Times of the Judges

CYCLES OF SIN

Tuesday, November 10

Reading: Judges 1-3

> ***Judges 2:18*** *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 worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.*

The book of Judges is a sad book. For several centuries, the Israelites were caught in a cycle of sin and punishment that followed a distinct pattern. The cycle would begin when the people deserted God and began worshipping the idols of the nations around them (2:10-12). Because of this God would allow an invading nation to conquer and plunder His people (2:13-15). When things got bad enough, the Israelites would cry out to God (though not in repentance) and He would send a judge to deliver them and point them back to God (2:16, 18). But as soon as the judge died, they would once again turn to their idols and forsake the Lord. Then the cycle would start all over again.

The problem the Israelites had was that they wanted all the blessing of being God's people, but they did not want God Himself. They wanted His protection and provision but did not want to live by His standards or have a personal relationship with Him. Cycle after cycle they hoped their fortunes would change, but each time only brought more and more misery.

Most of the men God used as judges during this period were not stellar in character themselves. In chapter 3, we meet a judge named Ehud. By trickery and deception, he gets a private audience with the wicked King Eglon of Moab. Being left-handed, he wore his sword under his clothes on the opposite side than most soldiers would carry a weapon; thus it was overlooked by the guards. Once alone, Ehud plunges his sword into the obese king and cannot pull it back out because the king's excessive fat swallows the blade. Ehud then escapes and rallies Israel's army to defeat the Moabites.

LESSON ONE: Have you ever felt like you were caught in a cycle of sin? We all have sins that are more attractive to us than others. If sin wasn't attractive we would never do it! Satan knows how to hit us where we are most vulnerable. Eventually we move through the cycle of guilt, repentance, and the promise never to do it again - only to end up falling back into the cycle and repeating the pattern over again. What do we need to do to break out of this vicious sin cycle?

LESSON TWO: The simple fact that Ehud was left-handed was used by God to get the job of delivering His people done. (We won't go into detail about the morality of this deception.) God can use the little things in our lives to accomplish His purposes as well. How can God use the big and small details and abilities of your life for His glory? Are you willing to allow Him to do it?