

“The Sin of Unbelief”
Judges 1
(Preached at Trinity, October 26, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Tonight we begin the Book of Judges. The author is completely anonymous; possibly more than one author.
2. The book follows upon the end of the Book of Joshua.
It begins, “After the death of Josuha . . .”
The first judge, Othniel, is introduced as the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb in Joshua 15. The Book of Judges describes the events surrounding 12 temporary leaders or judges covering a period of history spanning about 350 years, from Joshua to Samuel—roughly from 1400 to 1100 BC.
3. Judges chronicles 12 judges corresponding to the 12 tribes (minus Levi). There are six major judges of which much is written, and six minor judges of which almost nothing is written. They judged Israel not in the judicial sense of sitting to resolve legal cases but as magistrates and warriors to lead Israel and conquer their enemies.
4. The events of Judges are historical, however, their exact sequence in the chronology of history are only loosely connected. For example:
In **Judges 1:1** Joshua is dead but in **Verses 10-19** he is alive since this story is recorded in **Joshua 15** and he is alive at the beginning of **Chapter 2**.
It has been said that the Book of Judges is a theology book using stylized history as illustration (George Schwab, *Gospel According to the Old Testament* series, p.11)
5. The readers of the Book of Judges did not personally experience of the events recorded. They were a later generation experiencing their own difficulties. The Book of Judges is meant both as an encouragement and warning to God's covenant people. It covers a period when Israel continually fell into idolatry and sin. It is a fulfillment of God's warnings in Deuteronomy.
Deuteronomy 11:26-28 NAU - "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷ the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; ²⁸ and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known."
6. There is one central theme running throughout the Book of Judges – the theme of God's deliverance—His wondrous salvation. This great deliverance from the hand of God would be revealed through a number of characters. Israel continually rebelled against God bringing His judgment upon them by sending nations to oppress them. And yet God continually showed mercy upon His covenant people by raising up judges to deliver them.

7. The Book of Judges records both failures and successes that serve to both encourage and warn. The 12 judges described in this book are not idealized. They are less than models of virtue. Samson, for example, violated many of the provisions of his Nazirite vow, married an unbelieving Philistine and had intimate relations with at least two other Philistine women.
8. Another theme we find in the Book of Judges is it seems to be written as a justification and defense of the monarchy of Israel.
Judges 21:25 NAU - "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
 The implication was that if there had been a king things would have been different.
- A. There is also in the background an anti-Benjamin and pro-Judah sentiment. More specifically, there is a pro-David and anti-Saul argument. The Benjaminite city of Gibeah is painted as another Sodom. Gibeah was the hometown of Saul.
- B. Israel needs a king and David would be that king. Yet we know that no earthly king can lead to lasting righteousness. This is why we need the King of kings.
9. To properly understand the Book of Judges you have to understand the nature of Israel as God's covenant people.
- A. God promised Abraham that from him a great nation would rise – a people innumerable in size. And God promised him that through his seed all of the people on earth would be blessed. He also promised Abraham a land.
- B. God then told Abraham that His people would come into captivity that would last 400 years.
Genesis 15:13-14 NAU - "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ¹⁴ "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions."
 C. Of course Scripture records for us their slavery in Egypt and God's mighty deliverance. But the people delivered from Egypt were plagued by unbelief. They continually murmured with a heart of rebellion against God.
- D. When they approached the land of Canaan God commanded Moses to send in 12 spies to search out the land. This was not to determine whether or not they would enter but of the kind of land they were to possess.
Numbers 13:2 NAU - "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel"
 E. Besides Joshua and Caleb the spies were united in unbelief.
Numbers 13:30-31 NAU - "Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."

- F. The entire congregation of Israel sided with the bad report of the ten spies.
Numbers 14:1-4 NAU - "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. ² All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ "Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."
- G. God judged that generation
Numbers 14:22-24 NAU - "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, ²³ shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. ²⁴ "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it."
Numbers 14:29-30 NAU - " your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. ³⁰ 'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun."
- H. Jump ahead 40 years and the surviving generation is about to enter Canaan under Joshua's leadership. God reaffirmed His promise to Joshua.
They only had to believe.
Joshua 1:3-5 NAU - "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. ⁴ "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. ⁵ "No man will *be able to stand* before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you."
- I. Then God charged Joshua to follow Him with obedience and faith.
Joshua 1:6-7 NAU - "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go."
- j. But as we travel through the Book of Judges we'll see that they did not always continue in faithful obedience and commitment to God.
8. The Book of Judges is a narrative covering 350 years of Israel's history. As we examine the narratives of the Old Testament caution must be exercised.
- A. One danger is over spiritualizing them or turning them into allegories where we seek a hidden meaning to every element.
- B. Another danger is over moralizing the various accounts. We have to guard against using them in a manner that God has not authorized.

- C. But we cannot dismiss the typical elements of Israel as they apply to the church. The Church is the fullest expression of Israel. In other words, Israel serves as an example to the church.
9. When it comes to the history of Israel God does authorize us to look to them and allow their behavior to serve as a warning.
Paul wrote regarding Israel as our example:
1 Corinthians 10:5-11 NAS - " Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. ⁷ And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." ⁸ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
10. So how are we to receive the history of the Israelites?
- I. Israel's history was a history of unbelief
- A. God had promised them the land of Canaan
1. It was theirs to receive
 2. Caleb recited this to his unbelieving generation
Numbers 14:8-9 NAU - "If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us-- a land which flows with milk and honey. ⁹ "Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."
 3. Caleb's heart was a heart of belief – God will do it. They are our prey. God is with us. Do not fear!
- B. Their early days in Canaan were days demonstrating God's mighty power
1. Jericho's fortified walls came crashing down at God's command
Israel didn't lay a finger on the walls
 2. God continually demonstrated that the battle was His and He fought mightily on behalf of His people.
Joshua 10:8-11 NAS - "And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." ⁹ So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. ¹⁰ And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ And it came about as they fled from before Israel, *while* they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; *there were* more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword."

3. God demonstrated that it didn't matter how fortified their cities, how powerful their armies, how advanced their weaponry, He would destroy every enemy.
"Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go."
- C. But as we enter the Book of Judges we find the sinful heart of unbelief rising among the people of Israel
1. The first half of **Chapter 1** demonstrates the great success of the tribe of Judah. But then we find their weakness.
Judges 1:19 NAU - " Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots."
 2. Was God unable to destroy the iron chariots?
Some commentaries get caught up in whether or not iron chariots existed in this period when bronze was still in wide-spread use. They miss the point. Are iron chariots too strong for God?
 3. From this point to the end of the chapter we find this sinful unbelief increasing and the enemies of Israel were allowed to live alongside God's people. These would continually be Israel's undoing as Israel continually fell under the influence of these pagan people.
 4. God demands courage and obedience. This remains true today.
Israel often lacked neither because of their sinful heart of unbelief.
- D. At the beginning of **Chapter 2** we witness God's warning to Israel
Judges 2:2-4 NAU - " and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? ³ "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as *thorns* in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'" ⁴ When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept."

II. What is the teaching for us today?

- A. Paul tells us that Israel's unbelief serves as a warning to us
1 Corinthians 10:6 NAU - " Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved."
1 Corinthians 10:11 NAU - " Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."
1. God's promises to Israel were both conditional and unconditional
 - a. In terms of the physical nation, God's covenant hinged on their obedience.
They did not believe God and continually rebelled against Him
 - b. God's promise to Abraham was also unconditional and abiding.
Abraham's ultimate seed was Christ. The promise was fulfilled in Christ.

- c. The unbelief of Israel did not annul God's promise
Romans 3:3-4 NAU - "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found a liar*"
2. God has always had a faithful remnant who followed Him in faith and obedience
 Caleb was one of these.
Numbers 14:24 KJV - "But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it."
3. The warning to us sounds loud and clear. We must follow Christ in faith and obedience. Saving faith is always accompanied by the practical faith of obedience.
Hebrews 3:12-19 NAS - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; ¹⁵ while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." ¹⁶ For who provoked *Him* when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.
^{NAS} **Hebrews 4:1** Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard."
4. Another important truth for us: Notice the importance of the covenant community
- The unbelieving spies led the rest of the congregation into unbelief
 - Joshua and Caleb encouraged Israel -
Numbers 13:30 NAU - "Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."
 - We find here in Hebrews 3
Hebrews 3:12-4:2 NAS - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
 - This is part of the work of preaching
2 Timothy 4:2 NAS - "preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."
 ἐλέγχω – means to expose, point out, convince, instruct
 ἐπιτιμάω – means to rebuke, censure, or warn
 παρακαλέω – same word in **Hebrews 4** – it means to exhort, encourage

- e. It is the same word in **Hebrews 10** in the context of apostasy **Hebrews 10:24-27 NAU** - "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near. ²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment "
- f. Our watching over one another must not be the case of suspicious heart always judging the motives and actions of others with harshness but of tender love and care and a zeal that God's glory be displayed among all of us.

Conclusion:

1. As we enter the Book of Judges we are entering a book of warfare. But warfare describes the Christian life.
2. The Christian life is one of diligence and caution. We must continually hold onto the promises of God and trust His Word absolutely. We must pursue righteousness and flee all appearance of evil.
The great weapons of our warfare are the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith—receiving the promises of God and trusting them absolutely.
3. John Owen: "There is need of great care, heedfulness, watchfulness, and circumspection, for a due continuance in our profession, to the glory of God and advantage of our own souls. A careless profession will issue in apostasy open or secret, or great distress. Our course is a warfare; and those who take not heed, who are not circumspect in war, will assuredly be a prey to their enemies."