

June 12, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 1.

1. In what ways are Christians similar to the Israelites?
2. Why was it wrong for the Israelites to leave inhabitants in the land as workers or slaves?
3. What kind of sins can we identify as similar to the temptations the Canaanites set before the Israelites?
4. Name two things we must do in order to have victory over the enemy sin.
5. How can you help a brother or sister be victorious over sin?

PUT THE ENEMY TO DEATH **Judges 1**

The title of this sermon seems a bit harsh, is definitely negative, and most professing Christians would probably avoid using such a statement. Church-going folks today are told that we can win more people to Christ by being tolerant, positive, kind, and patient. No one should argue that the followers of Christ should be known as kind, positive, tolerant, and patient people. But not when it comes to obvious sins that are stated and defined in God's Word.

Paul sounded a bit harsh and negative when he wrote to Christians in Colassae and Laodicea saying:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Colossians 3:5-10).

Why should we be so concerned about putting to death the sins that are so common, so pernicious, and yet so acceptable to our culture? We must be ever vigilant against sin in our lives because sin is so enslaving. Any sin we tolerate is likely to become our master.

That is the story God wrote for us in the book named *Judges*. God told His people very clearly and plainly that, when He put them in the Promised Land, they were responsible to root out all of the heathen people and their practices. The reason for this extreme action was clear: *“For I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you” (Exodus 23:31b-33).*

God also warned on several occasions that by leaving the enemy in the land, the people would cause themselves much grief. *“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell (Numbers 33:55, cf. Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:3).*

The story of the judges is the story of many defeated Christians. They just can't seem to get victory over sin because they are not willing to kill it. If we are not willing to cut off the source of sin in our lives, we should not whine and moan that we can't seem to get the victory. Put the enemy to death. Or again as Paul put it, *put to death what is earthly in you (Colossians 3:5a).*

Success and Failure Regarding God's Will (Judges 1)

This book begins by mapping out some of the success and failure of the tribes of Judah and Simeon (1:1-21). All of the people gathered together to enquire of the Lord and the Lord blessed them—to some extent. The plan was simple enough. After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the LORD asking, *"Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"* *The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand."* (vv.1-2).

Obvious from this opening is the fact that Joshua had died some time earlier. Israel's history under Joshua reveals that after an initial push to conquer the land the people rested. Every area of the Promised Land had been attacked and many of the Canaanites annihilated or expelled. Joshua had already divided up the land according to Moses' instruction. For the most part, the people began to settle down, establish farms and families.

But then Joshua died. After the death of their leader, the people must have decided that it was time to get back to work and finish the job God had given to them — namely to remove the enemy from the land. But who would lead them in this obedience to God? Moses had been the leader for 40 years and during that time had led them with a rather tight rein. Then he turned the reins over to Joshua who led for the past 15 years. Now Joshua was dead. Who would lead? God told the people that Judah, the leading tribe, should make the initial move. God not only revealed who should go first into battle, but, at the same time, God promised to give the victory when He said, *"Behold, I have given the land into his hand"* (v.2).

That was the plan. It was a good plan. How did it work out? According to verse four, Judah and Simeon united to defeat the Canaanites and Perizzites. In particular they captured Adoni-bezek (Lord of Bezek) (v.5). However, having captured the king, they mutilated him by cutting off his thumbs and leaving him alive. Maybe this was the first indication that the people would not obey God completely. Mutilating captured kings was contrary to God's will to completely eradicate the land of those who would have a sinful influence. Nevertheless, God used that disobedience to remind Adoni-bezek of His law of sowing and reaping. *And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used*

to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me" (v.7).

The tribe of Judah also had success against many of the enemies in their land by defeating Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai. (vv.9-10). In that same setting, Caleb gave his daughter as wife to Othniel who won a victory over the enemy. He also gave them the land in the Negev and springs of water to go with it (vv.1-15). Caleb himself drove out from Hebron the three sons of Anak (v.20). All in all, things were looking pretty good. *"And the LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country"* (v.19a).

However, things were not as good as it seemed on the surface. Unfortunately, the people of Judah were content to leave some of the enemy in place. At one point, the people of Judah captured Jerusalem and burned it (v.8). Wonderful victory! "Isn't God's faithfulness great?" they must have sung. But the people of Benjamin did not maintain the city, and they let the sinful influence back in. *But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day* (v.21).

And isn't it odd that God could not fight successfully against iron-clad chariots? God was with Judah in the battle for the hill country, *but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron* (v.19b). Judah took possession of the hill country because the LORD was with them. Apparently, they could not drive out the chariot owners because God was not with them. So who left whom? No doubt the iron chariots seemed so formidable that the people of Judah refused to trust God to do the very difficult thing.

The success and failure of other tribes is outlined in the rest of chapter one (1:22-36). There were the sons of Joseph, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They drove the enemy out of Bethel (vv.23-26). *But Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages* (v.27). They established a sad trend instead. *When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely* (v.28).

Ephraim did not fair much better. *Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them (v.29)*. Nor did the other tribes succeed much. *Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites lived among them, but became subject to forced labor. Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon or of Ahlab or of Achzib or of Helbah or of Aphik or of Rehob, so the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them. The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain (vv.30-34)*.

All in all, the people's efforts to do what God required fell on hard times.

God's Confrontation of Failure and the People's Response (2:1-5).

After it became clear that God's people planned to leave the enemy in the land, the Angel of the Lord confronted the people. *Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim (v.1a)*. This simple statement leaves us wondering who or what the Angel of the LORD was. This being has showed up five other times in Bible history before this event. He met with Hagar in the desert and encouraged her (Genesis 16). He stopped Abraham from carrying out the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). He confronted Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3). He stopped Balaam's donkey on the road to curse Israel (Numbers 22). And though He was not called the Angel of the Lord, the *Commander of the army of the LORD* who met with Joshua is the same person (Joshua 5).

Most likely this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Christ, God the Son, has always existed. He plays a central role in the work of the Triune God. Especially before God's people had access to God's Word, the Scriptures, the word and instruction of God came to His people through this Messenger.

That the Angel of the LORD came from Gilgal is significant. Fifteen years earlier the Angel of the LORD had been with the people at Gilgal when they were just beginning to conquer the land. There the people had circumcised the men, and set up the monument to remember that God rolled away their reproach (Joshua 5:9). Things were different now.

The Messenger's message to the people this time was harsh and negative because that is how God deals with rebellion. First, He laid out the evidence of rebellion. He reminded these people that God had made a covenant with them. *And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you'" (v.1)*. Notice that God reminded the people that He was the one who brought their relatives out of Egypt. He put them in the land He had sworn to give their fathers starting with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God promised to never break HIS covenant. The short version of God's covenant was the Ten Commands. God's covenant also included the fact that He would give them the land, He would be their father, He would care for them and protect them, He would forgive their sins. The people's side of the covenant was simply to obey God's word. Through Moses God told the people, *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5)*. God repeated part of what the people were supposed to obey through the Angel of the LORD at this point. *You shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars" (v.2a)*.

God's rules in the covenant were clear enough. The people just chose not to obey. They made agreements with the inhabitants of the land regarding labor and allowing them not only to live, but to live in the land. They did not destroy the inhabitants' altars, or more broadly, their religion.

This was not a case of overlooking something minor on the part of the people. Rather, God bluntly said, *"But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?" (v.2b)*. Hear the words of God's accusation: "You have not obeyed My voice." This accusation should have sent a searing pain through the people's spirit. Remember that God's faithfulness to His covenant was contingent on the people's

obedience. *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5).*

They chose to disobey and God addressed them with a convicting question: “What is this you have done?” God knew what the people did. Just like God knew what Adam and Eve did, but still asked, *“What is this that you have done?” (Genesis 3:13).* That is the same question God put to Cain after he had killed Abel: “What have you done?” God poses the question to draw out confession. Confession is not an excuse for sin or even a reason for sin. Confession is calling sin what God calls it. The people needed to say in unison: “We have chosen to disobey God.”

Having established the people’s guilt, God the Son stated the method of chastisement He chose for their rebellion. *So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you” (v.3).* “So now” means, “You made the choice to sin, now I will tell you what it is going to cost you.” From now on, in their fight against the enemy, the people were on their own—no help from God. Furthermore, this also means that the enemy who they were supposed to have driven out would not be their friends, or good servants, or even non-committed neighbors. They were going to be thorns in their sides, the cause of grief and pain. And their false gods would always be a temptation for the Israelites to forsake God even further. Because of the people’s failure to obey God, they were going to have to fight the enemy in their own strength. That was a sentence for certain failure.

Hearing these words from God, the people were sorry – but not sorry enough (vv.4-5). The people’s hearts were smitten. *As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept (v.4).* All of the people were probably represented by the elders of each tribe, town, and family. As the representatives wept, as a whole, the nation wept in sorrow. Were they sorry that God caught them and exposed them? Were they sorry that the consequences of their sin were going to be painful and embarrassing? Were they sorry they disappointed God?

The people responded. *And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD (v.5).* Probably they were at Shechem, but they called it Bochim, the place of weeping. In

the midst of their sorrow and weeping, the people also sacrificed to the LORD. No doubt they offered a sin offering. However, God has a principle about this which Samuel explained to rebellious King Saul. *And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).* The record is clear that the people really did not repent and trust God enough to drive out the enemy.

Lessons for us.

This story teaches us an important principle. If we try to make peace with sin, it will enslave us. God has delivered us from sin, just like He delivered the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt. They were enslaved against their wills. Every person who God delivered had been born in that slavery. We too, like they, were born into slavery, were born in sin. It was slavery not by our choice. In that condition we had no other choice but to sin. We were hopeless slaves by nature.

God graciously came to us and delivered us from that deplorable condition. He forgave our offenses. He clothed us in Christ’s righteousness. He gave us His Word (like the covenant God gave the people). His very presence dwells within us like the Angel of the Lord who spoke to the people. He gives us fellow Christians to encourage us and challenge us. God even made a covenant with us. The writer to the Hebrew Christians explained, *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).* In light of all these blessings, we have no excuse for not driving out the enemy!

Furthermore, we must learn that to attempt to co-exist with sin is rebellious futility. And we do try to co-exist. In an effort to please our sinful nature, we do not treat sin harshly. We are quick to kill many sins, but not all of them. We fear that to kill all sin will make us oddballs who do not fit with the rest of the world. As a result, we end up being enslaved by the little sins that we refuse to drive out. Our enslavement to the little sins often influences the next generation

to be even more careless. Then one day, a couple generations later, it is almost impossible to distinguish “God’s people” from the enemy.

Because this principle is so, we need to take necessary action. We need to identify the enemy. The enemy is not other people, and not even culture. The enemy begins with my own flesh with its desire to sin. That enemy is encouraged by Satan who influences my world.

Having identified the enemy as our natural desire to disobey God, we need to determine to defeat the enemy at all costs. That begins when we admit that the enemy of sin is the real enemy. We must also admit that the enemy desires to enslave us. But determining to root out the enemy means that we will need to count the cost of battle. Jesus placed that cost rather high when He taught: *“And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire”* (Matthew 18:8-9).

What are you willing to cut out of your life to keep from being enslaved to sin? Are you willing to get a new job? Are you willing to get rid of your cell phone? Are you willing to stop social media? Are you willing to get rid of the television or at least cable? Are you willing to be looked at as odd by your peers?

Most important in this battle is that we must acknowledge the need to depend on God for victory. Like the Israelites, we will never drive the iron charioteers (v.19b) out of our lives unless we depend wholly on God. But full dependence on God requires death to self and selfish desires. Paul taught us that this is a daily death. He wrote, *“I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!”* (1 Corinthians 15:31). Jesus taught the same truth when He said to all, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23).

The battle begins when we admit that sin is real and desires to enslave us. That is why God warns us over and over to kill these desires that rise up within us. We will obey God on this matter or we won’t. If we choose not to obey, we choose the consequences of disobedience.