

Talk 2 - What is this doing in the Bible?

Introduction

It is an interesting time to be opening up the Book of Judges in church.

We are all horrified at what is taking place in Syria and Iraq against our Christian brothers and sisters, and not just them many other minority groups also. Truly horrifying.

And we will be praying for them and there is an opportunity to give to Anglican Aid today, if you want to grab the envelope and put a contribution in there today and place that in the offertory bowl and that will be collected and sent to Anglican Aid which is in a good position to support Anglican churches and other churches in this region who will be right now working very hard to care for the many refugees flowing out of Syria and Iraq. So we will be doing that today.

But I also wanted to take a moment this morning to do something else.

Because I can understand that with the horror I can imagine there might also be a bit of confusion as we open up the Bible and turn to Judges.

Because as you read that first chapter we read last week. You would look at that and go that looks a lot like what we are seeing today over there.

And if I am absolutely horrified at that, why shouldn't I also be absolutely horrified at what I am seeing there in the Bible ... AT GOD'S COMMAND!

[SLIDE]

What is going on here? Why is this in the Bible? Is it true that really all religions are the same. Is it true that all religions are dangerous and extremist and the best thing we can do is grow up out of it and reject these things? When I open up the Bible why should I continue to believe these things and put my faith in the God revealed to us in the Bible when I seem to see the same things I abhor elsewhere?

They are big questions for us, important questions that we need to answer, and that is why I realised yesterday I had to put aside the sermon I had been preparing to prepare a whole new sermon. That might help us wrestle and understand what the Bible might be saying to some of these questions.

So you will have to forgive me this morning, I'm sorry if you were looking forward to moving on into chapter 2, I am sorry if I might not be as polished as normal, and I might not be able to answer all of your questions - but if through this talk today you find you have a question that is not being answered then please write it down on the response slip put it in the offertory bowl and I **will** get an answer to you.

This is I think is a big issue for us and our community it creates a lot of anxieties but as always we can bring them to our Lord in prayer. So..

prayer

Before we go on - how about I lead us in prayer:

Our Heavenly Father,

We are so moved and horrified by what is taking place. It beggars belief and we pray that you would have mercy on them and relieve their suffering, comfort those who mourn and sustain the faith of your people that they may persevere in the face of such brutality and persecution.

Father we also want to come before you this morning humbly as we struggle with our nagging doubts and questions. Because we seem to see in the Bible you commanding the very thing that is so horrifying to us at the moment. And this shakes our faith. So we ask for your help this morning to look in to these things and your help to see them rightly, in the context of the whole Bible. Help us together to discern what is the same and what is different. And we ask this so we may know you better, so we may continue to trust in you, and so that we also might honour you by being prepared to give an account of the hope that we have in Jesus. And its in his name we pray. AMEN.

A big task

It's a big task before us this morning.

And I guess the question I want to answer is this:

Is what we are seeing here in the pages of Judges just the same as the Islamic Jihad we are seeing on our screens? It looks the same. Killing in the name of God. Is it the same?

Well you will probably not be surprised to hear me say I don't think it is.

And I think if we look at what the Bible is saying together and compare it to what is going on on our screens you will be able to see that too. So lets have a think through this together.

What is not a solution

And Actually let me start with what I think is not a solution which you may hear **even** around Christian circles sometimes.

[SLIDE] What is NOT a solution is to look at these parts of the OT or all of the OT and say well that was just a more primitive time, this was a more primitive stage of religion, which of course we cannot and don't take seriously anymore. And really what we are saying here is we don't actually believe this was God's word. We know better now.

I can sympathise with that view as apparently relieving the pressure but I think it has severe problems for us and does more damage to us in the end.

Firstly, it really doesn't take seriously the full extent of the nature of the Old Testament. For alongside Judges, the very context of Judges and the settlement of the Promised land is God giving his law to his people to live by.

The 10 Commandments.

Just before these event in Judges God had given his commandments to his people.

The very commandments and laws that were to shape the heart of their life and also the very laws that continue to deeply shape the thinking and morality of our own Western culture today. In particular the 6th commandment, “You shall not murder” and the 8th commandment “You shall not steal.”

If we reject the OT as immoral; the deep irony is we do so on the basis of the OT’s morality. We have a bit of a problem there. We end up becoming quite arbitrary in our thinking when we say well I like this bit but I don’t like that bit.

We don’t actually need to go that far. As you do that you may feel like you have chucked out some dirty bathwater but you have also chucked out a gorgeous baby at the same time.

Solution

Resist the easy modern option of chucking out what is hard and seemingly difficult [SLIDE] and work harder at what is the most profound and influential book of all time. God’s Word to us.

[SLIDE] no we need to work a bit harder at what the Bible is doing and saying at this part.

Because another point to remember here is that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow. That is we aren’t dealing with a different God here. The God we know who acts in and through Jesus with loving justice and mercy is the same God we are encountering in the pages of Judges.

While there are many mysteries and questions that arise out of our reading of Judges, we need to be working with confidence that the same God who acts so righteously and mercifully in Jesus is also the same God is acting here. And that can help us fill in some of the blanks.

Here is God’s Word, God’s rich and beautiful Word and we need to approach it a bit more humbly as we seek to understand “WHY is this in the Bible?”

Why has God just commanded, on one hand, “Do not murder and do not steal?” And then really just moments later command, “To drive these people OUT.”

What is going on here?

Behind the scenes

Well Firstly - Let’s go Behind the scenes ... lets look behind the scenes ... and see something that is not immediately apparent here in Judges but you would know if you had been reading your Bible from the beginning. And having looked at this behind the scenes I hope that will put us in a good place to find some answers.

See If you have been reading from the beginning of Genesis you will know that this moment of driving them out comes as no great surprise ... You will know that a significant part of what is actually happening here is that God’s righteous JUDGEMENT is falling upon these people.

See four hundred years earlier God had been walking Abraham through this land and at that time God had promised this land to

Abraham but back THEN it wasn't yet time for him to have it, (if he had heard God's promise and then gone and raised an army and invaded and killed everyone back then that wouldn't have been OK) why?

[SLIDE] Because in Gen 15:16 God had said,

"For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

that is ... The sin of the current inhabitants had not yet reached God's tipping point.

And That was four hundred years ago.

God has been patient with these guys for four centuries, enduring them, being merciful to them, giving them rain, giving them sun, making this a land flowing with milk and honey, giving them every opportunity to turn back and repent

God was ready to forgive, he was so willing to forgive ALL the cities of this country, we saw back in Gen 18 how Abraham had bargained, prayed, interceded for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the lesson we had learnt was that ... if only there was one, just one, righteous person in all of these nations – then surely they would have been spared, God who is rich in mercy and abounding in steadfast love, they would have been spared!

But no! In the harbour and shelter of his love and patience, their sin has just multiplied and has now finally reached its limit AND God's patience has reached its limit. And they as a people will be no more.

As so often in the Bible God's final judgement, isn't just left til the final day the judgement that is coming at the end of time, often intrudes in on the present. God begins to meters out the justice

that is more fully and finally coming to them on the Last Day. [SLIDE - BLANK]

Apologetic?

Now on one hand understanding this as God's right judgement may help our understanding but I cold undertand that on the other hand it may still leave you struggling at what seems like the severity of God's judgement.

And I understand if you struggle with the horror of that at this point.

Although I am aware that we do also have to recognise the inconsistency in our own hearts at times. Because what do we so often do? ... On the one hand -when we see evil and we sense God is falling short or delaying in bringing justice? ... what do we do ... we become indignant and accuse him of not caring and being slack ... we say "I can't possibly believe in a God who sits by and allows the abuse and suffering of children" (and I've heard pretty much those exact words this week - these events being thrown in God's face - how could he allows such things! ... yet on the other hand... when God comes forth and shows himself in places such as this as the avenger of guilt and the just punisher of sin ... then what do we do? ... we call him cruel and complain of his severity... "oh I can't possibly believe in a God who would call for such things!"

Don't think for a moment that it did not break God's heart to utter those words.

What perverse creatures we are to think WE are better at these things than God to think we KNOW better than God,

- We need to put away our self-righteous criticism and rather we need to humbly come before God and learn, learn the lessons he wants us to learn,
- we need to learn how sin is so vile that it merits judgement like this, (part of the Canaanite religion was to sacrifice children to the God of Molech)
- we need to learn from God of his patience and mercy that is willing to put up with such things for so long. To seek repentance and reconciliation for so long.
- AND FINALLY we need to learn here that one day judgement is going to happen far worse than it ever happened here.

Application -Deut 7 judgement in shadow

The temptation is to think that this was back then in the Old and horrible Testament, we've moved on and now, and we are in the New Testament now where everything is love and grace and things like that just don't happen. Right?

But that is to forget what Paul says in 1Corinthians 10:11, he looks back to Moses and the time of the Exodus and he says ...this

¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.

what has happened for them is a shadow of the realities that have happened are happening in our last days before we come into the promised land of the new creation.

The horror of what happened back then as judgement fell upon the occupants of the land is but a mere shadow of the horror of the judgement that is to come.

2Peter 3:5-10

[Do not] forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed ... By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

On one hand it will be a WONDERFUL day
 – there will be Jesus and everything we have hoped and longed for but it will also be a TERRIBLE day
 because on that day people will be perish.

Not perish a bloody violent death on the end of a sword but something much, much, much worse. It will be a day when the hope of God's grace is removed forever, it will be a day when people will finally and shockingly be handed over to the consequence of their sin; as God finally pulls back all the graces that he has for so long blessed them with. On that day they are handed over to an existence of bitterness and gnashing of teeth, on that day they will wish for the sword.

And AGAIN don't think for a moment that that won't break God's heart to do that.

O that our hearts would be more like his and that we would actually care about these things! I wondered this week what it would look like if I actually cared more about these things ... what would it look like for you?

Summary

That is the background to what we see in Judges. And I hope that places us in a better position to see how Judges is different to the Jihad we are seeing now on our screens.

[SLIDE Judges v Jihad.] [INSERT TABLE HERE]

Let me point out some obvious differences.

Judges

1. localised, specific, one off

Firstly what we are seeing here in Judges is a very localised, specific, one off moment of judgement. This is not a command for a way of life. This is not a general warrant in the Bible to violent religious Holy War. This is a specific non-repetative, non-programatic moment in history.

Do you see that? That is the most important and significant difference. Not a general Word from God to all believers.

So no Christian should be preparing themselves to go over to Iraq and join a Christian army to fight in a Holy War against Islam. That would be against the Word of God.

A Christian as part of a national army could go and fight as part of an international peace keeping force to help another country establish order that is ok.

2. The faith of the Bible is not territorily expansionist or imperialistic

The faith of the Bible is not territorially expansionist or imperialistic **The campaign in Judges** is not part of some kind of **imperialistic** conquest, a mere grab for power and territory, and we know this because no one was allowed to take plunder, they weren't allowed to make slaves. Even though they did they were disobedient at this point to the word of God. Everything was to be handed over in judgement.

And this is more generally the case. Once they occupy the land that is clared in judgement. That is where they stay. The Old Testament people are not expansionist or imperialist at heart. They stay put they are not militarily aggressive only defensive.

3. Light and blessing

Rather what is God calling them to be after this moment of Judgement? He is calling them to be something new and different in the world.

They are live as God's people, in God's place under God's rule.

And in this way they are meant to be a light and a blessing to the nations around them.

This what is at the heart of the OT, God's people living faithful loving equitable lives showing the great wisdom of God to the nations.

And at the height of the Old testament that is precisely what they are.

King Solomon is seen as one of Israel's greatest kings, and his wisdom flows to the nations around him. He welcomes nations from near and far. The great example is of the Queen of Sheba coming and marvelling in the wisdom and riches of God's people.

This is the heart of OT religion. Peaceful, living under God for the benefit of the nations.

And That is not Jihad.

Jihad

1. jihad is general and ongoing

On the contrary the Jihad we see going on is not a localised specific moment.

Its roots lay in the tradition of the Koran and associated writings.

While some scholars will disagree The quran sees Jihad as a required and appropriate method of spreading the Islamic faith at anytime.

Reference: Middle East historian [Bernard Lewis](#) argues that "the overwhelming majority of classical theologians, jurists, and traditionalists (specialists in the hadith) understood the obligation of jihad in a military sense."^[46] Furthermore, Lewis maintains that for most of the recorded history of Islam, from the lifetime of the Prophet [Muhammad](#) onward, the word jihad was used in a primarily military sense.^[47]

2. Jihad is expansionist and imperialistic

So also Jihad is territorially expansionist and imperialistic.

general internal jihad and external jihad - imperialistic and expansionist

They want the whole world to be muslim, they want everybody to live under sharia law.

In 1928, Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood, a rigidly conservative and highly secretive Egyptian-based organization dedicated to resurrecting a Muslim empire ([Caliphate](#)). According to al-Banna, "It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet."^[62]

Al-Banna also gave the group the motto it still uses today: "Allah is our purpose, the Prophet our leader, the Quran our constitution, jihad our way and dying for God our supreme objective."

And if you don't comply And you and your possessions belong to us. And that is what we have seen, property is confiscated and you are killed or as reports have come out this week, 1500 women and children have been forced into sexual slavery.

3. peace?

The word Islam does mean peace but it is a strange kind of peace that comes by killing your enemies. Convert or die. And in this way the so called peace of Islam comes to the world.

And serious reading of the Bible and you will find it is against violence.

And serious reading of the Quran and you will find violence is a legitimate means of spreading Islam.

loving muslims

Now at this point we do want to distinguish between what each book teaches and what its followers believe.

Just as there are many Christians who don't take the whole Bible seriously there are many in Islam who won't agree with Jihad. In fact it is quite clear that the vast majority of Muslims are just as shocked and horrified as anybody at what is going on.

So here is an opportunity for Christians to not return evil for evil or insult for insult but to love others and to reach out to a community who in Australia will be quite afraid at how the Australian community might react to them at the moment. If you know a Muslim now would be a great time to invite them into your home for a meal.

The abiding lessons of Judges for us today

Whilst we see the difficulties I am still excited at the opportunity to be able to go through the book of Judges over the next few weeks. Because there is a rich treasure of abiding lessons to be learned from this part of God's word.

Firstly, Judges teaches us much about ourselves.

We learn about ourselves.

It says, Yes there is a battle to fight.

What Judges shows us is that the real battle for them and us is not against them over there it's a battle in our own hearts.

After the death of their Joshua the question was **Will they obey? Will they trust God?**

And what we see is that they fail to trust God in what he asks them to do, and this had disastrous consequences for their faith.

And for us after the death of Jesus/our Joshua, Judges shows us we are faced with the same challenge.

Will we obey? And will we trust God in what he asks of us?

What he asks of us not the same. As Paul writes in Colossians:

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, it is not a fight with a sword against human enemies. **Our battle is against the powers and principalities.** It is a fight against those things that want to win our heart. Who will we trust? Will we forget God and turn away from him, turn to other gods/to idols like they did back then? or will we more and more grow in our trust of God who loved us and died for us to free us from sin?

Judges will be valuable for us because Judges reveals a cycle of sin and punishment and a also cycle and pattern of spiritual growth and renewal. Urging us to mature in our faith.

In Judges we are able to see How to win that battle for the obedience of the hearts that they never did.

And as we fight that battle and we do good deeds in God's name we can be the light that Jesus was and that he wants us to be.

We learn about God

Lastly and finally Judges is a book that continues to teach us about the one true God.

Judges continues to show us a God who is absolutely faithful. Who can be relied upon who can be trusted even in the face of what seems like impossible odds, even in the face of a terrible enemy.

That is great to know.

But Judges also reveals a tension.

How can this faithful God be true to his promise to give them this land? And how can he be true to his word that he will not abide evil?

See God's Old Testament people fail to obey. Are they really that much better than the people who were there before?

And if this is the case: how can he be merciful and keep his promise to give them this land? And still remain just and keep his promise to not abide evil?

That tension emerges more than ever in the pages of Judges.

And it will not be a tension that is resolved in the book of Judges, nor will it actually be resolved in all the Old Testament. This tension runs through all of the books of the Old Testament.

We actually won't see it resolved until the pages of the New Testament. We actually won't see it resolved until the cross of Jesus Christ.

There we see God's wrath and mercy meet. There at the cross we see God fully judge and punish the sinfulness of sin. And there we see God have mercy and fulfil his promise to bless us as he wipes away all our sin.

So Judges is a very important book for us to look at. Because there it reveals to us the seriousness of sin, and it points us to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Please join me next week as we continue to look at these things.

Concluding Prayer

Our Heavenly Father,

We are so moved and horrified by what is taking place to other human beings: men, women and children in this part of the world. It beggars belief and we pray that you would have mercy on them and relieve their suffering, comfort those who mourn and sustain the faith of your people that they may persevere in the face of such brutality and persecution. Please sustain them as you sustained Stephen so many years ago, please give your people that vision of Jesus who sits at your right hand, who is on the throne, who sees all and who is ultimate control, and may they know that no matter what may befall them, nothing can separate them from your love and the hope of a new heaven and a new earth and a new body that you have prepared for them.