

Judges 1:1-2:5

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Slightly complex passage tonight and quite confusing, hence why I've given out a sort of sermon outline.

Unfortunately, I ran out of copies of those. So if possibly some of the people that could sort of share them between two or whatever, so that some of the people from the band can get them and know where we're going.

Let's start with just finishing off the reading. So we've read chapter one and then we're also dealing with the first five verses of chapter two tonight.

So Judges chapter two. The angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochum and said, I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your forefathers.

I said, I will never break my covenant with you and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars. Yet you have disobeyed me.

[1 : 04] Why have you done this? Now, therefore, I tell you that I will not drive them out before you. They will be thorns in your sides and the gods, their gods will be a snare to you.

When the angel of the Lord has spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud and they called that place Bochum and they offered sacrifices to the Lord.

Let's just pray before we start into this. Father, we pray that as we come tonight to a passage that's quite difficult to understand and with application that is difficult, that you will open our hearts, that you will open our eyes, that we may see your glories and that you won't allow anything important to be snatched up from us, but that anything worthless will be forgotten and swept away.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So it should have been perfect. Everything had gone so well.

God had brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and despite some rebellion and wandering around the wilderness for 40 years, had brought them into the land he'd promised to them, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Under the leadership of Joshua, they had entered the land and God had given them some miraculous victories, such as that at Jericho.

[2 : 42] And so God's covenants to the patriarchs appeared to have been fulfilled. We see here God's people in God's place under God's rule.

So what went wrong? Last week, Graham was going through overview of the whole book and left us with that question.

Where did it all go wrong? And over the next two weeks in these introductory chapters of Judges, that's the question that we'll be looking at. But I think before we get further into this passage, we need to deal however briefly and superficially with one big issue.

We could bypass it, skim over it, get some nice lessons from the passage, go home and pretend and pretend the issue wasn't there until the enemy whispers in our ear, you don't really believe that, do you?

And then we start to question everything. The leaflet about this sermon series states, there are few books that make our modern sensibilities squirm as much as Judges.

[3 : 58] And that's very true. The trouble is, in most of the rest of the book, the things that we struggle with are the things that are condemned as wrong.

Here, the events we struggle with are when they are obeying God. When I was discussing this passage with some people around, I rather flippantly described it as being about why incomplete genocide is sin.

This is about the conquest and destruction of the various peoples that inhabited the land of Canaan and it doesn't sit very well with our 21st century mindsets.

We know that Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek. And so how do we reconcile this? And it's not just us Christians that find it difficult.

Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* would write, The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction. A vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser.

[5 : 05] A misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, phileicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, pseudo-masochistic, capriculously malevolent bully.

So how do we deal with those accusations? I think we need to be able to respond to these challenges whether they come from others or whether they just come from ourselves. So what were the Israelites told to do and why?

Moses takes several chapters to cover this early in Deuteronomy. But the key passage really is at the beginning of chapter 7 and it's pretty explicit.

when the Lord your God brings you into the land you're entering to take possession of it and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you.

And when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.

[6 : 20] You shall not intermarry with them giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them. You shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their ashram and burn their carved images with fire.

They are to completely clear the land of its inhabitants. They are not to enter into any sort of peace treaty, but they are to destroy them completely and destroy all their pagan altars, idols, etc.

There are several reasons that are given for this. The first, and potentially the most obvious, is to fulfill the promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

He had promised them on oath this land. It was part of his plan to bring blessing to the whole world and ultimately to bring his Messiah.

[7 : 29] Moses continues in chapter 7 of Deuteronomy, It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Then the second reason was to punish the wickedness of the nations that lived in the land. We see actually his mercy in this because he promised this land to Abraham but told him that his descendants would live as slaves for 400 years for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

So God was holding off as long as he could. But now the time for mercy is over. Their sin has reached its full extent and God will use his people as an instrument of judgment.

As one writer put it, until it was right to invade, God's people must wait even if it cost them centuries of hardship. But then the third reason and the one that probably we see most tonight is because God knows the weakness of his people.

He knows how easily they are led astray. He knows that if they settle down among the other nations they will start copying them and become like them in their detestable practices and worship.

[9 : 05] And in the rest of this series we'll see that that is exactly what happens. But along with these reasons there are several clarifications that God gives through Moses.

first of all he reminds them that there is nothing special about them other than that God chose them. He says that the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you are more numerous than the other peoples for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But then there's a reminder that it is God who is doing this. They are at most being used by him. this is God's battle not theirs. Various times through verses 18 to 24 still in Deuteronomy 7 there remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.

The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. The Lord your God will deliver them over to you.

And then thirdly there's a reminder that although the Amorites and other peoples may be wicked the Israelites themselves are far from perfect. Later on in chapter 9 of Deuteronomy after the Lord your God has driven them out before you do not say to yourself the Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.

[10 : 38] No it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you. And in case they hadn't got the point if you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed like the nations the Lord destroyed before you so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.

God and the rest of the Old Testament tells how God uses the surrounding pagan nations time after time against his own people when they turn away from them.

There's far more that could be said on this topic. Books and books could and have been written but ultimately it comes down to the question of whether we want to exalt our ideas of right and wrong above that of God or whether we want to in faith like Abraham says will not the judge of all the earth do right.

We may not fully understand it but we must trust him in this. And so back to our passage basically it splits into three parts roughly where we divided the readings although they overlap a bit there's some grey areas about some bits whether they're right or wrong is slightly uncertain but essentially about the first 20 verses talks about the victories of the people then the rest of chapter 1 talks about the defeats and then the section at the beginning of chapter 2 talks about the consequences of that. So it all starts really well at the beginning. In the first few verses we see the Israelites seeking to obey God. They know what they've been instructed to do they seek God's guidance about how to do it and then trusting God they follow his direction and God gives them the victory.

[12 : 57] They are obedient to God but they are also dependent on him. They don't just say God has told us to take this land we can do that.

Instead they go in dependent on him to lead them and to give them the victory and as promised he does. But another thing we notice in these early verses where the Israelites are victorious is that they're often seen to be working together.

In verse three we read of Judah and the Simeonites agreeing to help each other in taking their allotted piece of the land. They will go with their fellow Israelites and fight together lending each other their strength.

In the following verses four to eighteen we read of one victory after another in Judah's territory and then after that victories in Ath of Simeon.

Working together they were much stronger. But I think what's particularly significant here is that Judah at this point is the largest of the tribes and Simeon is the smallest.

[14 : 14] Judah probably didn't need any help but they turned to their future neighbours Simeon the smallest of the tribes about a third of their size and say to them let's do this together and together they go into the land and take it and settle there.

So another interesting thing hidden away in verse sixteen here we see the descendants of Moses father-in-law the Kenite going up and settling along with Judah.

the point here is that Moses father-in-law Jethro was not an Israelite here he's called a Kenite and elsewhere a Midianite they're probably two names for the same people in Exodus he's called the priest of Midian he's also known as Ruel which translates as a friend of God so this demonstrates that this conquest is not about ethnicity it's not genocide it is about Yahweh against the false gods of the Canaanites but unfortunately these positive accounts don't fill much of the chapter quickly the accounts of victory turn into accounts of defeat and I think there's various things we can learn here about these defeats where they came from the first thing we see about their defeat is that they have a stubborn enemy it says time after time the

Canaanites were determined to live in the land the first victories may have been dramatic but this is going to take endurance their enemies aren't going to all flee before them they quite like the land they're living in thank you very much so this is going to be a test of endurance for God's people not just will they trust him for one battle but will they trust him long term the second thing we see about their defeat is that it comes from fear in verse 19 we read that Judah were unable to drive the people from the plains because of their chariots fitted with iron we have to remember here that iron was the latest technology that was just beginning to be seen we aren't really into the iron age proper yet so this is top grade military hardware and so it is reasonable that they can't defeat them on their own but it's very interesting that this is just before the next verse where we see the account of

Caleb defeating three sons of Anak if you look back at various accounts through numbers etc we see that the sons of Anak are reported as giants these are the people that the twelve spies that

Moses sent into the promised land saw as the song goes ten were bad two were good ten saw the strength of the enemy saw the power of these giants and only two saw actually God is with us we can do anything and one of these good spies was Caleb the other was Joshua who has now died so Caleb is now an old man he's the only survivor from that time and he knows that it doesn't matter whether they're up against giants or iron chariots because God is greater it seems that the men of [18:20] Judah have forgotten this despite all these victories that God has given them they seem to have thought it was about their strength and so when up against a stronger enemy they cannot win but with God they had nothing to fear the third thing we see about their defeat is that pragmatism takes over time after time we read that instead of killing or driving out the people as they've been told to do they put them into forced labour they made them slaves humanly it made sense they were useful there was a lot of work to do building up the country and a ready supply of slaves would be a real help but that's not what they were told to do it was not long since that they'd suffered a major defeat after

Achan had kept a portion of the plunder for himself that should have been destroyed and later we'll read of Saul keeping the best of the herds from the Amalekites to offer as a sacrifice to God he believed he had a better idea of how to worship God than what God had told him to do and then the final thing we see about their defeat here is the problem of unfinished work in verse 8 Jerusalem is taken it's put to the sword and set on fire but it seems that they failed to hold it because in verse 21 we read that the Benjamites didn't drive out the Jebusites that lived in Jerusalem and in fact it would be David several centuries later that finally conquered and held

Jerusalem they have started the job but they haven't carried it through to the end and so their work the good work that they've done is all undone but then in those verses at the beginning of chapter 2 we see that their sin and their disobedience has consequences the angel of the Lord appears to them and brings them God's message of judgment it's interesting to notice that the last time the angel of the Lord was mentioned was just before they took Jericho when he said that he was there to fight with them but now following their disobedience God is doing exactly as he promised and he's leaving them to themselves he's not going to fight for them any longer when they were obedient he fought for them and gave them victory but he's not going to do that now they are left to fight and ultimately lose their own battles but despite these consequences we see that God did not completely abandon his people because we've got the rest of the book of

Judges where time after time the people repent and God fights for them but then they turn away again and then we have the rest of the Bible which all tells the story of how God patiently calls his people back to himself again and again and again despite the repeated unfaithfulness and rebellion so how on earth do we apply a passage like this to our lives in 21st century Scotland some have taken passages like this as an excuse for Christian holy wars or crusades but Jesus would say my kingdom is not of this world if it were my servants would fight others would take these warnings for Israel to go to such lengths to separate themselves from the people around as a reason for Christians to separate themselves to cut themselves off whether as hermits in monasteries in separate societies like the

Amish or just by cutting themselves off from much of the culture around as many in our own tradition would have done in previous generations and that urge is in many ways very commendable indeed Paul would write to the Corinthians who are getting caught up with idolatry come out from them and be separate there is a need for us to not get completely entangled in the world around us but Jesus would say in his prayer in the upper room in John 17 my prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one elsewhere he would tell them how they had to be salt and light to not put their lamp under a bowl it was expected to unlike the Israelites they would be living among and interacting with unbelievers be they

[24:21] Jews pagans atheists or whatever and yet we are told of a battle that we are to fight the letter of the Ephesians would tell us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms the letter to the Colossians tells us to put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature sexual immorality impurity lust evil desires and greed which is idolatry because of these the wrath of God is coming you used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived but now you must also rid yourself of all such things as these anger rage malice slander and filthy language from your lips do not lie to each other since you've taken off your old self with its practices and to put on the new self which has been renewed in knowledge in the image of its

creator and in

Romans 8 therefore brothers and sisters we have an obligation but it is not to the flesh to live according to it for if you live according to the flesh you will die but if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live the stakes in this battle are high the destruction that is commanded is just as complete but this is not the destruction of pagan peoples and of their idols but of everything within us that falls short of displaying God's glory any sin within us or anything that would cause us to sin and we are to be ruthless Jesus would teach that if your right eye causes you to stumble gouge it out and throw it away if your right hand causes you to stumble cut it off and throw it away or as the writer to the

Hebrews says let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles ultimately it's the same battle the battle for God's glory to be seen in the obedience of his people a people that are not special in themselves but that have been chosen called and redeemed by God and just like the Israelites God knows how easily we are drawn astray and so I want to go back through the exact same headings that we looked at the Israelites battle under and use the same headings to look at our own battle the first and most obvious thing we learn here about victories in the Christian battle is they come when we come to God in obedience and dependence knowing what he has commanded but looking to him to lead and guide and for his strength in the battle so often we try and do what God commanded but we try and do it in our own way and in our own strength and wonder why we fail but Paul tells the

Philippians it's God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose we sort of grudgingly accept that our salvation is nothing to do with us but we like to think at least think we can do something about our sanctification that we can work hard to make ourselves better but Paul tells us here that even our will to obey God comes from God we can do nothing on our own the second thing we've learnt here is that so often victory comes when we work together Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs we're told in Hebrews not to give up meeting together but to spur one another on to love and good deeds we're told in Proverbs that as iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens in another or in

Ecclesiastes two are better than one because they have a good return for their labour if either of them falls down one can help the other up but pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up Tim was telling us last Sunday morning as we were looking at the beginning of Philippians of the importance of good Christian friends of partnership in Christian life and gospel ministry as Tim isn't here tonight I feel free to embarrass him over the last few years I have found him to be that partner that brother in the Christian fight it's a great encouragement to have someone that you can send a message to saying I'm struggling please pray and know that they will it's a real encouragement to have someone that has the patience to spend the hours with you until you actually finally see how you really are and to encourage and to point my eyes to the beauties of my saviour and to send me on my way rejoicing strengthened for the battles ahead obviously he's a far from perfect friend and I am a far from perfect friend to him but he has greatly helped me as a brother in the fight and so [30 : 49] I would highly encourage all of you to take the time effort and risk to get around you brothers and sisters that you can fight with and who will fight with you maybe like Judah and Simeon there's someone younger weaker in the faith that you can get alongside and say let's do this together but just like the Israelites battle unfortunately the Christian battle also tends to be littered with defeats we see that like the Israelites we have a stubborn enemy the sin within us is deeply rooted and ultimately will not be completely gone until that day when we see him and are like him even the apostle

Paul could grieve about how the things that he wanted to do he didn't do and the things that he didn't want to do he did there are several songs that while quite good in some ways I refuse to sing the chorus of one hymn another wise great hymn says at the cross where I first saw the light and the burden of my heart rolled away I was there by faith I received my sight and now I am happy all the day really is that what your Christian life is like mine certainly isn't so many of these songs and so many presentations of the gospel manage to miss out everything that happens between that first moment of salvation and our ultimate glorification they forget the long arduous and sometimes painful process of sanctification in between they forget about the reality of the Christian life and we see too many new Christians that aren't prepared for this they think everything will be easy and they're completely thrown when the battles come and keep coming but secondly like the Israelites many of our defeats come from fear we know that dealing with sin will be hard and

we don't really want to do hard the call to discipleship is a call to radical living to take up our cross daily potentially to be hated and persecuted by the world around us a call to follow God into the unknown and we sort of think yeah that's fine for others I remember one preacher saying something along the lines of and I'm sure I'm completely misquoting them you haven't really repented until it's painful to turn away from the sin that you love are we willing to deal with that pain but Charles Macmillan brought to us on Wednesday night the story of Elisha and his servant surrounded by an army the servant is fearful and Elisha prays that the servant's eyes will be opened he sees that the whole hillside is covered with chariots and horses of fire the angelic armies are there to fight for them why should we fear hard things when this is our God God God God but thirdly like the Israelites our defeats come from pragmatism we often find useful those things that either lead us into temptation or sometimes even our sins we find useful and quite convenient for example the devices that many of you are reading the text tonight on are the exact same devices that can bring you in the privacy of your homes a

Pandora's box of distraction and temptation some of you will struggle greatly with this and yet find it too useful too integral a part of your life you're willing to compromise to accept the risk to put yourself in that danger zone because it's convenient previous generations worried about bringing TV into our homes and generations before that worried about printed books but we have brought into our life something far more powerful both for good and for evil are we willing to live with the things that cause us to stumble because they're convenient even because we find them useful in our worship and our service or maybe in our attempts to provide for ourselves and our families to support the church to give to the poor do we allow ourselves to forget about our dependence on [36 : 49] God and be shaped by the greed the idolatry the striving for wealth and power of those that are around us in our attempts to be responsible and do good do we unthinkingly open ourselves to temptation and sin there are so many other areas where it's so easy for us to accept as part of our lives things that cause us to stumble that turn our hearts from the glories of Christ and the difficulty here is that as we've discussed unlike the Israelites we can't just cut ourselves off from all these sources of temptation and even if we could there are plenty within us and yet we need wisdom each of us is different each of us has our own particular weaknesses things that cause real struggles to me are probably not a problem to you and other way around we are called in

James to be involved in the world to feed the widows and orphans and yet not be polluted by it it's not easy but it's what we're called to and it needs care wisdom and not compromise and finally like the Israelites our defeats come from unfinished work it's so easy for us to think that something that we struggled with in the past is now defeated and we needn't worry about it any longer I heard the story of someone who proudly told those around him that he hadn't sinned for ten years and their comment was he has now but maybe our attitude needs to be like that of the alcoholic who can say my name is

Jim I'm an alcoholic I haven't had a drink for 40 years I need to say my name is Neil I'm a poor vile sinner redeemed by outrageous amazing grace as soon as we think we're anything more than that we're sure to fall unlike the Israelites our defeats have consequences as a congregation we were shocked recently to see the effects of sin that had gone unchecked in the life of one of our brothers others but while the effects may not always be so public our sin does have consequences in our own lives in the lives of those around us in the church as a whole the consequences of our sin are many and varied and we could have several sermons on them and some of the psalms we studied recently we've heard the psalmist recounting some of the consequences of sin they had experienced as they find that it takes away their joy it obstructs their fellowship with God it affects fellowship with their brothers and sisters I'm sure at times all of us know the reality of these and many other consequences but I just want to focus on one consequence just now it affects our display of God's glory to the world around us man was created in the beginning in the image of God to reflect his glory his beauty his character but in Romans we read that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God we have all failed in the purpose for which we were created likewise as Christians we're called to shine as stars in a crooked and depraved generation God Paul could write to Romans God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you how we act individually and as a church has a great impact on what the world thinks of our God and his gospel there's always great scandal when yet another well known church leader has seen to fall dramatically and the constant accusation that is thrown at Christians is that we're hypocrites that we fail to practice what we preach we need to be very clear to those we

come in contact with that none of us claim to be perfect that that's not what Christianity is about but if there's nothing different about us other than that we go to church are they really going to believe that there's any power in the gospel to transform lives but before we finish up before we go from here yes challenged but really feeling discouraged there's a great encouragement for us in this fight we read last week in Philippians chapter 1 he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of

[42 : 59] Christ in Ephesians we read about Christ that God placed all things all his enemies under his feet at the cross we hear those great words of triumph it is finished the battle is already won our enemy who appears to be so strong has been gloriously defeated the battle belongs to the Lord we are very much in a battle a battle that seems too much where the victories often seem too infrequent but a battle that is already won God's words to Joshua just before entering the land were be strong and courageous do not be afraid do not be discouraged for the

Lord your God will be with you wherever you go and then Jesus last words before his ascension I am with you always even to the end of the age as the old hymn says the last hymn sung by Jim Elliot and his friends that we're reminded about this morning we go in faith our own great weakness feeling and needing more each day thy grace to know yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing we rest on thee and in thy name we go Amen