

The Story – Chapter 8 – Few Good Men & Women

Introduction

This week we look at the book of Judges, which describes how Israel, now in the promised land, enters into multiple cycles of behavior in which they chose their own paths over God’s path, face the consequences of their decisions, and finally repent and turn back to God who steps in to save them. However, when things get good again, they forget God’s actions, and the cycle begins again. Also in this chapter God uses some amazingly flawed people to further God’s purposes. If you don’t have *The Story* book, you can read Judges chapters 2-4, 6-8, and 13-16.

Chapter 8 – A Few Good Men . . . and Women

The nation of Israel has finally settled in the Promised Land, just as God had promised to Abraham so many years before. However, the original inhabitants of the land also remained and Israel had a hard time not copying their behaviors.

After the death of Joshua, a destructive cycle emerged:

- Israel turned again and again to the worship of pagan gods.
- Israel experienced the negative consequences of its choices.
- Israel cried out for God’s help.
- God raised up a leader (called a “judge”) to save them.

We first hear the story of Deborah, a prophet, judge, and strong leader who delivered her people from the Canaanite king, Jabin and his powerful armies.

Then later, Israel was oppressed by the Midianites, and God called Gideon out of nowhere to deliver His people. Gideon was extremely reluctant to believe God was calling him and needed lots of encouragement before he acted. But God demonstrated his power by whittling Gideon’s army to just 300 men before it routed the Midianites, enabling God’s people to enjoy freedom...for a while.

The cycle continued and the Philistines soon dominated Israel. This time God used Samson, a man who God gifted with amazing strength, but who also exhibited huge character flaws. Indeed, Samson’s own life embodied the destructive pattern reflected by the entire Israelite nation during the roughly 300-400 year period described in the book of Judges.

Discussion Questions

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for each chapter beginning on page 473 of the book and also questions that can be found on *The Story* bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. In the days after Joshua, "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (see Judges 17:6 and 21:25) instead of following God's desires for them. Can you think of a time when you ignored God's desires for your life? What happened? How were you and others affected? What did you do? What did God do in your life?
2. Deborah's military leader was named Barak. Deborah trusted that God would go before the Israelites and fight, but Barak was fearful. Can you describe a time when fear held you back from trusting in God? What about a time when you were more like Deborah? How is her story reflected in the church's views of women in leadership?
3. The angel of the Lord greeted Gideon as a mighty warrior even though he was from the weakest clan and the least in his family (*The Story* at pp.107-8). God was patient with Gideon's insecurities, and ultimately demonstrated abundant victory through Gideon and a stripped down army. Can you remember a time when God provided for you through overwhelming odds, when everything seems to be against you? Do you tend to define yourself by your weaknesses or by the potential God sees in you?
4. Samson tended to rely on his own strength instead of acknowledging God as the source. Are there strengths or resources that you tend to rely on, instead of entrusting your life into God's care? How is that working for you?
5. The Israelites turned to God when they were afflicted and oppressed, but left God when life was good. What does this suggest about the type of relationship they desired to have with God? What about you – do you find yourself spending more time with God when you want or need something from God? What would you think about a friend who treated you well only when he or she wanted something from you?
6. Many of the judges were seriously flawed. (And I do mean seriously flawed!) What do we learn about God in the fact that he still used these people? What does it say about God's willingness to work with us today?
7. What questions came up for you while you were reading this chapter?