

The Great Story of Salvation

My Way or God's Way—book of Judges

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Before into the lesson--A Change in the Title of the Series

- From The Bible in Chronological Order to
- The Great Story of Salvation, and then the individual chapters of it
- Why?
- Several reasons
- Through the Bible in Chronological Order is a daunting title
- Also want people to be able to jump in at any time
- And as I was thinking and praying what else to call it, I realized it really is a story, a story of redemption
- I wrote a book on church marketing years ago that I started in what I'm going to read you in a minute, and I think this sums up well the change in the title

Why a story?

- *"And here's the thing. The Gospel is a fairy story that's true. There really is a curse. There really is a dragon. But the amazing thing is: God sent His son.. And those who trust Him will live happily ever after.*
- Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary
- Why the need to tell this story?
- Because many people outside the church have our story wrong. The ending of the gospel story for believers in Jesus is truly to live happily ever after. There will be trials on the journey, but the trials will end. Heaven is a certainty. All wrongs will be righted, all hurts healed. Rewards will be given for every kind and brave deed. All heaven will applaud.
- But not everyone has heard the true story.
- Without that hearing, people believe distorted stories. The God of love and compassion is portrayed as a despot arbitrarily inflicting pain on people the same way a small boy tortures bugs. Other false reports assert He's lost interest and has walked away, leaving His children to fight and squabble without hope of justice or resolution. In the saddest tale of all some people don't believe their lives are part of any story, but simply a blot of sadness, scribbled without hope and shortly erased.

- **Bible 805 is about telling the true story**
- Judges & Ruth, our current chapter**
- Written by Samuel, time frame 1380-1045BC
- Summary of all the stories in these books:
- In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. Judges 21:24, NLT
- From National History to Individual Stories
- ***In the book of Joshua, God was with the whole nation as they conquered the land.***
- ***But in Judges, God turned from the nation and gave victory to individuals He called and empowered by His Spirit (3:10; Jdg 6:34; Jdg 11:29; etc.). W. Wiersbe***
- Some of the favorite characters of Bible Stories: Gideon, Sampson, Deborah and others we aren't as familiar with
- Though great actions by individuals, need to put it in context, so we don't just see them as isolated heroic characters

Source for some Comments and Notes

- Warren W. Wiersbe, With the Word, The Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Handbook
- Not scholarly, but a wonderful, practical, life application commentary, highly recommended

Joshua died and passed on leadership to.....

- *That's the first problem—he didn't.*
- *Judges 2:7 The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel.*
- *⁸Joshua died*
- *¹⁰After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.*
- We are never told why he didn't, but we see the results in the next 300-400 years from the death of Joshua until the Saul becomes king

What Happened—people abandoned God—an overview

- *Judges 2:1 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. ¹²They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger ¹³because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴In his anger against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵Whenever Israel went out*

to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

But God Didn't Abandon his people

- Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Covenant.....

- ²⁰ Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their ancestors did."
- We'll talk about individual stories but first

For our story: Challenge to us

- We need to think carefully about what we are passing on, enabling others to do.
- We need to be honest about it
- Even if it is difficult and the message isn't easy
- The Christian life is about so much more than good times—but you wouldn't know that from many messages and particularly concerned about the messages to younger people

Warning....negative old lady advice coming

- Life will probably get very difficult in the coming years
- Judges shows what happens when people have abandoned a belief in God—that will only get worse
- But many other things might get much worse also
- Natural disasters—is a trend, how do we react?
- I think we need to very seriously warn coming generations of how challenging things might be and that
- Knowing God's Word and trusting Him the only sure guide.

Sins of Canaanites

Highlights of a few of the Judges

- "The monotony of Israel's sins can be contrasted with the creativity of God's methods of deliverance." WW
- Various ones, probably overlapped, we don't have full stories: Ehud, Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibazn, Elon, and Abdon, and Jephthah
- Short mentions of them—some very wealthy with large families, some tidbits: "Shamgar who struck down 600 Philistines with an ox goad"
- Jephthah—clarify his story, an illegitimate son, called to be a leader, vowed to give to the Lord whatever came out of his house when returned victorious—his only daughter—did not sacrifice as to kill her, dedicated her to perpetual service, virginity in God's service—cutting off his line.
- Also, some awful stories of what happened....

We'll look at 4 of them in a little more detail

- Othniel, Caleb's nephew
- Deborah, woman prophetess
- Gideon, fearful "mighty man of valor"
--Ruth lived during this time
- Sampson
- Definition of a biblical Judge: ruler, military leader, one who decided in judicial matters, over limited areas. No income or taxing power, not a hereditary office. Called and empowered by God

Othniel

- Caleb's nephew and son-in-law—early in the book, proved to be a successful warrior—won city, won Caleb's daughter.
- Caleb gave her land in the Negev and she comes to him later to ask for water—gets Upper and Lower Springs
- People oppressed for 8 years
- *The Spirit of the Lord came on him [Othniel], so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. ¹¹ So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.* Judges 3:10-11
- Pattern – oppression, prayer, God answers, peace while the judge lives and then it repeats

Deborah

- Already serving as a judge and already "leading Israel"
- Only judge called "a prophet"
- God called her to deliver people, she summons Barak, who is victorious, but ends with the opposing general killed by Heber the Kenite (relatives of Moses)
- Once again, land has rest for 40 years

Gideon

- Israel oppressed by Midianites
- Also, descendants of Abraham, the people Moses fled to, but something had gone very wrong
- Idol worship rampant and public—in Gideon’s town an altar to Baal and an Asherah pole
- Angel of the Lord appears to him hiding and threshing grain
- “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior—mighty man of valor.” Judges 6:13
- Gideon protests—if God is with us, why all the problems? Angel doesn’t answer, simply calls him to be the deliverer.

Gideon Protests

- The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”
- “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”
- ¹⁶The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.” Judges 6:14-16
- Then the situation with the fleece....
- God is merciful, but we aren’t to do this
- Then the Lord reduces his army from 22,000 to 300 and give them a great victory!
- Lesson here—if you don’t think you have the resources to do what God wants –that might be precisely the point, precisely where God wants you to be

But after the victory

- People wanted Gideon to rule over them
- Refused, but make a golden ephod and people worshipped it
- 40 years of people, people return to sin
- His son, Abimelech kills all his brothers is a tyrant until dies in battle.

While all this drama—story of Ruth

- A famine and Elimelech and Naomi go to Moab
- Two sons marry Moabite women and all three men die
- Naomi hears things are better back in Israel and decides to go home
- Both daughters-in-law start out with her, one turns back, Ruth remains
- “Where you go, I’ll go.” Ruth 1:16 most significant, “your God, my God.”

They go back to Bethlehem

- Important—this was obviously a city that still revered and lived by God’s law
- We see that in that they obeyed the laws of

gleaning, and of the “kinsman redeemer”

- Back to the Story
- They have no man, no income, so Ruth goes out to glean in the fields

Happens to go into Boaz’s field

- He notices her, protects her
- And eventually becomes “kinsman Redeemer” one who can buy their land, marry Ruth, and have children to carry on the name of the family
- He does that and their son is Obed, father of Jesse, father of David
- Naomi ends her life with joy

Lessons of Ruth

- No matter how bad overall society may be
- No matter how difficult personal circumstances may be
- God always has people who serve Him
- That’s why it’s important to not focus on things we can’t control
- But on our God, who is in control and who wants us to serve Him no matter what

Samson

- Called from before birth to be a judge
- When younger wanted to marry a Philistine woman, it did not go well, and he ends up killing a thousand of them and given a great victory
- ***Led Israel as a judge for 20 years
- But...never got over sins with women
- Gave and visited a prostitute
- Sometime later. . . fell in love with Delilah
- After many deceptions finally reveals the secret of his strength—his hair
- Cut, captured, eyes put out

But the hair on his head began to grow.....

- They abused and mocked him
- Brought to their temple and he prays
- ²⁸Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Judges 16:28
- And it crashes down

Archaeologists have uncovered two Philistine temples.

. . . .

- Both temples share a unique design; two central pillars supported the roof. The pillars were made of wood and rested on stone support bases. With the pillars being about six feet apart, a strong man could dislodge them from their stone bases and bring the entire structure down.

Book ends

- Horrid stories
- Judges 17 and 18—a Levite who serves a man for pay and his idols
- A group of Danites comes by, takes the Levite with them, slaughters all in a city
- Set up the idols there and worshipped them
- Judges 19 story of Levite and his concubine, revenge for her death almost destroying a tribe, kidnapping wives for warriors
- Ends with: In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. Judges 21:24, NLT

Not fairy tales, Real People

- Archeological verifications
- Names, places, all verified (not a small thing—does not happen in all religious texts)
- Battles recorded by major powers, who refer to Israel, Hebrews, the basic outlines and timelines confirmed

Concluding challenges

- Humanity doesn't do very well when their song is "I did it my way."
- As the book of Judges shows, when "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" it led to every imaginable form of sin, warfare, oppression
- Personal self-indulgence spills over into the lives of others

Why did it go so wrong?

- More than just us wanting to do what we want to do
- We are created beings and we function best when we do things the way our Creator intended.
- The wonderful news is that Our Creator knows what is the very best for us.
- I think that is the core problem in Judges and for many of us today—we really don't believe that we are created beings (not self-made) and that our Creator has the best in mind for us

To challenge our assumptions, think about our Creator—in the Bible—go back and listen to why we can trust it

- Created a perfect world
- Promised a Savior when humanity sinned and the entire OT that we are studying is one long story of the preparation for the birth of Jesus who would be that Savior.
- When Jesus came to earth, he was God in human flesh.
- People wonder what God is like—look at Jesus.
- He was fun at a party; kind to the hurting; he healed sick people, fed hungry people, was a teacher who knew his scriptures and traditions,

but who put new meaning and understanding into them when he preached.

More about this one we are to trust

- Sees the beginning and the end
- Loves, understands,
- The TV show where people could call—a lifeline.... if you can tap into knowledge you don't have, the greatest resources
- God is that, we have access to Him through our prayers

Final challenge--His way....or our way

- Judges shows what happens when we do it our way
- We have a choice—no matter what might be happening in our crazy world, individual actions matter.
- They matter to the people around you, maybe in a big way like one of the judges, but most likely for most us maybe like Ruth simply living a life trusting God
- But of course, what Ruth didn't see is that her life was part of a Great Story of Salvation God was working out—she was the great grandmother of King David, the early ancestor of Jesus
- None of us see our part in the Great Story God is writing, but all of us like the Judges, like Ruth can simply trust God as clearly as we understand his will in daily tasks, as Ruth did and willing to follow him in ways that might seem impossible as victory did for Gideon.