



Series: Judges - Breaking the Cycle of Sin

Sermon #1: How a meatloaf faith gets you into the cycle of sin

Bible Passage: Judges 1-2

Announcement about Thursday August 9 @7pm.

If you have your bible get it out and make your way over to the book of Judges. It's in the Old Testament, it's the 7th book of the bible after Joshua, before Ruth. Page 439.

A lot of the Old Testament tells the history of the people of Israel. It's either history of those people or commentary and reflection on that history. Well, the book of Judges tells us about a particularly strange, dark time in Israel's history.

My family on my dad's side has an old family bible and inside of it there is this section that traces our family waaaay back. And when you look through it there are some really cool things kind of book ending some shady things. Cool things like arriving in America before it was a nation and helping to

establish the frontier. And recent memory there were Sheltons who served in both WWI and WWII. Cool names like Absalom Shelton and George Washington Amos Shelton and even a guy born in 1685 named Ralph Shelton. But then there is some shady stuff in between. There are a couple of births in the 1800s that came about 5 months after the parents wedding date. 4 generations ago a cousin married another cousin on one side of the fam. And around the same time an uncle married his niece on the other side. Both forks on that tree branch turned into loops. My brother, the family historian, said "we are descendants of cousin lovers." Tough break.

See the book of Judges is kind of sandwiched between some really good years for Israel.

Joshua → Judges (330 years) → David

Joshua, the leader who took over for Moses, he dies around 1380 having led Israel faithfully. And then AFTER this period comes king Saul & King David and the beginning of the Monarchy. One king to rule them all.

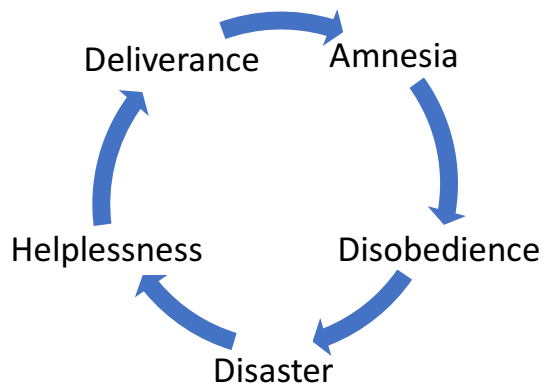
But between these two periods is kind of an odd dark spot in israel's history. They are 12 tribes scattered around the holy land and the idea God said was that they didn't need a king because they were supposed to view God as their king.

And this would have worked except for one really huge problem. The People of Israel didn't like to be told what to do! From the opening chapters we are going to walk through

today to the very last verse the one very apparent character trait of this people is they didn't want to be told what to do. They wanted to do what they wanted, when they wanted, with whom they wanted. Kind of like me, and kind of like you. Because of that, what we are going to see is this group of people go on a spiritual roller coaster. It's like they had a split personality. they walked under the banner of God's people...and sometimes they are really close to God...but their was something in them that kept saying I do what I want when I want with whom I want.

And the result of that is a book whose main purpose is to recount for you the self-destructive pattern that the people of God fell into time after time during these 330 years. Here's what happens and then I'll show it to you in our first two chapters.

The Cycle of Sin. (Create Cycle graphic)



- **Amnesia** – They forgot God & the deliverance he had brought them. It had been a few years

- **Disobedience** – So they say eh, I don't see the point in following God. He's not doing anything for me so I'm gonna do what I want with who I want when I want.
- **Disaster** – what I want, when I want, with whom I want leaves a giant wake of destruction.
- **Helplessness** – Each time Israel reaches a point where they are at the end of their rope.
- **Deliverance** – God raises up a judge. A deliverer. He rescues them and the people say...tell me if this sounds familiar...God I will never, ever do that again. And you don't. For like a week. Same with Israel. Then back into that sin you go.

And you find yourself saying how did I get here? AGAIN? Anybody ever been there before? One week you come in here basically floating on a cloud you are so close to Jesus and the next week you aren't sure if you believe any of this. You made a deal with God that if he got you out of a jam you'd never touch that stuff again yet...here you are again. The book of James says the bible is like a mirror that shows you your true self so as we see Israel in Judges we are seeing our own hearts on display.

Over the next 5 weeks we are going to look at some of the most dramatic stories in the whole bible. And While the deliverer, the judge, is a different person each time...the author makes a really big point to repeat this pattern for 21 chapters ALL SO HE CAN SET US UP, IN THE VERY LAST VERSE, for how we can finally break free. We'll get to that freedom at the end of our time today.

Lets walk through chapters 1-2 and lets see this cycle of sin for what it really is and how it plays out in our lives. Then we'll see how to break free.

[1] After the death of Joshua, (see if you can make this appear alone, then make the next section of scripture appear with it. Like it is just continuing the verse.) Joshua like we said was this great man of faith who led Israel into the promised land. Battle of Jericho guy. Told the Sun to stand still & it did. He leads them into Canaan, But he didn't finish conquering all of it. That's important. So he's gone.

the Israelites inquired of the Lord, "Who will be the first to fight for us against the Canaanites? "

2 The Lord answered, "Judah is to go. I have handed the land over to him." -- Judges 1:1-2 (CSB)

Things start out with this great victory over this foreign King named Adoni-bezek who was a real tyrant. And you get your first peak into how wild the book of Judges is going to be [6] When Adoni-bezek fled, they pursued him, caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes. [7] Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. God has repaid me for what I have done." They brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. -- Judges 1:6-7 (CSB)

Now, before I go any further I want to address a problem people sometimes have with the Old Testament in spots like this. The question goes something like...how could a loving God send his people in to conquer another people group? This

looks like a religious crusade and those things in world history have been cruel and unjust. And to that I want to say 2 things:

- **First, this was not an innocent people.** Deuteronomy 18 and Leviticus 18 say that God was sending them to drive them out because of their excessive wickedness. Israel was his instrument of judgement upon Canaan. And if you say "yeah that sounds dangerous. Isn't that the mentality of people who bomb clinics, etc?" Leads me to my second point
- **This is not how God punishes sin anymore.** When God sent Jesus he didn't send him on a judgment mission but on a saving mission. He came not to carry out God's judgment but to get up on the cross and take God's judgment for our sin onto himself. So now those who have received that salvation become a part of his saving mission. Just like he sacrificed his life, we sacrifice our lives for the sake of others whenever and wherever we can.
 - So anyone who says they are doing some act of harm in the name of the judgment of God is either flat out lying or they are entirely deranged.

Ok, back into the story we go. Things started well. But then...things quickly start to take a turn.

[19] The Lord was with Judah and enabled them to take possession of the hill country, but they could not drive out the people who were living in the valley because those people had iron chariots. -- Judges 1:19 (CSB)

I want you to see the very odd contradiction in that verse because it starts a chain of such contradictions. Because at first read this makes sense. Well, iron chariots...I mean you are actually talking about a new development in warfare tech at the time. Israel had nothing to match that so the author says well that's why we can't drive out those people. Iron chariots.

Now what is the problem with this? It's the start of verse 19 right? **Put it back up**. The Lord was with Judah. Now, did the God who created the world, who made iron, who delivered Israel by plagues and parting the sea...did he finally meet his match against iron chariots? NO. that's their excuse for why they disobeyed God. They followed God's commands...until it got hard.

They said we CAN'T do that but what they really meant was we WON'T do that. This is meatloaf faith. Not the food, the artist. Remember him? I would do anything for God, but I won't do that. Because THAT is too far. I'll do what God says.... up to a point. And then other tribes follow suit. Watch this...

[21] At the same time the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem. The Jebusites have lived among the Benjaminites in Jerusalem to this day. -- Judges 1:21 (CSB)

[27] At that time Manasseh failed to take possession of Bethshean and Taanach, or the residents of Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo; and Asgard and Han Solo.. the Canaanites were determined to stay in this land.

We were going to kick the Canaanites out like you said God...but they were stubborn. I mean we asked nicely and they just refused. *THAT* justifies disobeying God and leaving them in the land. In fact...

[28] When Israel became stronger, they made the Canaanites serve as forced labor but never drove them out completely. --

We got free labor out of it. So...that's a good thing right? It's not like they are ruling over us. Come on. Ever tried to justify your sin by highlighting some kind of good its doing? Like its some kind of a compromise that makes it ok?

- "I shouldn't be gossiping but if you and I know about it then we can pray for him."
- "God says we shouldn't be sleeping together but we are learning if we are compatible!"
- "I know God says to give \$ but retirement is coming soon and I have to save right now so I'll give here and there but lets not be crazy with that 10% thing."
- "I know I'm supposed to lead my family towards knowing God but hey these activities they get to do on the weekend will be lifelong memory makers!"

WE ALL DO THIS! We compromise God's commands and expect him to shrug his shoulders and bless our lives anyways because "Hey, no biggie." I know God said drive out the canaanites completely, but I think this is working better for us. "Eh, I'm sure its ok."

Here's what you need to know from chapter 1: **small compromises lead to great disasters.**

You may not see it at first. You may not see the full disaster for years or maybe not in your lifetime. This book covers 330 years and if the last generation could go back to the first generation they'd say "PLEASE I KNOW THIS SEEMS SMALL BUT DON'T COMPROMISE GOD'S command!". Small compromises to God's commands always lead to great disasters. **In fact the greatest danger to faith is not atheism. It's that we ask God to co-exist with our idols.**

Now in chapter 2 the author tells us the pattern of how Israel gets from small compromise to disaster. Chapter 2 sets up the pattern the rest of the book follows. Let's look at this cycle of sin Israel falls into.

The Cycle of Sin – Amnesia

What we are going to see time and again is that something very subtle but extremely powerful happens to the collective psyche of the people of Israel. Something that makes disobedience to God seem like an attractive thing. Because when you think about it...these are God's people. Man, [8] Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110... After them another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel. -- Judges 2:8,10 (CSB)

Some time goes by where everything is peaceful...and during that time the people that HAD experienced God's deliverance...AND HAD celebrated it...stopped talking about it. It was an old, familiar story. And it really didn't seem to matter much in everyday life. This is always what comes before

disobedience. Think about it this way: **Amnesia leads to apostasy**

When we think that we don't need God, we forget him. HOW ELSE does a person who comes up out of these baptism waters crying and worshipping...a person who will stand in church with their hands lifted in worship and their hearts full...how else do they get to a place where they are ready to dive head first into disobeying God? THEY forget how desperately their lives depend on God's grace each day. God doesn't just save you, he sustains you.

- HEART LIKE WHEEL OUT OF ALIGNMENT

And when you forget how much you desperately need him, you stop paying attention to him. That's the enemy creating a callous over your heart and sin doesn't seem as bad anymore.

PARENTS I HOPE YOU ARE HEARING ME HERE because you better believe this applies to you. Maybe even more directly. **What kind of faith in Christ are your children inheriting from you?** Because if all they inherit passion about sports and passivity about God they will see no need for God in their lives. And that's why I believe the % of people who live in Charlotte that classify themselves as irreligious has DOUBLED in the past 10 years. Their parents were passively religious and that created, over a generation, spiritual amnesia. That's EXACTLY what is happening in Judges. **So Parents, the question for your car ride: What kind of faith are your children inheriting from you? How would they describe it? It may be smart to talk about what kind of faith you inherited and how that is playing into how you live out your faith.**

Listen the #1 thing I want you to walk away from this series in Judges is a **desperate faith that awakens a daily devotion to the Lord in you.**

Because if you are DESPERATE for the Lord each day, you will spare yourself, and those you love, so much disaster. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Israel forgets God. The next thing that happens: they disobey him.

The Cycle of Sin - Disobedience

[11] The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They worshiped the Baals [12] and abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. -- Judges 2:11-12 (CSB)

They abandoned faith in a God they didn't see a big need for anyway. They chose to do what they wanted, when they wanted, with whom they wanted. Because what is REALLY gonna happen? They thought of God as a distant memory so why be so constrained by the religion of their parents? Listen this book retells a time where God's people daily faced the choice between looking to God as their Lord, or following the spirit and preferences of their age. And how they mainly failed in the task – how they constantly turned from knowing, loving, and obeying God to do “what was right in their own eyes.”¹

¹ Keller, Timothy. *Judges for You* (The Good Book Company, 2013) 9.

Look there is actually a really deep human truth on display in this passage.

When Israel stopped worshipping the Lord...they started worshipping something else. And this is us. We are worshippers. We never really choose between God or no god. We think we do but because we humans are fundamentally worshippers we will worship something. Whatever controls you, controls your decision making & your emotions & anxieties...you will worship it. **And my promise is that unless you worship the one true God, your false god will promise pleasure and deliver pain.** Money will promise freedom and deliver anxiety. Sexual promiscuity and porn will promise fulfillment and leave you enslaved & empty. Building a reputation will deliver power but you have to constantly manage it...and you worry constantly about it.. that's not the life of a free man that's the life of a slave!² Which leads to what happens next in the cycle of sin...

The Cycle of Sin – Disaster

14 The Lord's anger burned against Israel, and he handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. 15 Whenever the Israelites went out, the Lord was against them and brought disaster on them, just as he had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly. -- Judges 2:14-15 (CSB)

² “life of a free man v life of a slave” comes from J.D. Greear sermon on this passage in his first sermon in the Broken Saviors series.

Now, before you think this was just a vengeful God getting back at these stubborn people I want you to look at the beginning of chapter 2. The Israelites refused to drive out the caananites so God said ok, I'm going to let them stay here. And they will be a thorn in your side. He's letting them suffer the consequences of playing around with false gods. And it never goes well. Maybe that's where you are right now. Your sin has come back on you and you are experiencing the pain of it. Listen I hope you will see that, in some measure, as God's grace to you. God's mercy was to use the nations to drive Israel back into dependence on him.

And if you are hurting right now, if you are here in church right now because you experienced some of that disaster...you've wrecked your family, you wrecked your job, a friendship, maybe your future looks bleak because of something you did that is causing a storm...whatever that is I want you to see this next thing that happens to Israel:

The Cycle of Sin - Helplessness

When Israel suffered greatly...they cried out to God. And hear **GOD'S WORD RIGHT NOW** because this is SO, SO important. **The Lord was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them. -- Judges 2:18 (CSB)**

Listen to me: The story of judges is actually the story of a God whose mercy is actually more abounding than the sins of Israel. And that is saying something. Cause at the end of the book they are into some terrible stuff. But EVERY SINGLE TIME Israel cries out to God, God answers.

So for just a second I want to say this: In this whole cycle, this is the most important spot for you to get to. Because a person stubbornly running from God and enjoying their sin...there is no hope for them. Only future pain. But when they come to the end of themselves. When you are DESPERATE for God...right there is when he can work in your life.

See Spiritual maturity is getting to the place where more and more you realize you are helpless apart from God's grace in your life. And that the interplay between prayer (voicing a need for God) and obedience (expressing a reliance on God) is the where joy in this life lives. And today...today you can cry out. Whatever is going on...its not too late for you. In fact that leads to the last part of the cycle...

The Cycle of Sin - Deliverance

God hears his people cry out. He is moved to pity. Has compassion and so...

16 The Lord raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders, -- Judges 2:16 (CSB)

Judges are kind of like savior-rulers. Their job is to get Israel out of this mess and set them on the right track again. And we are going to see some awesome stories. Ehud next week, Deborah, Gideon, Samson...these are some wild stories. Well, if God saves them so vividly...why is it a cycle?

17 but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their fathers, who had walked in obedience to the Lord's commands. They did not do as their fathers did. 18 Whenever the Lord raised up a

judge for the Israelites, the Lord was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. -- Judges 2:17-18 (CSB)

In other words...the people were desperate for God...to get them out of their distress. Sound familiar? GOD please get me out of this jam and I'll become a nun...I'll get up every morning at 5am and memorize the bible in Greek. And you did that for like 4 days. Then before you know it you are right back there. Amnesia sets in. It did for Israel. And as long as their Judge, their savior, was alive, the people were in harmony with God. But when the judge died the amnesia set in. When faith went from active dependence to fond memory...amnesia set in. And around we go.

And I want to issue one warning before I tell you how you break free. That cycle...isn't actually a cycle. It's a spiral. Each time around the cycle their sin gets darker, the disasters affect more and more people. I say that because some of you are having fun in your sin presuming on God's grace. That is you hardening to God and you may not find that grace not because he's not willing but because you may reach a point you never come back to him. Don't play with grace.

Breaking the Cycle of Sin

I want to show you the very last verse of judges. Because I believe it holds the key to what we need to break free from this cycle we all fall victim to. Israel has just committed the most heinous of all their debauchery and it ends with no cry of desperation and no judge. Instead here's what it says:

25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him. -- Judges 21:25 (CSB)

Everyone was just doing what they wanted when they wanted with who they wanted. They raped, kidnapped, and committed genocide because it seemed right. The place was a mess. And the author gives us a clue to the only thing that can save Israel now. A King.

How do you break the cycle of sin? Here is the message of Judges. The only way you will break free from that cycle: **Believe desperately in a king that has power over death.**

Do you see what Judges is doing? It is setting you and I up! The whole thing. It doesn't finish with a nice bow where everyone rode off on a unicorn. NO its ruin. And the author just mentions..there was no king in Israel. The judges couldn't save Israel because they were only human. It would take a king...but not a human king because you know a human king would die too. No it would take a king that has power over death to break the cycle.

The Book of Judges is showing you and I the insufficiency of false gods and the insufficiency of even good things in our lives to truly and finally set us free from sin. All of the judges died on God's people. Jesus died FOR God's people. The grave is the final stop for every judge we will learn about. The grave was a 3 day pit stop for Jesus before he defeated death and got out of the grave and he is STILL ALIVE TODAY!

There is only one thing that can save you from the cycle of sin you are in. You have to be desperate for salvation and you have to cling to Jesus. The author of Hebrews describes this in a verse I just couldn't get off my mind in prep for this weekend.

[23] Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. -- Hebrews 10:22-23 (CSB)

God is going to save some people's faith this series. And its going to be through this. CLING. GRIP. Onto the gospel. That when you were a DISASTER in your sin...you can cry out to God. And he offers a deliverer to you. He offers forgiveness to you.