

Judges 6A

- It's time to turn the wheel once more
 - Samuel now introduces the fourth major apostasy in the book of Judges
 - This turn of the wheel will run from chapter 6 all the way to the beginning of chapter 10
 - And it will encompass four judges, though one judge in particular, Gideon, will be our focus during most of these chapters
 - As I've mentioned already, Israel's cycle of sin and redemption continues to deteriorate in Judges
 - And we're going to note that deterioration very clearly in this episode of sin in Israel
 - When Israel calls upon the Lord during their misery, He will not welcome their request for mercy
 - And the judge He raises up is a man with notable weaknesses
 - And the nation responds to God's mercy by killing each other at a point
 - Leading to even worse rebellion

[Judg. 6:1](#) Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.

[Judg. 6:2](#) The power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds.

[Judg. 6:3](#) For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them.

[Judg. 6:4](#) So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.

[Judg. 6:5](#) For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it.

[Judg. 6:6](#) So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD.

[Judg. 6:7](#) Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian,

[Judg. 6:8](#) that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery.

[Judg. 6:9](#) 'I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land,

[Judg. 6:10](#) and I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me.'"

- The story begins with that anticipated phrase Samuel uses to mark the beginning of a new cycle of sin: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - They did what was right in their own eyes by worshiping idols, but in the judgment of God, it was evil
 - And as a result, the Lord gave Israel seven years of misery under the Midianites
 - The Midianites were nomads who descended from Abraham and Keturah, his third wife
 - We often forget that Abraham had three wives, not just two
 - And here's another example of how the Bible reflects on the error of taking multiple wives
 - In every case in scripture where a man takes multiple wives, the Bible always makes clear that such a choice was wrong and contrary to God's will
 - In Abraham's case, for example, we can clearly see how taking his second wife, Hagar, was a mistake
 - Scripture makes clear that Hagar was a decision of Abraham and Sarah's flesh, not one prompted by the Spirit
 - And in the result, Abraham's decision produces severe negative consequences for him and for Israel even to this day
 - And here we see the negative consequences of Abraham taking a third wife as well
 - It produced the Midianites, enemies of Israel

- The Midianites lived in the plains east of Moab on the eastern bank of the Jordan river
 - Since they were nomads, their livelihood didn't depend on establishing cities or agriculture of their own
 - Instead, they made their living as raiders
 - At harvest time, they would descend in great number on neighboring peoples to steal their crops and possessions
 - Then they would escape back to their lands
 - In effect, the Midianites forced other peoples to do the hard work of growing crops and raising herds for them
 - They were able to accomplish these raids with the help of camels were told in v.5
 - Midianites were among the first to domesticate camels
 - A camel is large, fast and can carry significant cargo, making it ideal for raiders
- In vs.2-3 we see how the Israelites responded to the tyranny of the Midianites
 - The Israelites took to hiding their crops in the caves of mountains to conceal them from the raiders
 - The hillsides of Judea are covered with caves and dens making them perfectly suited to hiding crops
 - The Dead Sea Scrolls were hidden from the Romans just this way
 - Despite trying to hide their produce, the people of Israel were still terrorized by the Midianites
 - You can only hide so much in caves
 - And so the Midianites would ride in, take what they wanted including all livestock
 - And ride out leaving the people destitute
 - This pattern continues for seven years as God's punishment to His people for their idolatry
 - Remember, these punishments are the direct result of Israel disobeying a covenant which they agreed to keep

- And in that covenant given through Moses, the Lord warned Israel in advance of what they would experience if they disobeyed the covenant

[Deut. 28:15](#) "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

[Deut. 28:16](#) "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

[Deut. 28:17](#) "Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

[Deut. 28:18](#) "Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

[Deut. 28:19](#) "Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

[Deut. 28:20](#) "The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. ...

[Deut. 28:25](#) "The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

[Deut. 28:26](#) "Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

[Deut. 28:27](#) "The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

[Deut. 28:28](#) "The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart;

[Deut. 28:29](#) and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.

[Deut. 28:30](#) "You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit.

[Deut. 28:31](#) "Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, and will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you will have none to save you.

[Deut. 28:32](#) "Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do.

[Deut. 28:33](#) "A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually.

[Deut. 28:34](#) "You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

- We can see many of these things the Lord promised taking place during the time of Judges
 - In particular, notice God promised Israel would lose their hard earned crops and livestock
 - And Israel would be defeated by their enemies while still in their land
 - They would flee in every direction as an example of terror before the world's eyes
 - And in Deut 28:29 the Lord says the people will grope at noon like a blind man in darkness
 - He's referring to the way Israel will be hiding in dark caves during midday
 - Groping in darkness as they try to hide from their enemies
 - The Lord predicted exactly what Israel would experience as they suffer the consequences for their disobedience
- It's amazing how much misery Israel was willing to tolerate without waking up to the reality of their circumstances
 - They were suffering in all these many ways because they continued to live in disobedience to the clear instructions of the Lord
 - And remember, the commandments they are rejecting were given by God for Israel's benefit
 - Those commandments had the power to promote Israel's well-being
 - To bring them peace and joy
 - To prosper them under God's care
 - These weren't commandments designed to make life harsh or unpleasant
 - Nevertheless, the people disobeyed the covenant choosing to live in their flesh, seeking to pleasure themselves in unholy and destructive ways contrary to the word of God
 - And so the Lord responded as He promised with these consequences

- And I imagine at the first raid, the people of Israel rationalized the calamity as merely bad luck or a momentary tragedy
- Then as things got worse under the Midianites, the people must have decided to fight back
- But when they realize they couldn't beat the Midianites, they came up with the cave solution
- Which was no solution since they merely became self-imposed prisoners in their own land
- Then as they lived in darkness, confined to caves, scared, miserable, destitute, they began to blame God
 - You would think that as their lives deteriorated into this miserable existence, they might have stopped to ask themselves why God was permitting it?
 - Because they should have recognized that nothing happens to God's people – then or now – that isn't according to God's permissive will
 - He has permitted everything we experience in life so it may serve some good purpose in His plan
 - But if we're going to find that good purpose, we must stop and consider what are circumstances say about our obedience and God's purposes
- Of course, there is a difference between trials and discipline
 - Not every bad experience is a punishment for living in disobedience to the Lord
 - Sometimes God brings us trials and persecution which can look like discipline but will always feel very different
 - When we are experiencing discipline, we'll feel conviction, we'll feel sorrow and hopefully we'll repent to seek God's forgiveness
 - But when we're being tested, we'll feel peace and even joy at the prospect of receiving persecution for the sake of the Gospel
 - Here's the rule of thumb
 - God brings trials upon children living in obedience

- He brings discipline upon children entrapped in sin
- It appears, however, that seven years go by before the people even begin that soul searching process
 - For seven long years that just accept their circumstances
 - Life has gone from blissful to atrocious, from blessed to cursed, and yet the people don't stop to ask how did we get here
 - We might expect that as they groped around in the darkness of those caves they might have had reason to stop and ask that question
 - They knew the Lord's power and how He had brought them to this land
 - So they should have asked have we done anything contrary to the Lord's will that would lead Him to cause us to suffer in this way?
 - And even after seven years, their don't ask the right questions much less arrive at insightful answers
 - Their blindness and the darkness of the caves is a perfect representation of the spiritual blindness and their darkened hearts
 - Since they can't see the reasons for their suffering, the Lord responds in vs.8-10 through an unnamed prophet to explain what should have been obvious
 - The Lord reminds His people that He was the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt, brought them into the land and defeated their enemies
 - Then He says since I am the all-powerful God, you have no reason to fear the Amorites (i.e., all the Canaanite peoples)
 - Clearly, if God can defeat Egypt, He can protect Israel from anyone, including the Canaanites
 - So Israel's enemies can do nothing to Israel...except what God allows
 - The Lord's point is that their can be only one explanation for the suffering Israel is enduring at the hands of the Midianites

- The Midianites are winning because the Lord is letting them win
- And if the Lord is letting them win, then He must have some good purpose for allowing it
- But understanding that purpose requires the Israelites to ask these questions themselves and then follow the answer wherever it leads
- We have to learn to think like this too
 - Our covenant doesn't bring guaranteed calamities like the covenant given to Israel, so we can't look at a simple list like the one in Deut 28
 - But that doesn't mean we can't see when the Lord is trying to get our attention
 - On the contrary, the discipline of the Lord is always designed to be self-evident, scripture says

[Heb. 12:1](#) Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

[Heb. 12:2](#) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[Heb. 12:3](#) For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

[Heb. 12:4](#) You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

- As the writer of Hebrews points out, sin is an encumbrance in our life
 - It holds us back from obeying and pleasing God
 - It holds us back from enjoying the peacefulness and joy of a life lived according to the Spirit and the word
 - And it stops us from accomplishing the good works He has set before us which hold opportunity for eternal rewards
 - Which is why we are told to strive against sin continually
- But if we fail or give up, the Lord will bring us discipline to help us confront our sin

[Heb. 12:11](#) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- The Lord trains us with discipline, which is never going to be fun
 - The Israelites weren't enjoying the Lord's discipline hiding in caves and watching their crops and flocks disappear
 - But if those measures led them into greater obedience, then it was all worth it
 - Because it would lead to repentance and then obedience, which gives God opportunity to restore Israel in peace
- If we live in sin, sooner or later the happy facade of our world will start crumbling down
 - And as God brings discipline, we need to seek the full value of it by asking why is God allowing this?
 - In some cases, the answer will be because we refuse to obey Him or have stopped resisting sin
 - We gave in, we gave up, we made excuses, we got depressed, discouraged or maybe we just don't care anymore
- Even when we stop confronting our sin, the Lord doesn't give up
 - He responds with discipline so that we might get back on track and experience the peace of living in obedience
 - But we have to ask the question with an honest desire to know the truth and then do what's required
- As the time to restore Israel comes, you can see the Lord responding differently this time around in Israel than He has in the past
 - Clearly, the Lord isn't pleased with Israel so that even as He acts to free them, He does so almost reluctantly
 - And when He does respond, He selects another unlikely man, Gideon
 - What follows in chapter 6 is the commissioning of Gideon as the next judge (or captain) of Israel

[Judg. 6:11](#) Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.

[Judg. 6:12](#) The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior."

[Judg. 6:13](#) Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

- Gideon is a man who personifies the state of Jewish society in his time, much in the same way Deborah and Barak were examples of their day
 - The weakness of men seems to continue, and Gideon is a good example of that weakness
 - He is man of self-doubts and poor leadership skill
 - He wishes to serve God but he remains drawn by the culture around him
 - And though Gideon wins the battles as the Lord appoints, in the end he commits idolatry and engages in sin by marrying many wives
 - There are no pure heroes left in this book, since we're dealing with a culture on the decline and a people who are corrupt
 - Nevertheless, the Lord continues to remain faithful
 - As He steers Israel from one apostasy to another
- When it's Gideon's turn to take the wheel, the Angel of the Lord appears to him by an oak tree probably in the Jezreel Valley
 - And Gideon is so meek that he is working to thresh his wheat in a wine press
 - Normally, threshing was done on a high place out in the open
 - Because the process of threshing involved beating the stalks of grain to separate the fruit from the chaff
 - By doing this on a high place, the wind could catch the lighter chaff and blow it away

- But because Gideon was so afraid of the Midianites, he has gone to a wine press
 - Wine was typically pressed in low places to keep the juice from running off
 - So he is hiding out of sight of the Midianites
- The Angel of the Lord appears calling Gideon a valiant warrior
 - The salutation is designed to cause chuckles, because Gideon is anything but a valiant warrior
 - But the Lord is addressing Gideon looking ahead to who he would become, not who he was in that moment
- The Lord's appearing must have taken the form of a human being in this case
 - Because Gideon doesn't respond in awe or terror, but with argument
 - In fact, he seems to bring accusations against the Lord
 - Gideon says if the Lord is with us (meaning with Israel), then where is He now?
 - How can we say the Lord is with us in the midst of these terrible circumstances?
 - Haven't many believers asked this very question?
 - When our circumstances get bad enough, we ask how God could still be on our side or working for our good
 - We assume that if God were on our side, He would protect us from everything negative
 - The assumption was just as wrong for Gideon as it is for us
 - God didn't forsake Israel
 - Israel was the one to forsake God
 - And God didn't leave Israel's side...He's been their everyday
 - He's been at work bringing the curses He promised
 - So instead of asking where is God, they should have been asking why did God allow this? What is He trying to tell me?

- So God explains what He means:

[Judg. 6:14](#) The LORD looked at him and said, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?”

[Judg. 6:15](#) He said to Him, “O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.”

[Judg. 6:16](#) But the LORD said to him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.”

- The Lord orders Gideon to go in this strength, meaning to go in the strength of the Lord’s presence
 - It’s at this point that the Lord makes clear to Gideon that Gideon is in the presence of the Lord Himself
 - And then from this point, the conversation progresses something like the way Moses responded to the Lord in the desert
 - Ironically, Moses was in Midian at the time of his call, while Gideon is being called to defeat the Midianites
- When Moses was commissioned to free Israel from a powerful adversary, Moses gave three excuses, which the Lord addressed in turn
 - The first excuse Moses gave was that the Lord He should send someone else better suited
 - Likewise, Gideon is reluctant to answer the Lord’s call
 - And like Moses, Gideon begins by diminishing his abilities for this assignment
 - He says he comes from the least family of his tribe and he is the youngest in the house
- God responded exactly the way He responded to Moses earlier
 - The Lord said He would be with Gideon and that was enough
 - In fact, Gideon will be so empowered by God that it will seem as though one man defeated the Midianites
 - Remember this comment later when we learn how God equips Gideon for his battles

- Gideon isn't done with his worries and protests, but even now we're feel like asking is this the best God can do?
 - When God's people live in disobedience long enough and fail to turn back soon enough, some damage can be hard to reverse
 - In Israel, the culture is fracturing, disintegrating, weakening
 - And so even when God acts to bring it back, recovery isn't assured
 - And the best of society are a step lower than previous generations
 - The new norm is weakness as we see in Gideon
 - Similarly, if we endure in our sin long enough despite the discipline of the Lord, we are playing with fire
 - We are at risk of going so far that no degree of discipline will bring us back
 - Or even worse, that the Lord may leave us where we've put ourselves
 - But I hope for better things for us
 - As Hebrews says

Heb. 6:9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.