

4. Conflict and Crisis: The Judges (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Judges 4, Judges 6, Judges 14, Heb. 11:32, 1 Sam 2:1; 2:12–25, 8:1–7.

Quotes

- I think we have all experienced passion that is not in any sense reasonable. *Stephen Fry*
- Every life is a march from innocence, through temptation, to virtue or vice. *Lyman Abbott*
- It's obviously a lot harder to try and be a good guy than it is to be a bad guy. The world is a fundamentally evil place, it seems like. So in order to be a good person, you have to fight temptation and vice. *Michael Shannon*
- I am tired of people saying that poor character is the only reason people do wrong things. Actually, circumstances cause people to act a certain way. It's from those circumstances that a person's attitude is affected followed by weakening of character. Not the reverse. If we had no faults of our own, we should not take so much pleasure in noticing those in others and judging their lives as either black or white, good or bad. We all live our lives in shades of gray. *Shannon L. Alder*
- A hero is someone who, in spite of weakness, doubt or not always knowing the answers, goes ahead and overcomes anyway. *Christopher Reeve*

Questions

How do we see the great controversy playing out in the stories found in the book of Judges? What is the main theme of this part of Israel's history? What does it mean that "all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25 NLT). What can we learn from these stories? How do we see the people's relationship with God?

Bible summary

The prophet Deborah plays a critical role in Israel's success documented in Judges 4, while in Judges 6 God calls Gideon to lead his people. But perhaps the best illustration of the "conflict and crisis" that of Samson in Judges 14. The time of the judges is referenced in Heb. 11:32. 1 Samuel 2 recounts the call of Samuel in a time of great wickedness that even included the sons of the high priest Eli, while late in Samuel's life he has to deal with the people's desire for a king (1 Sam. 8)

Comment

Samson's passionate life, full of fighting and lust, is a conflicted tale. Surely the context and societal circumstance explain some, yet it is hard to read some of the commentary that, "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men..." Judges 14:19 NIV. In fact every time the "Spirit of the Lord" comes upon Samson, he carries out violence...

The climax of the story is with Delilah, though his role as leader of the Israelites for twenty years must not be forgotten. It seems almost inconceivable that after repeated betrayals Samson should continue to be with Delilah. She had made her loyalties very clear—they were to her people, the Philistines, and not to Samson. But Judges 16:4 makes it clear he had fallen in love with her.

Samson seems to think he can go on playing with fire and not get burned. Delilah complains that Samson is making a fool out of her by lying about the source of his great strength. Why does he not respond that she should not be trying to betray him to the enemy? After such repeated evidence, why didn't he just leave? The reply must be that he became so sure of his own strength, and his own ability to outwit his foes, that he went along with her little game—only to discover that this was no little game, and that by betraying his God through breaking his Nazirite vow, he ended up as a blinded slave.

Notice in the story how the Philistines worked through Delilah. She must have known what happened to Samson's wife. And she clearly demonstrated no true love to Samson. So what was he thinking? How was he representing God to those around him? And even at the end, what was achieved by his murderous suicide, except more hatred, bitterness, and suffering? It is a sad episode for a people who knew the true God, but did not witness rightly.

And God? Weeping for foolish Samson, with all his misused power. For his people, led by an intemperate strongman easily distracted by pretty women. For the Philistines too, who did not receive a good picture of the true God, and who mourned their dead at the hands of this foolish "man of God."

The time of the Judges is characterized by everyone doing right in their own eyes. This shows us how far we can abandon truth and follow our own ideas and desires, as foolish as Samson playing games with Delilah. The great controversy plays out here too, with the seductive lies of the Devil all too often winning out over the true reality of God's love for his erring people...

Ellen White Comments

God's promise that through Samson He would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death. {CC 132}

There was dwelling in Israel a woman illustrious for her piety, and through her the Lord chose to deliver His people. Her name was Deborah. She was known as a prophetess, and in the absence of the usual magistrates, the people had sought to her for counsel and justice. The Lord communicated to Deborah His purpose to destroy the enemies of Israel, and bade her send for a man named Barak, of the tribe of Naphtali, and make known to him the instructions which she had received...

Barak knew the scattered, disheartened, and unarmed condition of the Hebrews, and the strength and skill of their enemies. Although he had been designated by the Lord Himself as the one chosen to deliver Israel, and had received the assurance that God would go with him and subdue their enemies, yet he was timid and distrustful. He accepted the message from Deborah as the word of God, but he had little confidence in Israel, and feared that they would not obey his call. He refused to engage in such a doubtful undertaking unless Deborah would accompany him, and thus support his efforts by her influence and counsel. Deborah consented, but assured him that because of his lack of faith, the victory gained should not bring honor to him; for Sisera would be betrayed into the hands of a woman. . . . {DG 37}

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