

Day 12 – Feb. 14

Today we meet the first four Judges – Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah. Each has such different stories of their leadership. Each gets a different amount of story told, from Shamgar's single line to Deborah getting a story and one of our famous biblical "Songs". Different genders, different handedness, different enemies... the stories are so varied that they make for good reading.

Which is odd because the circumstances around these stories are so eerily similar, almost formulaic.

1. The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord.
2. So the Lord turned them over to the (insert Caananite nation here) who oppressed the Israelites for ____ years.
3. Then the people cried out to the LORD for help.
4. so the Lord raised up _____ as a rescuer to save them.
5. (insert the story of the rescue here)
6. And the people followed the Lord until the death of the judge.
1. Then, the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord once again.

Such different people fighting different enemies in different ways. Yet the story is the same. It's almost like an '80s television show. A simple formula that every show follows, but with enough variation that it keeps people interested. Left handed warrior? Woman prophetess? Frightened, insecure young man? Interesting variations on a theme.

But the story doesn't just circle endlessly. It is degrading with each retelling. The first Judge, Othniel, is unique in the "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he became Judge of Israel." Deborah was a prophetess who led them. Soon we'll meet Gideon the coward. And then Jephthah the impulsive. And finally Samson the corrupt.

Time seems to degrade rather than improve things. It wears away, breaks down, and dissolves things. So how do we see time doing this to us as God's people? Are we turning away from God and toward false idols like the Israelites of this day? Are we getting worn down in terms of following Christ's mission in this world? After COVID, we are seeing a growing exhaustion as a nation; is this pushing us down the road of spiritual breakdown? Important questions to ask ourselves, not just philosophically but personally.

And the good news of this passage, which does not excuse us from asking these questions but rather puts them into perspective, is that Jesus was our final Judge, and since He is still alive today, the cycle stops at point 6. And so we have hope even as we ask the hard questions of ourselves concerning our faith, our faithful obedience, and the endurance in our faith that time requires of us.