

Judges

Judges is one of the most violent and tragic books of the Bible. Israel had been commanded to wholly and utterly clear the land of Canaan of its previous inhabitants (see Deuteronomy 7:1-5), but as we see in the first chapter of Judges they failed to do this (see Judges 1:27-36). Instead of clearing the land of the Canaanites, Israel simply subjected them to forced labour. Not only did this sin lead to a downward spiral of idolatry, murder, rape, and civil war, but it also led to a role reversal: instead of Israel subjecting the Canaanites into forced labour, the Canaanites end up subjecting Israel to forced labour.

The story in the book of Judges is directly analogous to the Christian life. As Israel was called to clear the land of the Canaanites, so are we as Christians called to clear our lives of sin. We are to be at war with sin, mortifying (killing) the sin in us. We cannot settle with simply having control over our sin as Israel had control over the Canaanites, because sin, like the Canaanites, is not passive; as long as it resides in our lives it is seeking to control and spiritually kill us. As John Owen aptly put it:

Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.

How do we mortify sin? To quote John Owen again: 'All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless, it must be done by the Spirit.' In other words, we simply cannot mortify the sin in our lives by ourselves, we need the Holy Spirit, we need Christ. One of the telling features of the book of Judges is that the Lord provides a series of (increasingly incompetent) Judges who liberate Israel for a time but only a time, with the final line of Judges being: 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' This all, I believe, points to our need for an eternal judge and king who can be our saviour from the sin in our lives, who liberates us from our captors. This judge and king is, as you might have guessed, Jesus Christ; we must turn to him as we pursue victory over sin.

Ian Church

Day 1

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Day 2

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Day 3

Romans 6:15-23

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Day 4

John 8: 31-38

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The

slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

Day 5

Proverbs 1: 8-19

Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and forsake not your mother's teaching,
for they are a graceful garland for your head
and pendants for your neck.
My son, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.
If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us ambush the innocent without reason;
like Sheol let us swallow them alive,
and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
we shall find all precious goods,
we shall fill our houses with plunder;
throw in your lot among us;
we will all have one purse”—
my son, do not walk in the way with them;
hold back your foot from their paths,
for their feet run to evil,
and they make haste to shed blood.
For in vain is a net spread
in the sight of any bird,
but these men lie in wait for their own blood;
they set an ambush for their own lives.
Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain;
it takes away the life of its possessors.