

Read Through the Bible

Week 13, March 29th - April 3rd

Readings: Joshua 21 -24, Judges 1-9; Luke 6-8

Introduction to Judges

Sex and violence, rape and massacre, brutality and deceit do not seem to be congenial materials for use in developing a story of salvation. Given the Bible's subject matter—God and salvation, living well and loving deeply—we quite naturally expect to find in its pages leaders for us who are good, noble, honorable men and women showing us the way. So it is always something of a shock to enter the pages of the Book of Judges and find ourselves immersed in nearly unrelieved mayhem.

It might not gravel our sensibilities so much if these flawed and reprobate leaders were held up as negative moral examples, with lurid, hellfire descriptions of the punishing consequences of living such bad lives. But the story is not told quite that way. There is a kind of matter-of-fact indifference in the tone of the narration, almost as if God is saying, "Well, if this is all you're going to give me to work with, I'll use *these* men and women, just as they are, and get on with working out the story of salvation." These people are even given a measure of dignity as they find their place in the story; they are most certainly not employed for the sake of vilification or lampoon.

God, it turns out, does not require good people in order to do good work. He can and does work with us in whatever moral and spiritual condition he finds us. God, we are learning, does some of his best work using the most unlikely people. If God found a way to significantly include these leaders ("judges") in what we know is on its way to becoming a glorious conclusion, he can certainly use us along with our sometimes impossible friends and neighbors.

Twice in Judges ([17:6](#) and [21:25](#)) there is the telling refrain: "At that time there was no king in Israel. People did whatever they felt like doing." But we readers know that there *was* a king in Israel: *God* was king. And so, while the lack of an earthly king accounts for the moral and political anarchy, the presence of the sovereign God, however obscurely realized, means that the reality of the kingdom is never in doubt.

Reflections and Questions for Thought

By John Nanke

Wow! It saddens me and frightens me when I read the historical accounts contained in Joshua and Judges of how the Hebrews continually accepted and relied upon God only to turn around and reject him years later. God truly must love his people as he keeps giving them chance after chance. So much so that in Judges the cycle becomes almost mundane. The reader can't help but wonder. "Why doesn't God just wipe them all out and start over. Wouldn't it be easier?" No, instead the Lord washes them clean with forgiveness. He obviously finds them worthy of this loving and important gesture.

In Luke 6:37 Jesus commands us, "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven." Jesus is quite demanding and serious with this command. Some may say, "Impossible, only Christ can accomplish a task as difficult as that! I have been so hurt and treated so unfairly in my life how can I forgive". Yes only Jesus is perfect because he was God himself come to rescue us from ourselves. But

honestly, if we all take a serious look at ourselves, we realize that by not forgiving we are being selfish and only hurting ourselves. You can do as Christ commands and love God with all your heart. Forgive your enemies and love your neighbor as yourself, and be generous with all that God has made you steward of. These are not impossible things to accomplish. Christ would not ask us to do this if we were not capable.

But, here's what frightens me about all of this. Is not our Nation turning its back on the Lord just as the Israelites did during the time of Judges? Our idols may not be golden calf images, but none the less they exist in the forms of material items, celebrities, and lust for power and wealth. The Bible gives us historical examples of what has happened to nations that worship false idols and became distracted from God placing objects of this world above him. They met with disaster. Are we also not becoming guilty of this sin? We must ask ourselves "Are we so arrogant to think God won't do the same to us as he did to the Israelites when they turned away from him!" Our nation was founded on religious principles by God fearing men. Our prayers defeated the British not our guns. Does no one see the miracle and hand of God in this?

I believe our nation is now standing at a crossroad and it is up to each one of us as individuals to stand up for God against the greed, corruption, and injustice of this ever increasingly secular world. It requires on our part courage, patience, love, and strength that only can be obtained by trusting in the gift and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now I ask you! Where do you stand in this battle? On the sidelines doing nothing or leading the charge! Don't pause and be timid! Your life and the lives of your loved ones depend upon the choice you make.