

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 4 - Day 2: There was no King

I love teaching students the Bible. One of my favorite books of the Bible to teach students, especially young men is the Book of Judges. It's one of the most exciting parts of the Old Testament: it has heroes, villains, fighting, supernatural beings, romance and a hero of supernatural strength, Samson.

Judges take place in the time between the death of Joshua to the beginning of 1 Samuel. At this time, Israel had no king, instead it had temporary rulers called Judges. These Judges were heroes who rescued God's people from attacks and led them into victory. The last verse of Judges summarizes the times:

Judges 21:25 "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

Even though the people of Israel had just claimed that they would surely follow the Lord, take a look at the pattern that the book of Judges follows:

1. Israel lives in peace while following and obeying God as their king.
2. Israel inevitably forgets God and begins to worship the gods of their neighbors- lifeless idols.
3. God punishes Israel by sending enemies from a nearby nation to defeat them in battle and to rule them.
4. Israel turns to God and asks for His forgiveness.
5. God hears the cries of His people and rescues them using one of the judges.

This pattern repeats itself over and over again during the book of Judges. I think this pattern is best illustrated through the life of one of the most famous judges: Samson.

Judges 13:1-5 A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Even before Samson was born, he was destined to be used by God. He was to be a Nazirite - or set apart for God.

Numbers 6:2-8 "When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any

juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins.

“All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.

“All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall not go near a dead body. Not even for his father or for his mother, for brother or sister, if they die, shall he make himself unclean, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he is holy to the Lord.

Samson would not be a temporary Nazirite, he would be a Nazirite from birth. Even before he was born, his life was dedicated to God and filled with promise. As his life began, his commitment to his vow was strong, but as he grew older, his commitment to his vow began to weaken.

The Bible tells us that Samson would experience moments where, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power." In these moments he was gifted with supernatural strength. This leads me to wonder, was he strong all of the time, or just when the Spirit of the LORD came on him? He was big and muscular? Or did he look normal? The Bible doesn't say. We do know that his hair was extremely long and kept in big braids.

Regardless, Samson, like Israel, inevitably begins to test the limits of his obedience to his vow:

Judges 14:1-3a Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, “I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.” His father and mother replied, “Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?”

Just like Israel, God wanted Samson to be set apart or different from the idol-worshipping Philistines, but here we find Samson falling in love with a Philistine woman and looking to marry her. The story continues:

Judges 14:5-9 "Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave

them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass."

Here we see Samson making compromises in his commitment- he is flirting with the enemy, and then he is eating honey out of a lion's carcass. He is using his gift from God for his own personal gain than for God's glory and purpose.

Samson eventually makes too many compromises and finds himself as a prisoner to foreign powers; in this case the Philistines. His hair had been shaved off, his eyes had been gouged out, and his hands were bound to a wheat grinding stone like a donkey. I heard one speaker say that "sin blinds us, and binds us and grinds us." At the end of his life, Samson was brought into the Philistine temple to their idol Dagon where they mocked him and this happened:

Judges 15:25b-30 "When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform.

Then 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." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived."

Samson's life is a picture of what happened in the land of Israel during the time of the Judges:

1. He began his life by living in peace with God and in obedience to Him.
2. Samson forgot his vow and compromised in his obedience to God.
3. God punished Samson by turning him over to his enemies. They chained and mocked him.
4. Samson turned to God, and humbled himself before God.
5. God heard Samson's cry and gave him supernatural help.

This isn't just Samson's pattern, or Israel's pattern, but our pattern too. Just like Samson and as we have seen throughout this study, God has a kingdom purpose for your life. He wants us to walk in relationship with Him and to obey Him. He gives us gifts to use to bless the nations and bring His glory in His Kingdom. Just like Samson, we are prone to make compromises; we are prone to distraction and disobedience. Just like Samson, we could miss the incredible dreams that God has for us by saying yes to sin and temptation.

Yet just like Samson's story, we find that God is gracious to us. He forgives us when we fail and He restores us when we come to Him in humility. We find that we serve a God that, despite our

failures, never stops loving us, watching us, protecting us and caring for us. That is a message not only for us, but for all of those that we know of who are convinced that God no longer loves them because of the mistakes that they have made.

However, how far would this grace extend? What are the consequences of generation after generation forgetting God? Would God remain faithful to His **kingdom purposes** even if sin spiraled out of control?

Unfortunately, the story of the Judges ends by showing how Israel drifts further and further away from the Lord. The pattern that was true of sin in Genesis 3-11 is now true in the time of the Judges. At the end of the book, we are told of Israel committing devastating atrocities.

Judges 19:22-25; 20:20-21 As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing." But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them.

Judges 19:29 And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

Judges 20:20-21 And they commanded the people of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in ambush in the vineyards and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.

Recall that the book ends with this line:

Judges 21:25 "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

Would a king be the solution that Israel needed? Would this be the era of the promised king that would come from Jacob from the tribe of Judah? The next segment of Israel's history begins with Israel's quest for that promised king who would stop this vicious cycle of sin once and for all!

-Rob Walter

Share the Gospel: God's love for you, (and for your friends and family) is bigger than any mistake that you will ever make. There is no sin that is too big for Him to forgive; there is no one too dirty for Him to make clean.

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: