

Judges Overview

Abandonment: What Happens When We Forget About God

Notes

Big Idea:

A life lived absent of a relationship with God gives way to a life without the blessings and guidance of God

INTRODUCTION

What happens in life when a person, a people, a town, a church, or a nation forgets about God?

What does that life, that culture, that society look like?

What takes place to get them to a point where they forget about God?

What type of journey is that?

More than likely, people forget about God slowly, day by day, habit by habit, act by act.

They see the warning signs and at first, they are worried and concerned, but then slowly but surely, what used to bother them no longer bothers them.

I've told you the story before about our go-kart exploits. I had a friend over named Cooter. Cooter and I were riding the go-kart all in the sawmill, up the hills of sawdust and chips, through the machinery, and around the lumber yard. We got to the back yard, and we had an old metal 50-gallon drum that I started going in circles around. My plan was to go in circles until I built up momentum and then shoot out in between the piles of lumber. As I went around that drum, I got closer and closer to the drum. Cooter kept telling me I was getting too close, and I told him not to worry about it. As I was telling him not to worry about it, all of a sudden, I heard a yell and blood went everywhere. I got too close to that drum and Cooter was holding on tight to the outside handle and one of those metal shards on that drum was sticking out and cut one of Cooter's fingers right off his hand.

Now, did we set out to cut off my friend's finger when we woke up that morning? We did not?

Did I have some warning signs telling me to stop doing what I was doing? You bet I did.

Did I listen to good advice and adjust my course? Absolutely not!

My failure to adjust my course when I knew I was in potential danger and when an actual warning led to a very big unintended consequence that caused others some serious pain.

The business of life takes over, spiritual disciplines begin to slip, compromises begin to be made, tolerations grow, and before long what was once a vibrant life on fire for God is now a shell of its former self.

A person, a people, that once enjoyed the rich blessings and favor of God, now are under his discipline and wrath, suffering from their own sin and the weight of its consequences.

When we fail to heed the warning signs of sin, we end up far from God, his influences, and blessings.

As we begin our series on the Book of Judges, we are going to see how a people who once were on fire for God, end up living in total ruin and utter disaster.

Historically, Judges follows Joshua. At the beginning of Joshua, we see Moses dying and God appointing Joshua as the leader of the people. The time of the exile in the wilderness is over and God is ready to lead the people into the Promised Land and give them what God had promised Abraham in Genesis 12.

Joshua shows us the conquest of the land of Canaan and how the people fought for what God had given them.

When we get to the book of Judges, we see a very different scene.

Where in Joshua, we saw a generation passionate about God, in Judges we see a generation in apathy towards God.

This apathy eventually led to apostasy as the people of God look more like the people of the world.

From this series we will see several patterns emerge which is what we will cover today.

Today, we will look at an overview of the Book of Judges and see several of the recurring themes of the book.

But before we do that let me ask us a few questions.

Are there areas of your life where you have noticed slipping spiritually?

Have things that once bothered you, convicted you? You see yourself making excuses to do them, engage in them, and support them?

What spiritual disciplines in your life have begun to slip?

As we think about the Book of Judges, at least three areas of concern come to the surface:

- We often think we are right
- We see the importance of family habits
- We see the cycle of sin, suffering, supplication, and salvation

The first point we will talk about is one that we don't like to talk about.

WE OFTEN THINK WE ARE RIGHT

One of the key verses in the Book of **Judges is 21:25** which says,

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The phrase, "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" is repeated multiple times throughout the book.

This statement shows us how, little by little we begin to celebrate what was once intolerable.

We see specific examples of this throughout the book from the people of Israel and even those called to lead them from their oppressors.

Doing what is right in our own eyes is another way to say we are allowing the sinful desires of our hearts to take over our lives.

We see this progression and development of sin throughout the course of the book.

In **2:11** we read,

“Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,”

The people committed sin. They knew what was wrong and decided to go against the Lord’s commands.

When we come to a point in our lives, any point in time, whether it is an instance or season, where we know the difference between right and wrong and we willingly choose wrong we violate the law of God and sin against his holiness.

I remember one time Jacob had some snacks and he decided to dump them on the floor. I caught him in the middle of emptying the cup and told him to stop. He looks me right in my face, like a grown man about to fight. I stared straight back at him and said, “Don’t you do it. You know what is going to happen if you do it.” He stared into my soul and held out his arm and like a mob boss, turns that cup upside down and pours the entire content on the floor.

He knew when he decided to pour that cup out in the first place he was in the wrong. Then, when I confronted him on it, he knew he was caught, and after he knew he was going to get into trouble he still did it!

If we are believers and followers of Jesus, we know the difference between right and wrong, between sin and honor, because we have access to God’s holy word and we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

We see the progression of sin in the life of Samson. Samson was a Nazarite from birth and was supposed to live a holy life.

Samson’s life is a caution of what happens when we think we are above God’s morals and standards.

In **14:2**, when

he came back and told his father and mother, “I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife.”

Samson goes off to the Philistine people and sees a woman, who is not an Israelite and desires to marry her.

Look at the language. “I saw a woman.” He went looking for sin and he found it.

Sin is not hard to find when we are looking for it.

So, he marries a woman from outside the family of Israel and enters into an unhealthy relationship with her family and people, thus leading to trouble, confusion, and death.

But Samson is not done with sin and sin is not done with Samson.

Samson continues to slide into sin as is evidenced in **16:1**.

“Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there and went into her.”

Fast forward in Samson’s timeline and his wife has been given to his best friend. He is wandering, allowing his lust to lead him, and what happens?

He goes to Gaza, one of the five major cities of the Philistines. There would be nothing but trouble for him in this place.

Again, when one goes looking for sin, he finds it and what does Samson find? A prostitute.

The text tells us he has relations with her. His lust caused him to go looking for sin, his eyes saw what he wanted, he determined in his own heart what was right, and he willingly and with intended purpose committed sin.

This sin would lead to an illicit relationship which would eventually lead to Samson’s death.

We are not surprised to read, “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”

Let’s go back to the introduction to the book. We already saw in chapter **2 verse 11** that the people of Israel did was what evil in the sight of the Lord.

This plays out in some very horrifying ways and leads to a conclusion none of us desire.

Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger. ¹³ So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. ¹⁴ The anger of the Lord burned against Israel,

The people did evil in the sight of the Lord. They willingly did the opposite of what he desired and instructed them to do.

But that was not enough. Verse 12 says they took their sin a step further and forsook or abandoned the Lord. They left God behind.

I have seen this time and again in the church. An individual who is in need, whose life is hard and who is struggling, pulls close the Lord and to other believers. Then, when life gets better, they start to get their head above water, they miraculously forget all the goodness of God.

You may be feeling the tug of this right now.

What we see evidence of in Judges, the New Testament writer James shows us how this process actually happens.

They abandoned the Lord for what? They forsook the God of their salvation, the God who delivered them from the hand of Egypt for false gods, for idols made of wood and stone. They bowed down to the idols of the culture.

And what was the Lord's response? He burned with anger against his people. God gave them what they desired. He gave them what their hearts wanted. They wanted to live according to the culture and standards of the world, so he allowed them to be ruled by those standards which lead to their being overtaken by their rulers.

When we abandon God for idols, we will experience the full consequences of those idols.

We have idols all around us. Idols of self, of fame, of clicks and likes; idols of identity and sex; idols of money and security; idols of power and wealth; idols of success and free living.

Are there idols in your life that you are allowing to control your faithfulness to Christ?

Lest we think the fall into sin happens accidentally, we turn to the book of James.

James discusses the journey from temptation to sin to death that results from sin in **1:14-15**.

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Each person is an individual. We are all responsible for our own sin and spiritual maturity.

Temptation takes place, not randomly, but because we allow the lusts of the flesh to take root and breed within our heart and mind.

Lusts are not limited to sinful sexual exploits. Lusts are strong desires of the soul that look to satisfy the longings of the flesh.

We desire whatever sin will satisfy our cravings. Each person has their own struggle with their lusts, but it is the desire, the craving, the wanting to fill something in us that is not of God and does not honor God that causes us to be drawn to sin.

The desires start and then when we don't give them to the Lord, they entice us, they draw us in like a fish in a net.

You see, sin is not a spontaneous act, but it is simply the fruit of a sin filled, selfish process.

Just as a birth does not spontaneously take place but goes through the process of pregnancy. During pregnancy, the baby is strengthened and cared for, and given protection to grow healthy and strong up to the point of birth.

When we allow lust to take root in our heart, we allow it to be conceived, or created in us. Instead of getting rid of the thing that will cause us harm, we nurture it, protect it, lie about it, and make excuses for it, until the day it gives birth.

But unlike the birth of a child that brings joy and delight to the parents and family, our sin brings discipline to us and heartbreak to our heavenly Father.

Sin, when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Are there any lusts in your heart that you are nurturing?

Let us be quick to turn them over to the Lord so we may avoid the temptation that leads to sin.

FAMILY HABITS ARE IMPORTANT

The generation that faithfully served Joshua and the Lord, gave way to a generation that did not know the Lord.

Chapter **2:7** and **2:10** tell us some important information.

⁷ The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel

The generation that initially entered the Promised Land, who were born in the wilderness, who did not have a home, this generation served the Lord.

They knew the stories of the rescue from slavery in Egypt. They saw God provide for them in the wilderness. They knew of his faithfulness, and they responded to the faithfulness of God by being faithful to him.

But then, they had kids. And their kids did not see the Lord in that light.

¹⁰ All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Scholar Warren Wiersbe notes one of two things were true: “either the older generation had failed to instruct their children and grandchildren in the ways of the Lord, or, if they had faithfully taught them, then the new generation had refused to submit to God’s Law and follow God’s ways” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary, Joshua-Ester*, 95).

From this thought we see two truths: habits of faithfulness are difficult and defining and habits of complacency are defiant and dangerous

Habits of Faithfulness are Difficult and Defining

James 4:14 refers to our lives as a mist that is here for moment and then vanishes.

Our short life span combined with our depravity and propensity for sin make it all the more important for families to develop habits of faithfulness.

Parents, we cannot control the actions of our children once they reach adulthood, and we are not responsible for their actions.

We are responsible for modeling Christlikeness to them; for showing them what selflessness and humility are; for teaching them the deep love of God; for helping them develop habits of spiritual disciplines and faithfulness.

Is it difficult to develop these habits and consistently model Christ to our family? You better believe it.

That is why it is so important for us as parents and grandparents to consistently be in the word and drawing near to Christ.

Take time to talk to your children and grandchildren about the things of God.

It would be a waste of your relationship and influence as a Christian parent if all you ever discuss with your kids is how their day at school was, what they scored on the test, how they are doing on the team, or how they feel about life.

Take time and be intentional about praying with your kids, speaking blessings over them, and turning the conversation to Christ and his word.

Will it be easy? Will it always be convenient? Will it be awkward?

Our children's future with Christ is much more important than the future of their bank account and worldly security.

Habits of Complacency are Defiant and Dangerous

It is much easier to allow the habits of complacency to take control of our families instead of working to build habits of faithfulness.

While the habits of complacency are easier, they are defiant of the will of the Lord and lead to a potentially dangerous outcome for the salvation and sanctification of our families.

What about you? Are you seeking to build habits of faithfulness or are you allowing the easier habits of complacency to rule your family?

We must be determined that we will raise our families in the love, affection, and discipleship of Jesus because the cost is too great to fail in this duty.

WE SEE THE CYCLE OF SIN, SUFFERING, SUPPLICATION, AND SALVATION

The Book of Judges is really a story of the life of any believer. Hopefully our lives don't look exactly like those of some of the characters, but we truly see the cycle of sin, suffering, supplication, and salvation.

Throughout the book we see God as the only Savior. He rescued Israel from Egypt and he saves them from the consequences of their sin.

The people initially serve the Lord. Then they fall into sin and their sin grows, and grows, and grows until finally God has had enough.

God gives his people over to foreign nations to chasten them.

We see this in **Judges 6:1**.

"Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years."

Then, in their pain and distress they cry out to God for deliverance and God would raise up a judge to save them.

Look at **2:18**.

“When the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.”

This cycle is repeated over and over throughout the book.

You may find yourself in bondage this morning.

Sin was more than you bargained for. It took you farther than you wanted to go and cost you more than you wanted to pay.

You don't know where to turn and you don't think you can get out of it.

I want to let you know something this morning friend.

You are NEVER too far gone that you can't cry out to God.

The moment you turn to the Lord in repentance is the moment you receive forgiveness and freedom.

CONCLUSION

We have taken a 30,000-foot view of the Book of Judges. Judges shows us the danger of abandoning the Lord.

Judges shows us how easy and quickly we can turn from devotion to disregard.

Maybe you find yourself identifying with something we talked about. Maybe you find yourself beginning to take a slow slide away from devotion.

Maybe you have gone off the deep end and are living fully in sin against the will of the Lord. You are starting to see the effects and suffer the consequences of living apart from the Lord.

I have good news for you today. You are not too far that the Lord will not rescue you. Will you turn to him today?

As we talked about the dangers and disasters of abandoning the Lord, we also talked about the readiness of God to display unmerited and unmatched grace to any who turn to him in repentance.