

March 19, 2023

“The Beginnings of Apostasy”  
Judges 1:1-2:5

FCF: Our unwillingness to hear a warning

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The LORD is telling us of the dangers of apostasy.  
(magnet) We need to hear this warning.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

If you follow news of Yellowstone National Park, you read headlines like this ([READ](#)):

Part of Human Foot Found in Yellowstone Hot Spring

Bears Are Waking Up. And They're Hungry.

Yellowstone Tourists Decide To Get Up Close & Personal With Bison, Doesn't End Well.

Such stories are why the Park Rangers have coined a new term - “touron” (a fusion of “tourist” and “moron”). These are folks who think the warnings are for everyone else. But not them.

There's a sense in which we are all tourons. We all play fast and loose with the warnings God gives us as to what we should steer clear of and the consequences, the damage that can bring.

This morning we're starting a new sermon series, through the Old Testament book of Judges. Will and I are going to be tag-teaming in this over the next few months. So buckle up.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Joshua 1:1-2:5](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

If you are a fan of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, you know that Susan is one of four children who end up as kings and queens of Narnia. But in the last book, *The Last Battle*, in a scene representing heaven, you realize that Susan is not there. It is a glaring, jarring omission.

Even in the story, other characters ask why she is not with them. The answer ([READ](#)):

“My sister Susan,’ answered Peter shortly and gravely, ‘is no longer a friend of Narnia.’

‘Yes,’ said Eustace, ‘and whenever you try to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says, “What wonderful memories you have! Fancy you still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children.”’”

This scene raises a very important issue. Lewis is describing someone who seemed to be a follower of Aslan - who seemed, in other words, to be a Christian - but who ends up turning away. Susan dismisses all their childhood memories as mere games, as if they didn't happen. In the Christian life, this is called apostasy. It's when someone who seemed to be a believer rejects Christ, turns from His teaching, and leaves His people. It is a real, sobering, weighty issue.

Which brings us to the book of Judges. The book before, Joshua, gives the account of the movement of Israel into Canaan, the land promised to them by the LORD. Judges is the sequel - not of an ongoing conquest but of sin running rampant. That is, the beginnings of apostasy. And that's the theme for our text. The LORD is telling us of the dangers of apostasy. We need to heed this warning. What would it mean for us to hear this? To understand how it works.

For that, we need to trace its beginnings. We see that in three ways. First, in the initial faithfulness. Second, in the progressive compromises. And, third, in the eventual confrontation.

**I. INITIAL FAITHFULNESS**

Things begin with an initial faithfulness. They start fairly well, as we see in vv.1-21.

*A) A Promising Start*

### 1. A good question

It's a promising start (**READ Judges 1:1**). This is a good question. They recognize their need of leading, their need for a leader, and instead of a referendum they go to the LORD for the answer.

### 2. Early success

So it's a promising start. And it is met with early success. We hear of victories in battle, evidence of the people's dependence and obedience which brought the promised victory and rest.

#### *B) An Ominous Note*

### 1. An alliance reliance

That promising start is marred by an ominous note - an alliance reliance (**READ Judges 1:2-3**). There's nothing wrong with this except that it wasn't called for. So why did Judah seek it out?

### 2. A jarring summary

But it's not just that. After a string of victories, we come to this jarring summary (**READ Judges 1:19**). Chariots of iron were cutting edge for the time, the weapons of the plain. Seeing them stopped the advance. Which, again, begs a question. Had Judah already forgotten the LORD?

So we see this initial faithfulness. But it is partial. Even here, it is incomplete.

#### *Illustration:*

And made so by fear. It reminded me of this news report I saw a while back (**READ**):

Two distressed men called 911 to report an attempted break in at an Oregon home. They told dispatch that the possible burglar was lurking in a locked bathroom, and that they could "see shadows under the bathroom door." The dispatcher immediately sent a team of officers to the location. Just seven minutes later, law enforcement surrounded the callers' house. They waited outside the bathroom with a trained K-9 and heard banging from inside the room. Police told the [Washington Post](#) that the suspect might have forced a window open as a last ditch effort to escape. Demanding the intruder to open the door wasn't an option anymore. Deputies drew their guns and stormed into the bathroom to find ... a lost Roomba repeatedly running into the shower door.

Well, that had to be a bit embarrassing - not just to the home owners but to the deputies.

#### *Application:*

Back to Judges. This irrational fear of the chariots of iron is at least partly what was at the root of the apostasy of Israel. We are continually warned of fear, fretting, and the inevitable faithlessness it brings as we try to take things into our hands. That's the real and present danger.

Which puts a question before us even this morning. What is your greatest fear? Is it the loss of approval? Is it the loss of control? Is it the loss of ease? What is your greatest fear? The answer to that is your greatest vulnerability, where you will be most surely tempted.

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## **II. PROGRESSIVE COMPROMISE**

Moving to our second point, we see a progressive compromise. This is in 1:22-36.

#### *A) A Spreading Contagion*

### 1. Multiple failures

Shifting from the south to the north, we have the contagion spreading. We read of multiple failures, multiple times in which the people "did not drive out" the inhabitants of certain areas.

### 2. Eventual reversal

And those failures of advance end with an eventual outright reversal (**READ Judges 1:34-35a**). Eventually, the people of Dan end up moving completely away to the northern area of Canaan.

*B) A Forgotten Calling*

1. Who they were

What's going on here? At least partly, this spreading contagion is caused by a forgotten calling. The people of God had forgotten who they were, whose they were, and all that that truly meant.

2. What they were called to be and do

The Apostle Peter seizes on this imagery centuries later (**READ 1 Peter 2:9-10**). Israel had forgotten who they were and what they were called to be and to do - salt and light, a city on a hill, a living and compelling demonstration of the grace of God at work in every area of life.

So the initial faithfulness gives way to progressive compromise. A half-way obedience.

*Illustration:*

That's what we see going on here - a half-hearted obedience and devotion to the LORD. Taking Him and His warnings of the enslaving power of sin half-seriously. Imagine this. You sit down with your doctor and are told you have an infection that will kill you if it isn't cleaned out. So you agree to the surgery. You wake up and ask, "Did you get it?" And the doctor says, "Well, here's the thing. March Madness is on so I was watching a bit of a game. But I think we got most of it." What would you say? "Most of it!?" Clearly the problem wasn't taken seriously.

*Application:*

Understand that this idea of Holy War in the Old Testament was not about land grabs, ethnic cleansing, or such. We'll talk about this more in a few weeks. It was about a spiritual cleansing, an eradication of idols so Israel would finally have a place of rest to serve the LORD and to be an instrument of salvation to the rest of the nations. But they lost sight of that.

This puts questions to us. We have to see that we are surrounded by the idols of power, sex, and money in a multitude of ways - far beyond our ability to count. Our default is the lens of our own surroundings - self-dependency, self-determination, and worship of our rights. Do we believe this could affect us? Should we not be spending time in prayerful reflection on this?

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### **III. EVENTUAL CONFRONTATION**

Which brings us to the last point, the eventual confrontation. How does the LORD view all this? How does He respond? In love, He cannot simply let it go (**READ Judges 2:1-5**).

*A) A Messenger from the LORD*

1. The route

Who conveys this message? The angel of the LORD - God's authorized representative, come to the people from Gilgal, the place of the covenant renewal as they had entered the Promised Land.

2. The reminder

Taking this route, this served as a powerful present reminder as to how the LORD had bound His people to himself, the sovereign initiative He had taken to establish and secure this relationship.

*B) A Message of the LORD*

1. What they had done

So the messenger comes. And he delivers a message reminding them of what had been done for them. And then making clear what they had done in response - doing what they should not have done and failing to do what they should have done. That's the sobering summation set forth.

2. What He would do

What they had done is made clear. And so too is what He would do. "You have given yourself to do what you wanted. And I will now give you over to what you want." That is, to their idols. And it would prove to be more painful than thorns in their sides and more enslaving than snares.

But none of this would come out of despising. It is all of a love that cannot let them go.

*Illustration:*

It was a love that is determined to direct and redirect, however was needed or required. Some of you know I have a German Shepherd named Lucy. Lucy has a strong herding instinct, especially when she thinks it's time to eat or go on a walk. She is determined to direct and redirect me on what she deems to be the right path in that moment. And she's pretty good at it.

*Application:*

Let me suggest that this creature is a reflection of her Creator. Some of you have or are going through hard times. You've had things added you'd like taken away. You've had things taken away you'd like given back. That can raise all kinds of questions. But let me ask you to consider something. Might that be God's directing in your life? I ask that with great care. Much of the pain that comes into our lives comes from other people or things out of anyone's control. But God can use even those to direct and redirect us upon the right path. We might well cry out, "Stop! Leave me alone." But the greater truth is that, because of His love for us, He simply cannot. He cannot turn from us. Which means we need not (and must not) turn from Him.

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**CONCLUSION:**

What is our hope in the face of such a warning? The LORD loves us enough to warn us of the consequences of our sin. But that's not where it stops. There's a whole lot more. The LORD also loves us enough to bear upon Himself the consequences of our sin. Consider how the story unfolds. As you read through Judges, what you see is a downward cycle of rebellion. Things go from bad to worse on repeat. If you want a soundtrack to the story, it might well be the theme to *JAWS*. Or, better yet, it might well be the sound of a flushing toilet. Things keep going from bad to worse. Even the judges themselves, as representatives of the people, get worse as the history unfolds. By the time you get to the end, things are as dark as they can be.

“How is this hopeful?” you ask. It all serves to prepare us for the ultimate Judge, the greater Deliverer - Jesus. It exposes us to our need. It shows His tenacious love for His people. It helps us to see what He is like. And, beyond even that, what He will do. It is truly hopeful.

Again, the LORD is telling us of the dangers of apostasy. We do need to hear this warning. That warning is an expression of His love, a love that is shown most fully in Jesus.

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