

Amen