

August 21, 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 6:1-10.

1. Is God ever responsible for people suffering?
2. Would God ever allow Christians to have trouble and, if so, why?
3. Is it possible that America is under God's judgment?
4. Compare America's past of a general faith in God with that of other nations.
5. Will God be responsible for Armageddon?

LET ME EXPLAIN
Judges 6:1-10

Maybe you have purchased a battery-operated gizmo lately. Maybe you were happy to read on the package that batteries were included. Maybe you were sharp enough to also read that in order for the gizmo to work, you have to remove the little plastic tab that sits between the battery and the contacts so that the battery is not drained during storage. Maybe not. I have known people who ignore the instructions for such items and then get frustrated because their handy-dandy little gizmo doesn't work.

There is a reason why most of the products we buy, from automobiles to washing machines, come with instructions. First, the manufacturer actually expects us to read the instructions because the

proper operation of the item—and even the longevity of the item—depends on the owner following the statements found in the instructions. Second, too many people don't read the instructions.

That is also the story of life. Our Creator has designed us in a particular way. Because of sin, the creation is defective. In its original design, life was probably pretty simple. It seems that our Creator's intent was for us to wake up in the morning, spend time in fellowship with Him, and take care of His beautiful creation throughout the day, while maintaining fellowship with Him. And then at the end of the day, after enjoying fellowship with the Creator, we would go to sleep.

Again, because of sin, life is not that simple. Therefore, our Creator gave us a complete instruction manual that identifies the flaws and problems that sin has brought to His creation. His manual lists many common actions we need to take in order to counteract the defects of sin. His manual, the Bible, most importantly tells us in clear detail how we can be reconciled with Him and live a life that honors Him. Most people don't read the manual or, if they do, they don't believe it enough to practice it.

Therefore, life gets pretty messed up. Too often the defects of sin make life miserable. Because people do not operate life according to the Creator's instructions, they become addicted to lusts, they are controlled by sin, their marriages crumble, their families are disasters, and, overall, life is not even close to what the Creator intends for it to be.

God gave very clear instruction to His special, chosen people, the nation of Israel. To them He purposely gave the law with all the intricate details found in books like Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Probably the people in Gideon's day concluded that all those rules were just plain cumbersome. They were like the owner of a new lawn mower who concludes that changing the oil is an unnecessary, bothersome chore. "Why should I change the oil," the man might conclude, "when it appears my neighbor never changes the oil in his mower?"

When God's special, chosen people try to live life like their neighbors, who God has not chosen and to whom God's instructions do not apply, their lives get totally messed up. And so we read in Judges 6 that once again God's special people decided that maintenance of life according to God's instruction was not necessary.

Once again, God's people decided they wanted to be just like people who God did not choose. And once again, life got terribly miserable.

One very important lesson the people needed to learn was that the Creator who chose them also ordained the circumstances of life, the world, and eternity. When He gives a command, He expects His people to obey. If we don't, and if He loves us, He will discipline us in order to get our attention. That is what God explained to the sinning Israelites through an unnamed prophet. There are important lessons for us to learn in this narrative and explanation.

Sin and Sorrow (vv.1-6).

The people had sorrow because the LORD gave His people to the Midianites. Why? Again, it was because the people did evil. The story in chapter six opens with the words, *The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD (v.1a)*. There is no deep secret meaning in what they did. Evil is what God abhors. It is bad, not necessarily by human standards but certainly according to God. Therefore, evil is an attack against God's character. To do it is to do what is contrary to God's very nature. For the ancient Israelites, evil was twofold. First, it was to ignore God's law and count it of little or no value. Second, it was to embrace worship of the false gods of their pagan neighbors which caused the people to take on the same traits as their pagan neighbors. Those traits are often stated or hinted at in the Old Testament. They appear to be similar traits to what we would call evil in our day. False worship opened the door to drunkenness, fornication, adultery, injustice, dishonor of parents, and abuse of their children to the point of offering babies to Molech.

What were God's people thinking? Did God not see or care? No one ever does evil out of God's sight. He sees all, knows all, and judges all. Zophar, Job's friend, concluded, *For God knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it? (Job 11:11)*. That conclusion is in keeping with God's statement through His messenger Isaiah. *"Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden. Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel, whose*

deeds are in the dark, and who say, 'Who sees us? Who knows us?'" (Isaiah 29:14-15).

Evildoers matter to God, especially when they are His chosen people. He will respond to them. In fact, if it is possible for us to live a life of doing evil and not experience God's attention, it is a good indication we are not His chosen people.

The chosen people decided to do evil, so the LORD Himself gave them over. As a result, the people experienced the pain that comes with being given over. *And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel (v.2a)*. Probably the whole digression just seemed pretty natural to folks. For forty years the people had known relative peace (5:31). People who were twenty when Jael killed Sisera had lived to the end of their lives (60). They had established productive farms, orchards, and vineyards. They had reared children and were enjoying their grandchildren. Probably most of them attended various feasts or celebrations and talked about how good life was. Were there any people who were concerned that the majority was not following God's law? Was anybody agitated that people were not keeping God's prescribed feasts? Were there some people who appeared to be old fashioned because they insisted on worshiping the true God?

Then one day it all began to change. Their neighbors to the south became powerful and began to rattle their sabers. After a time of threats, the Midianites began to poke at the boundary lines and even move their tents into Israel. Before long those pagan people realized that Israel offered little or no resistance to them. So they just began to take over the culture like so many sojourners or immigrants who virtually became the masters. Now the chosen people of God were giving their resources to pagans who God had not chosen. "Surely this could not be God's will," they must have wondered.

What the people might not have understood was that God Himself gave them over. The hand of Midian overpowered Israel, *and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years (v.1b)*. No doubt it would have been difficult to convince the chosen people that God was actually the one who made the Midianites powerful and who opened the door for them to come into Israel. But God had promised from the nation's beginning that He Himself would be their judge and discipliner. In the Law in Leviticus, God promised that if His people chose sin, He Himself would punish them. He promised, *"And I will*

*destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my soul will abhor you. **And I will** lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and **I will not** smell your pleasing aromas. **And I myself will** devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. **And I will** scatter you among the nations. **And I will** unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste” (Leviticus 26:30-33).*

God would do that? That was His promise. People still have trouble allowing God to be in control. In the end, before God allowed the Babylonians to wipe out the nation, He promised through the prophet Amos (3:1-6), *Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”* That must be figurative, right? God said, “Compare other truths: ‘Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet? Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out from his den, if he has taken nothing? Does a bird fall in a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when it has taken nothing? Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?’” (Amos 3:4-6a). Therefore, since those things are true, so is this: “Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?” (Amos 3:6b).

Because God is in control, and because God is the author of judgment, life unraveled for God’s people. In response to the Midianite overthrow, the people literally hid in fear. *And because of Midian the people of Israel made for themselves the dens that are in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds (v.2b)*. Imagine such a lifestyle for the posterity of the people to whom God **gave** the land flowing with milk and honey. Their forefathers had planted orchards, vineyards, built farms and houses. Even their moms and dads had enjoyed God’s bounty.

But now for seven years the news reports acknowledged that things would not be the same for the younger generation. Because of the economic difficulty brought on by pagans who ruled over them, the young generation would not be able to afford a house. They

would have to live in caves and dens. Cave and den rental became the norm.

The people could not enjoy the fruits of their labors. *For whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. They would encamp against them and devour the produce of the land, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents; they would come like locusts in number – both they and their camels could not be counted – so that they laid waste the land as they came in (vv.3-5).*

The masters who lorded it over God’s chosen people came and stole all the bounty that God’s milk-and-honey land produced. We experience this to some extent in that our lords and masters take for themselves over 50% of our income annually and distribute it to whoever they can buy votes from. And how do God’s people respond in hard times of oppression and slavery?

Being wasted, the people cried to the LORD. *And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD (v.6)*. God brought them low. His desire was for His people to flourish and enjoy His bountiful supply. But His people chose not to believe but preferred to be like their un-chosen neighbors. God took His chosen people from a level of bounty to lowness. Low compared to the heights of God’s blessing. Low compared to their forefathers’ bounty. Low compared to those around them, their neighbors.

This was not a coincidence or a fluke. God used Midian to make His people low. Those people had descended from Abraham through the sons of Keturah, Abraham’s concubine. They were, therefore, related to the children of Israel (Abraham’s grandson) but not chosen. At one point in the past, they had leagued themselves with the Moabites to hire Balaam to curse God’s chosen people. Now those unbelieving, unchosen pagans were in control of God’s people. And once they were in control, the Midianites refused to let the chosen people set up Nativity scenes, or pray in school, or talk about God, or even display the Ten Commands. They said it wasn’t fair to them who didn’t believe in God.

What to do? The people came to God for help. God's people know where to turn in such difficult times. People who have only human wisdom to depend on turn to alcohol, drugs, sex, violence, war, and other risky lifestyles. According to the previous four stories, whenever God's people got low enough to cry out to God, God answered their prayer by raising up a deliverer. This time, God stopped to explain the problem before raising up a deliverer.

God's Explanation (vv.7-10).

God sent His messenger to answer the people. It appears that the people understood some connection between the Midianite persecution and the LORD. *When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites (v.7).* The pagans made them miserable. The miserable Israelites knew life had not been like that for 40 years. They expected God to help them. This would be especially true if any of them had studied unedited history in school. God did that kind of thing for His people in the past.

God did respond to the people's prayers. He sent them a preacher. *The LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel (v.8).* Oh great! Just when they needed real help, they got a preacher. This time God didn't raise up a deliverer immediately. This time God sent a specific message through a chosen messenger. This would be God's normal method for communicating with His chosen people in the years when Israel was declining (850 BC, Elijah – 400 BC, Malachi). God still sends His message through chosen spokespersons as various kinds of preachers regularly proclaim His message from His Bible all over the world.

God's message through the preacher explained the connection between sin and suffering. First, there was a simple rehearsal of the facts. In the beginning of nationhood it was God who removed the nation from slavery. *And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage" (v.8).* The chosen people would not even be in Israel if not for God's work. Did they forget their history?

Second, when God led the people to the Promised Land, it was God who drove out the oppressors. *"And I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you,*

and drove them out before you and gave you their land" (v.9). The pagans who were gone had been driven out by God. Did God's chosen people forget why God drove them out?

Third, and most important, it was God who made the rules. *And I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell" (v.10a).* Because God is the Creator, the Author of the promise of the land, the Deliverer and Sustainer, He had the right to make the rules. The major rule was simple: "Love, trust, honor, worship God according to His rules; Don't try to fit in with the popular neighbors who are not chosen."

The problem is described quite simply in the last part of verse ten. *"But you have not obeyed My voice" (v.10b).* These people had no excuse for not knowing God's law. They had no excuse for not obeying God's law. They had no excuse for not knowing that disobedience would bring judgment. Their forefathers were certainly aware of God's promise and warning. Just before sending the people into the Promised Land, God reminded the people, *"But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you" (Deuteronomy 28:15).* Even before that time, God had warned earlier in Leviticus, *"But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it" (Leviticus 26:14-16).* So here, God simply reminded His chosen people about the connection between their disobedience and His judgment. He said this is what He would do and He kept His word. Any questions?

Actually, the principle stated in this text does bring up some questions. For example, "Is Israel's history of suffering tied to the fact that as a nation they disobey God's truth?" Probably. Does this principle explain the horror of the holocaust? Some people believe that Israel's rejection of Jesus is the reason for God-ordained judgment for centuries. Some people believe that the holocaust in particular was a case of God honoring the peoples' request when the

people demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus: *And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"* (Matthew 27:25). Is persecution of the Jews all the way until Christ returns a matter of God simply keeping His Word?

Then there are some other pertinent applications of the principle. The Church, like Israel, is also God's chosen people. Within the local expressions of the Church universal are people who are religious but not born again. They are like Israelites in the nation who did not trust God. The Seven Churches of Asia (Revelation 2-3) are representative of this. In nearly all of those seven letters, Jesus promised some kind of discipline or judgment because of the disobedience of the church. Like ancient Israel, the whole was easily infected by the few evildoers. Obviously, those seven churches are gone out of existence. Was it God's judgment? Probably. He keeps His word.

No doubt the hottest question on our minds regards the chosen people of God in America. We are not Israel and should not expect application of precisely the same promises or judgments. However, principally the same God responds in much the same way to the same kind of chosen people. God expects His chosen people to love Him and obey; and when we don't, we turn out like the Seven Churches. But historically from the founding days of this nation until recently a large number of "chosen" people have made up the American population.

To talk about God judging, chastening, or disciplining those people is not a popular topic. Modern generation prefers to picture God as kind, benevolent, and loving unconditionally. He does. But He is also the same God who explained to Israel why He sold them into severe suffering at the hand of evil people.

That might explain why Germany is a pagan nation, God's work through Martin Luther notwithstanding. And France is a pagan nation, John Calvin notwithstanding. And Great Britain is a pagan nation, John Wycliffe, John Knox, or Charles Spurgeon notwithstanding. Whole nations and whole people groups reject God and attempt to quench His truth, not because God is too weak to resist but because God is in control. But we might forget that in pagan Germany, France, and Great Britain live thousands of chosen people who love God and trust Him. America is simply following in their

train. It is likely that very soon we will lose all resemblance of a nation founded on God's truth and principles. That will be God's justifiable judgment against us. But God will no doubt be gracious to allow thousands of us, His chosen people, to still love Him and trust Him.

Also, sometimes we forget to read the end of the book and discover that when Christ returns to this earth to set up His kingdom, there will be almost no evidence of faith. It is God's plan to allow this to happen for His glory. In settings of gross and unrelenting sin, God's judgment is always justified.