

Judges 1:1-2:10

Judges: Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons  
*How To Turn Blessing Into Cursing*

I can't tell you how many times I've heard people in sermons or teaching say "The church today is..." and then you fill in the blank. The church today is worldly, the church today is uncommitted, the church today is self-focused.

We talk about God's people as if they've all just been just walking with God down through the centuries and suddenly, in our day, the church has taken a turn away from God.

The truth of history is much different. When you stand back and get the big picture what you see is the frailty and the strengths, the faults and the merits, the weaknesses and the resilience of the people of God.

Down through the ages technology, science, medicine all change, but human nature is still the same. People have the same needs for love, acceptance, meaning and purpose as they always did.

Not only that, but people still fall to greed, lust, jealousy, and self-focus. Sin never changes. Temptation is the same. And the truth is that God's people can still be tempted like anyone else.

Today we're beginning a series on the Old Testament book of Judges we're calling "Missing Life For All The Wrong Reasons."

God is a God of blessing. He's the Lord of Life. As we looked at in our last series on Identity Theft, God wants us to enjoy life by enjoying Him.

Jesus said, *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* (John 10:10)

Our problem is that we misread statements like that and confuse the abundant life with the easy life. God never promises us an easy life. What He promises is that we can experience life to the fullest if we live it for Him.

There will be suffering. There will be trials. There will be temptations. But if we have faith that God is our Savior and we honestly let Him lead us, then the joy of the Lord will be our strength. We'll live life abundantly because we'll have joy, peace, patience, and most of all, purpose.

Who wouldn't want all that? And yet somehow, if we're not careful, we can miss the life that God has for us. We can miss life for all the wrong reasons.

The book of Judges gives us a unique picture of the ups and downs of the nation of Israel. As we go through these chapters in the coming weeks we're going to be confronted with some scripture that's definitely out of the ordinary.

Judges has some intense passages. In the coming weeks we're going to read some things that may sound kind of bizarre to our 21st century western ears.

Rest assured that that *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* (II Timothy 3:16)

That means that the book of Judges has practical instruction for our life today.

The events of the book begin after the death of Joshua and progress to just before the ministry of Samuel and Israel's first king, Saul. Up to this point God has repeatedly shown His people His faithfulness and His power. He has miraculously brought the Jews out of Egypt and faithfully preserved them during their 40 years in the desert.

He has begun to show his military might by driving out the first of the Canaanite nations before the Jews. He has displayed His power and sufficiency by bringing down the seemingly impenetrable walls of Jericho. He has shown again and again that he would be faithful to drive out these foreign nations from the Promised Land as long as His people looked to Him and trusted in Him.

The Canaanite people were incredibly depraved, almost beyond description. They were so degenerate that God finally brings judgment upon them. He's given them hundreds of years to turn away from their totally corrupt ways. Now He is using His people to drive them out of the land.

However, as time passes and Joshua nears the end of his life, the Jews commitment to finish taking possession of the Promised Land begins to fade.

Finally, in the final chapter of Joshua, the Jews renew their covenant relationship with Jehovah and vow to remain faithful to Him. They throw away the statues of the foreign gods that they've already picked up.

When the book of Judges opens they are preparing to move into the Promised Land on the west side of the Jordan to destroy the current pagan inhabitants of the land. They are preparing to go into the Promised Land tribe by tribe to take possession of the specific allotment of land God had promised to each of them. That is where we meet them as we move into the book of Judges.

The events described in the book of Judges cover about 300 years and describe a

time in Jewish history when God was recognized both spiritually and politically as the King of Israel.

Tragically, the book of Judges records a long and shameful series of sinful rebellions against God by the Jewish people. The cycle goes like this: Rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration. That cycle is repeated again and again in Judges.

We're going to see God's people at their lowest. We're going to see them giving up their chance at living an abundant life over and over again. Our goal in the coming weeks is not to beat up on them but to see where they went wrong and how to avoid falling into the same trap.

Along with all that, there's one more theme that that really makes me sit back in amazement. It's about the character of God and His sovereign working in the world. This is it: Even the most rebellious of people can't prevent God's ultimate plan from being accomplished.

As low as Israel stoops, in the end, God still uses them to bring us the Bible and the Son of God, Jesus Christ. That shows that God is a whole lot bigger than we often realize. And God will fulfill His promises.

What He says, He will do through us and sometimes in spite of us.

## **Turn to the book of Judges Page 217**

I want to encourage you during this series to read through the book of Judges on your own. We're not going to be able to go verse by verse and cover every verse in this series. Take your time and work your way through it. If you've read it before ask God to show you new things as you study. If this is your first time reading Judges, ask God to help you to get oriented to the flow of the book and to the characters in the book.

So let's start at the beginning.

### *I. God's People Are Divinely Blessed*

#### **Read verses 1-4**

Four hundred ninety-five years before Judges 1 God chose a man named Abraham out of a pagan, polytheistic culture and promised to bless him. This is what He said, *Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* (Genesis 12:1-3)

That great nation turned out to be Israel. The land was Canaan or Palestine, and the blessing that would come through him to the world was Jesus Christ.

As God sent His people into that land of promise, God promised to give them success. His whole purpose for them was that they should reflect His character to the world.

God's promises to Israel were both spiritual and physical. Before they entered the land God said this:

*The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.*

*And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (USA?)*

*And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. (Deuteronomy 28:9-13)*

Think about what God did for these people. He showed love toward them. He gave them His commandments. He sent them His prophets. He made them the ancestors of the Messiah who would bring eternal forgiveness.

Israel was blessed beyond measure. And so are we.

Because of the Jews we have a Bible. Because of The Jews we have a Savior. God pronounced His judgment on sin all the way back in the garden of Eden but at the same time He also promised the remedy.

The whole Old Testament chronicles the story of our redemption. It's all about the family history of Jesus.

We've sinned and deserve hell. Jesus paid the price for sin at the cross and rose again. The Bible says in the Old Testament, *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6)*

It says in the New Testament, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

The message is the same. The story never changes. The story of redemption is woven through the entire fabric of the Bible.

*I. God's People Are Divinely Blessed*

*II. God's Blessing Can Be Diminished Through Compromise*

Jacob, Abraham's grandson, fathered 12 sons. They're the ancestors of what we call the tribes of Israel, and the ones for whom the tribes are named. Each occupied a separate territory in the promised land except the tribe of Levi, which was set apart as priests to serve God.

Judges Chapter one tells about some of the tribes pushing out the Canaanites and settling their inheritance. But many did not.

### **Read verse 28**

They said to themselves, "We know that God said either wipe them out or push them out of the land, but that's really hard to do. We know better than God and it makes more sense to let the Canaanites live here and pay us tribute money and be our servants."

But it got even worse than that. **Read verses 31, 32**

The people of Asher just lived in and around the Canaanites. They just became neighbors. They might have even had backyard barbecues together. Who knows.

The point was God's people decided, for their own set of reasons, that God's way was too hard. They knew better than God. They believed that God didn't really understand what's going on.

I'm sure they rationalized their disobedience to the point where it made complete sense to them. It was God that was out of touch with their lives. So they did life their way instead of God's way.

You say, "What's the big deal? Why was God so harsh? What could possibly be wrong with making friends out of your enemies?"

Here was the problem. The Canaanites were a sophisticated agricultural and urban people. The Canaanites absorbed and assimilated the features of many cultures of the ancient Near East for at least 500 years before the Israelites entered their area of control.

They invented the form of writing that ultimately became our alphabet.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, they found a land of farmers, not shepherds, like they'd been in the wilderness. The land was fertile beyond anything these Hebrew nomads had ever seen. The Canaanites attributed this fertility to their god Baal.

You can just imagine these Jews seeing all this and the wheels start turning. Could the God who had led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness also provide fertile farms in the Promised Land? Or would the fertility god of Canaan have to be honored? Maybe, to be safe, they should worship both Jehovah and Baal.

The people of Canaan had a highly complex system of worship which was all based on fertility. Robert A. Guisepi writes, "Cultic ceremonies involving sexual acts between male members of the agricultural communities and sacred prostitutes dedicated to the Baalim were focused on the Canaanite concept of sympathetic magic. As the Baalim (through the actions of selected men) both symbolically and actually impregnated the sacred prostitutes in order to reproduce in kind, so also, it was believed, the Baalim (as gods of the weather and the Earth) would send the rains (often identified with semen) to the Earth so that it might yield abundant harvests of grains and fruits."

Sexual activity and perversion permeated every aspect of Canaanite worship and society.

God knew exactly what would happen if His people were exposed to Canaanite culture. It wasn't the Canaanites who were going to change, it was the Jews. And that's exactly what happened.

Instead of tearing down and destroying the Canaanite idols and places of worship, the Jews slowly but surely began to adopt their deviant, degenerate ways of worship.

So here's a people who had been so blessed by God. You'd think it would all be so clear to them. Instead they get pulled into the vortex of the twisted Canaanite religions.

What were they doing? They were walking away from God's staggering and extraordinary grace. They were walking away from the source of life and hope and trading it off for a lie.

It was an appealing lie. On the surface it looked like a whole lot more fun than

God's truth. On the one side you have God saying, *You shall not commit adultery.* (Deuteronomy 5:18)

On the other you have the Canaanites saying, "You can not only have sex with lots of people, but it will actually please God!"

It was an appealing lie that duped many of God's people but it was still a lie.

The Bible says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.* (Ephesians 1:3)

In Christ we have forgiveness of sin, hope, peace, joy, grace. We have the promise of heaven.

Isn't it incredible how easily we get sidetracked? Isn't it startling how we can know God's truth and enjoy His blessings and get pulled off track by some temporary appeal to pleasure or control or pride?

It's like we're walking in the floodlight of God's truth and Satan pops around the corner holding up some cheap, dime store, shiny, plastic, made in China, little trinket and we become mesmerized. We're hypnotized by some little bauble and totally focus on it and ignore the cascade of divine light and truth.

It's not even like God has to take His blessings away from us. It's us that walk away from them.

*I. God's People Are Divinely Blessed*

*II. God's Blessing Can Be Diminished Through Compromise*

*III. God's People Can Lose The Results Of God's Blessings*

## **Read 2:1-4**

If you trace out the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament you find out that He's actually the pre-incarnate second person of the trinity. So this is God speaking.

He reinforces that ultimately He will uphold His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That's the promise of the land, the multiplied descendants, and the blessing through them to the world.

But unconditional covenants can have conditional blessings attached to them. In other words, God never changes His promises to us. He always fulfills them But that doesn't mean that we can't incur His judgment for disobedience.

God never changed His promises to Israel but look what He says here. He says, *I*

*will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.*

I'm faithful to you but you haven't been faithful to Me. I told you not to make any agreements with the Canaanites and beyond that I commanded you to tear down their altars to their false gods. You didn't do it. So here's what I'm going to do.

The ground isn't going to open up and swallow you. There won't be any lightning bolts from heaven. Here's my judgment.

*I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.*

I don't know if you're grabbing onto this but God's words here are really scary. I have an idea for a sermon series I want to do someday titled "The Scariest Verses In The Bible." Here's a preview. Coming attractions. God says you wanted what you wanted more than what I wanted, so I'm giving you what you want.

When I was a kid I used to wish a lot. I saw a couple of those movies about Aladdin's lamp and I figured out the perfect strategy. If I was ever in a second hand shop and happen to pick up a magic lamp my third wish was going to be, "I wish that every wish I wished from now on would come true." None of that "limited to three wishes" stuff for me.

Fortunately I never came across that magic lamp. It's amazing the clarity hind sight gives you.

Looking back I am so thankful 99.9% of my wishes didn't come true. Over and over again what I thought I wanted at the time would have been the very opposite of what I really needed. What I thought I wanted and what was best were usually two very different things.

Back a number of years before the time of Judges 2, the people of Israel were wandering in the desert. God brought them out of Egypt with a miraculous display of His power but the people still doubted Him.

They were hungry and complaining so He provided manna. Manna was bread from heaven. Fresh baked every morning, they didn't even have to go down to Super Fresh. It was just there on the ground.

But after a while the people stopped being thankful and started to complain. Here's what they said about this divine bread that had kept them alive up until this point.



**Turn to Numbers chapter 11 Page 130 Read verses 4-6**

Where's the beef? All we have is the bread from heaven! We remember how good we had it back in Egypt. (Of course they conveniently forgot about that little slavery issue that caused them to weep and cry out to God for deliverance.)

Look what God says. **Read verses 18-20**

Moses says to God, 'Where are supposed to get this meat?' Here's the answer.

**Read verse 31**

God gave them what they asked for. He about buried them in meat. Psalm 106 explains, *But they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul.* (Psalm 106:14-15)

God said, "I'll give you what you want. You don't want to honor Me? You think you know better how to run things than I do? You want to be in charge instead of being thankful for My wisdom, and leading, and guidance? No problem. But watch out, because spiritually you're going to come up pretty empty."

Getting what we think we want, rather than what God wants for us can be the worse form of discipline.

That's what happens back in Judges 2. For centuries after this the Canaanites were a thorn in Israel's side. They were constantly opposing them and time after time God's people become duped by their false religions.

God's people can lose the results of God's blessing. You might be a person who can say with assurance "I know that Jesus Christ died for my sins and rose again. I know that God says that whosoever will may come. But something's not right. My life's not abundant. In fact, right now it seems pretty empty."

I'd start with the gospel. Jesus said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?* (John 11:25,26)

It's one thing to believe the general truth that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world.

It's quite another to believe that He died for your sins personally. Have you personally put your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior?

That where you start. If you've truly trusted Christ then the next question would be, are you living in light of His blessings?

Have you presented your body as a living sacrifice to Him or are you really serving yourself? In Judges, over and over again, God's people turned blessing into cursing by their self-serving agenda.

God wants to flip that around and turn cursing into blessing. He wants to work in His peoples' lives as we walk through the sin-cursed world, to shower us with all spiritual blessings.

He wants us to find our security, meaning, purpose, confidence, and strength in Him