

Title: Needed: A much longer spoon  
Text: Judges 1.1-2.5  
Theme: Trying to make a deal with sin  
Series: Judges #1  
Prop Stmtnt: Negotiating with evil assumes that evil is not evil.

The Elephant in the room and Setting the stage (2 sermons – same message)

Read Text:

There's an English proverb that dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century that says, "*He who dines with the devil had better bring a long spoon.*" In other words, if you are going to hang around the devil, you had better keep your distance. The truth is, there is no such thing as getting cozy with the devil and not being burned. There is no such thing as negotiating with evil because that assumes that evil will make and abide by an agreement. If you think that evil will keep its word, then you do not understand that evil is really evil. You cannot make an agreement with evil that says, you get this part and I get this part and we will leave each other alone. Sin is hell bent on total domination and will pretend to abide by a truce in order to get you to be lazy.

John Owen, the English theologian from the University of Oxford, famously and convincingly said, "Either you will be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." But, fighting sin gets old. Isn't there a pill for that? Can't I just ignore it? Won't it go away on its own? No, and if we do not declare war on it, then we will tolerate it. If we tolerate it, we will befriend it. If we befriend it, we will be ruled by it. If we are ruled by it, it will destroy us.

The book of Judges is a series of case studies on insanity. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results, right? Well, over and over we read a version of: "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals..." (chart)

This pattern of failure and disaster was set in place by Israel's refusal to do what God commanded her to do. But, I think that we all hesitate when we read that God commanded Israel to wipe out the Canaanites. It sounds a lot like ethnic cleansing or genocide, something that we are horrified by and would condemn now. So, why would anyone accept this as being okay? I want to address this.

The Elephant in the room

**I. The command to wipe out the Canaanites is clear, literal and specific.**

Deut 20.10-18 spells out the actual process. When Israel comes to a city that is far away (i.e. outside of its national boundaries) offer terms of peace. If they accept, they will be forced to hard labor. If they do not, then kill the men, but spare the women and children. As far as the cities that are in your area, offer terms of peace, which would mean, the

enemy would have to leave everything and leave the land. You may be tempted to think: that's crazy, who would do that? But the truth is, the land didn't belong to them anyway. It wasn't their (the Canaanites) land. God owns it all and can do with it what he wants to do. He chose to give it to Abraham's descendants through Isaac as the terms of the covenant. God keeps his word. So, the conquest was, in part, God giving the land to the people just as he had promised. The people of Jericho and Ai could have walked away.

## II. **The reason for the command is clear.**

### A. God is offended by the sins of the Canaanites .

Do you remember those chapters in Leviticus that go on and on about all of the things that God says "not to do?" In chapter 18, God goes into considerable detail about things that are offensive sins, such as incest, bestiality, adultery, homosexuality and idolatry (like the worship of Molech, which required the offering of children as sacrifices). Now, keep in mind that in Leviticus God is revealing this to Moses while the nation of Israel is in between Egypt and Canaan. And God says (Lev. 18.24-25) "*for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity and the land vomited out its inhabitants.*"

### B. The Canaanites are guilty and deserve death.

The Canaanites are not innocent, naïve, unsuspecting people who are clueless about God. According to Rahab, they know about God. They know what happened to Egypt, to Sihon and Og. They have their scouts and spies. Rahab responded to what she had heard about God with faith, the rest responded with defiance.

### C. This is not a rash reaction by God.

The fact that God does not respond to all sin with instant judgment is not because God is not offended. He gives time to repent. But, if there is no repentance, his offense only increases. The judgment meted out to the Canaanites was severe because God plays for keeps. Don't forget, the flood was bigger. Any of those in the surrounding countries who heard about what God had done, may (like Ruth) respond in faith.

### D. By making Israel God's tool of justice, Israel learned how serious sin really is.

Judges 7.25 – "*All Israel stoned him with stones.*" Israel was to never forget about the serious nature of sin. Being the means of judgment should have taught Israel the consequences of idolatry.

### E. If you do not deal with sin, it will deal with you.

What sounds offensive (Israel being a tool of judgment to punish people for their sin and purify the land) is a grace of God given to protect Israel from becoming like them. When

Israel did not do the difficult job God commanded, she became what God despised. Have you ever read the last several chapters of this book? It's some of the worst stuff that you will ever read, not just in the Bible, but ever. This is bad and these are the people of God. I don't want to preach these chapters and will probably be out of town on those Sundays and give them to Johnny or David or Chad or Bobby.

F. The issue is sin, not race because God judged Israel too.

This is what the book of Judges and the rest of the OT is about.

III. **Your moral sensitivities are not greater than God's.**

This is not an easy command and I do not pretend that it is but do not think for a second that you have a greater conscience than God or a higher moral standard. God is Creator and as our Creator, he is personally invested in his creation as a whole and particularly in the human race that he made in his image. Rebellion by humans is so wrong, so offensive, and so deeply grieving to God. And God demonstrates how longsuffering he is. But the fact that he gives people multiple opportunities to repent and long periods of time to do that, gives people the impression that he is apathetic or tolerant of sin. If the world had repented at the preaching of Noah during the 125 years of building the ark, there would have not been a flood. The weighty truth is this; sin messes up everything. And while God commands Israel to take this kind of action, there is a cost to doing so. Centuries later we read about a warrior who actually followed God with his whole heart, appeared on the scene, and was willing to stand alone and fight alone and defend the honor of God. This man, David, fought many battles and did then, what this generation should have done. But toward the end of his life when he wanted to build a Temple for God, God said, "no." You've shed too much blood. That was not a statement of judgment it was a statement reflecting the grievous necessity of justice and yet the weight that justice brings. You and I have no real concept of how just how pure, how holy, and yet how loving God really is. Let the text stand for itself and speak. We are bothered by this command only to the degree that we do not understand the cost of rebellion. As one man said, "we don't get to vote on who God is." God is not like Mr. Potato Head where you put in the parts you like. God is not concerned about opinion polls or with re-election. He is and that's that. The person who says, "Well, the God that I worship would never give a command like that" is not only ignorant, arrogant and pathetic, but is guilty of committing the same sins that Israel did when she assumed that this command was too hard or unnecessary or not important, or just not good.

So, the next generation after Joshua who arose, whose job was to finish the conquest, and refused/failed to do so, set into motion a pattern that would result in them, like the Canaanites, being wiped out. Instead of Israel being agents At the end of this book, Israel is doing about everything the Canaanites did and should expect to be wiped out and were almost completely wiped out (10 northern tribes) and would have been except for one thing. God had made a promise and God keeps his promises. Judah survived; a remnant.

There is only one truly innocent person in the history of the world. And that person was the recipient of the greatest injustice. Jesus, who never did anything to deserve the judgment of God, was the recipient of the wrath of God for every single person who would ever believe on him. When you really understand the cross you will understand how much God hates sin and has to judge it and you will understand how much God loves to redeem sinners and how far he will go to do so.

Judges 1.1-2.5 – Setting the stage

1. **Incomplete obedience is NOT obedience.** 1.1-36

a. **A promising start**

Judges begins with a promising start. The people inquire of God, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?” Notice that the people of Israel (the nation as a whole) initiated communication with God. Also notice that there is no question of what to do, because that is settled. There was no, “I don’t agree with this. I think there is a better way. Why do we have to do this? We’re better people than this.” They accepted the mission and the responsibility to finish the job. The question was, how will we do it and who will take the lead. This is great! The people of Israel (not just one tribe) are depending on God. The answer from God is Judah. That is significant for what happens after this book, but there are a couple of really neat things that happen here. Judah accepts the challenge! Wow! So much of the book of Judges is describing a people who are so utterly lacking in leaders. Not here! This is great! So, we see this dependence upon God and obedience to his direction 1.1-10.

There is something else that happens here. Judah invites Simeon to help. Now, Judah and Simeon were originally brothers of the same mother (Leah) so, there may have been a natural sense of kinship between the two, but I think there is more. The tribe of Judah was significantly larger than Simeon and therefore, the land allotted to Judah was much larger. It was so much larger that Simeon’s land was within the borders of Judah’s land. (Like the city of Center Line is within the city of Warren) Eventually, Simeon is swallowed up by Judah, but here, Judah is helping Simeon and the teamwork is noticeable and worth of being applauded.

Another thing that takes place in the first chapter is evidence of being responsive to good leadership 1.11-19a. This account about Caleb and how he goes about possessing his territory is repeated from Joshua 15. And again, I think that the writer of Judges is demonstrating that in contrast to what is about to happen, that it did not have to be that way. In these verses (11-15) there are three encouraging characters.

Caleb, the partner of Joshua from years ago, is here at the end of his life, still believing, still going, still moving forward, and still making things happen. No blood pressure or cholesterol meds, no “I’ve done my time, let someone else do it, I’ve earned the right to think only about myself” attitude. Caleb at 80+ years of age is successful in taking the city that ends up belonging to him. Great. But, he wants to see the entire mission succeed

and he will not live forever. He knows that the next generation has to own this mission. So he issues up a challenge. Whoever conquers Kiriath-sepher gets my daughter for his wife. Now, before you think how bad that must have been, hold on. Any guy who was willing to organize an army, attack a city and be victorious, had to be a good leader, a good soldier, determined, be dependent on God and obviously, love this girl. I think Caleb was pretty wise. This would help ensure a good leader who would marry his daughter and be a good heir for him. Othniel took him up on it and got the city and the girl. So, here is an example of the next generation who took to heart what Joshua and Caleb's generation understood. I am very impressed with Caleb's daughter Achsah.

She surveys the land that she and her husband have been given and she knows that it is not all that great (Negeb – desert-like), so after encouraging her husband to ask for more, she approaches her father respectfully and asks him for the springs of water. And Caleb grants her desire to be blessed with in this way. Whenever we run into Caleb we see a guy who says, “let's do this” and “let's do this now.” His daughter appears to be just like him. I think, Caleb, you did a good job raising your girl. She has the same spunk and not only did she get a good husband in Othniel, but Othniel was blessed with a great wife in Achsah. But there are some ominous signs.

#### **b. Ominous signs**

The first hint of trouble is seen in the treatment of Adoni-bezek. Adoni-bezek means the King (adoni) of Bezek. Judah accomplished a major victory. Defeating an army of 10,000 was a big deal, and perhaps out of anger or perhaps pride, Judah treated the defeated king as a trophy and humiliated him (explain). God never told his people to humiliate the enemy. Judah treated Adoni-bezek the way he treated his enemies. He saw it as karma. But the truth is, what Judah did was wrong because they were adopting the practices of the land instead of doing only what God said to do. That is an ominous sign. The people of God are never to take their cues from the world around them. So, while the battle began with the people depending on God, it did not end that way. Then according to v.16 the descendants of Kenite were content to settle with the people of the land instead of driving them out as they were commanded.

Judges 1 is an interesting read and this section (17-21) is a good illustration of what I am referring to. For the most part, the author refrains from commenting on the facts. He just says what had happened. Now, when we get to chapter 2, what he described militarily, geographically and historically in chapter 1, he now addresses theologically. But not yet. At this point we are left to read in between the lines. For example in 19a, we read the Lord was the reason why they were victorious in the hill country, but in 19b we read that because the Canaanites possessed greater weapons, the Canaanites remained in control of the plains. So, the author could say that Israel could not drive them out and that was true on their own. But the rest of the story was, they did not drive them out because they stopped trusting in God and were willing to accept the incomplete success as success. But incomplete obedience is not obedience and by failing to finish the job they planted seeds of destruction. Parents learn this lesson. Teach your children that incomplete obedience is not obedience.

And basically from that point on, through the rest of the opening chapter we read repeatedly of how Israel could not or did not drive out the enemy. Not only that, but there is a noticeable shift from the nation of Israel (how the book and chapter begins) to the tribes. Instead of thinking as a nation, they were thinking like tribes. Everyone was in it for themselves.

What happened? No one stood up and said, “this is unacceptable. I will not tolerate the status quo. I am not going to give in to what everyone says is inevitable. I will not accept the opinion that I can’t do anything about it. I refuse to be defined by what others say my generation is like as if I have to be that. I am going to take God at his word, and if I stand alone, then I will stand alone. If I die alone, then I will die alone. But I will not allow the circumstances to define me, I will not be intimidated by the size of the enemy, the strength of the enemy, the weapons of the enemy, or the words of the enemy but will instead, trust in God. Who is with me?”

This portion of the Bible would be so different if someone like that stood up. Can you imagine? Israel still had some momentum. In many cases, she still had the upper hand. She could have finished the job. Generations later, there was such a person – and he was a boy! A boy named David stood between two nations, two armies and there in that valley, in his squeaky voice going through puberty said to the enemy, you sir, have dishonored God and I am here as his representative to provide you with the opportunity to see him. In order to do that, here, meet my friend smooth-stone. He can be a bit of a headache, or in your case this will be a pain in the neck. And one boy, one little boy changed the course of a nation and history because he dared to believe God and did not give a rip about what the enemy or even his own friends thought. What if a David had stood up back then? What if a David would stand up now? Obviously, David points to Christ; that is the point. But, in pointing us to Christ, David puts some things about Christ on display, like being willing to stand alone and die alone because the cause is truly worth it. Christ was willing to die alone and did die alone because the cause of purchasing your salvation was worth it. What is the cause you live for? What are you willing to die for? Because you will die for something, but it may not be worth it.

I know that standing up, stepping out and speaking up is hard. Being elder means you are taking a risk. Being an ABF teacher means that you are going to be judged. Being a small group leader means that you are sticking your neck out. When you do that, you invite criticism and you will get it. It takes courage to be a leader but it takes no special skill, no courage and certainly no honor to hide behind a computer or a cell phone and launch verbal fault-finding, motive-questioning missiles at people who lead. You will get the “who do you think you are” looks. You will encounter all those who will tell you all of your faults. But keep in mind, these come from people who only live for themselves. Oh yea, they have opinions, but honestly, they don’t count. God’s does. But, if everyone allows their fear of others to intimidate them from leading, then we will be no different. One of my goals in this series is to challenge, cultivate and inspire a fresh band of leaders and a renewed culture of leadership. The church needs leaders who fear God above all. We need to be a people who are willing to make commitments and keep them.

The fear of others is itself an idol. The fear of what others may think or say is a cruel idol. As this book unfolds, we will see more and more a theology of idols. Idols make promises, but instead of giving you what they promised, they try to take everything from you and will take everything from you unless, you declare war on them and like my battle with warts, have a take no prisoners attitude. But, you cannot win this battle on your own. You need Christ.

When we pick up with chapter 2 next week, we will find a different beginning. Instead of the people coming to God in dependence, God is coming to them in judgment. Read chapter 2 this week and tell yourself, “it didn’t have to be this way.”

2. **Sorrow, tears, panic, promises and sacrifice are not the same as repentance.**  
2.1-5

Conclusion:

- 1) What sin in your own life are you tolerating or excusing? What have you allowed to be acceptable that God does not?
- 2) When are you going to stand up for what is right and keep standing up no matter what?
- 3) How has your fear of what others think bound you from doing what is right, or caused you to do what is wrong?
- 4) Are you someone who takes shots at leaders, or do you actually pray for them and look for ways to encourage their courage?
- 5) Will you follow Christ?