

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

1. Everyone did as he saw fit. *(Judges 21:25, 2:1-19)*

Judges 2:10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. 11 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. 12 They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger 13 because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. 14 In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. 15 Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. 16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshipped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. 18

Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Judges 21: 25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.

We come to a new year and a new series of sermons, this time from the Old Testament. We are going to explore a time when Israel was lawless, into a country that became a strong kingdom under a history defining king - David. I Samuel is a book that records that journey from disaster to a new hope. We will find that it was not a smooth transition but a rocky road on which the people learned many lessons.

If you came to the last of the Bible study and Prayer Meeting on a Tuesday afternoon, you would know that the people of Israel entered the land as a conquering army, that proved the power of God as they followed Joshua to victory - but what happened next. They were supposed to be a Theocracy, led by God under Judges that He raised up to lead them. The law gave them a strong moral and social structure and the land had been clearly divided up and marked out in the days of Joshua.

But it didn't last:

10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. 11 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. 12 They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them.

It is remarkable how quickly things fall apart from generation to generation and the people of God quickly took on the values of the nations around it. If we want to

understand the first book of Samuel, we need to understand what had happened to the people.

Scripture sums up so well what happened during the period of the Judges *everyone did as he saw fit*. This verse is going to haunt us quite a lot over the next few months as we explore Fellowship in the morning services and we look at 1 Samuel in the evenings.

The question is - God's will or ours. Our sinful, fallen natures make us always default to *everyone did as he saw fit*. I know that sounds depressing but is unfortunately true. It is a state into which we quickly fall.

The stories in Joshua are amazing - the stopping up of the River Jordan, the taking of Jericho. Amazing scenes that show the might and power of God. How quickly they forgot and were quite happy to do as they liked as they settled in the land and became comfortable.

What did God do?

In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. 15 Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

God dealt with them in judgement. If you were here on Thursday you'll know that the people never learnt throughout their history. The history of Israel is about rise and fall. When they did their own thing, they fell.

As we enter into a new year, we go in with promise, but we must realise that we are a people under God's authority and command. When we do our own thing, we are in trouble. Churches invariably go wrong when God's people start to be like these people *everyone did as he saw fit*. They went their own way, not God's.

Before we depress ourselves on all this let's remember that we are called to discern God's will and follow in it. It's the formula for success as we take this land. But we also need to remember to that there is much about us that is sometimes like *everyone did as he saw fit*. Let's be people in 2004 that seek God's will and do it, so like Joshua, we take the land - we stand in the gap and build the wall.

But what if we do fail, what if there is disaster all around. What Judges and Samuel teach us is that God is a God of redemption.

They were in great distress. 16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.

Let's give God the glory for His grace because He always provides for us a means of redemption in Christ. For Israel it was in the face of disaster. As I suggested on Thursday, the Lord prefers that we stand in the gap and build the wall. Let's praise Him that we find forgiveness. For Israel, they persistently failed:

But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

There was a cycle going on here of rise and fall. Churches are sometimes like that. They have golden ages and disasters. It's depressing to see a church that God once blessed being down at heel. You can usually also find sin at the base of it. A healthy church is one that seeks God's will and does it. A failing church is where *everyone did as he saw fit*. Think of any church where there has been disaster and you'll find sin at its root.

But so often the people of Israel found redemption. Let's never wallow in past failures or present problems. In Jesus we find redemption, forgiveness and newness of life. This evening, let's turn away from our sin and find Jesus afresh and find a new vitality as we look towards a new year. As we look to reverse decades of decline in the Christian faith in this area, we must remember that we worship a God who brings redemption and renewal to those who follow Him and trust in His power.

But most of all, as we transition from Judges to Samuel and Kings we see that the cycle of failure and decline can be broken and in the early dynasty of David that the people of God can be revived. The danger of falling is always there, but God wants to lead us into great things.

What was the difference? The difference was departing from *everyone did as he saw fit* to listening to the voice of God which is a scene we will get to as the young Samuel has the experience of hearing God in Shiloh.

As we come into 2004 we must move away from that human urge and desire to do as we see fit to finding that God is one who redeems and revives. As we see light at the end of our dark tunnel, that we will rise and exit to the light and not follow the cycles of the past. I believe this series stands as a warning to us not to go back, but an encouragement that even the way of God is sometimes a rocky one, we need to trust Him to do His will and purposes. We are moving on, we know how the people of God can fall, let's pray that we will see that revival continue.



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