

Coach House Church

BEACONS

HARSH BUT NECESSARY

17TH MARCH 2021

If you know our house then you'll know how much we like visitors, in usual times, people staying over and people coming for meals. We've had many a bonfire and a big pan of curry and chatted late into the night. However, there have been some unwelcome visitors in the house lately-tiny four legged ones. And unfortunately, although I know they are all valued creatures, sometimes being harsh is necessary. The creatures have now been caught and dispatched and are no longer running across the kitchen.

In the bible, there are instances where actions are harsh but necessary. Many times we won't understand why particular events happen and we'll be confused at the severity of what happens. The book of Judges is like this. The background to the events in Judges is that the people of Israel, having escaped from slavery in Egypt, wandered around the desert wilderness for 40 years, then finally entered the land promised to them by God, still did not totally trust and follow God's rules set out for their best interests.

Repeated throughout the book is the phrase:

"In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25)

Throughout, there is a cycle of behaviour of turning to God in distress when they faced the disaster of attack by neighbouring nations, followed by a drifting away from God's law and direction. As generations grew up they were further away from being actual eye witnesses of God's miraculous delivery from Egypt and his gracious protection. Their link to the events was through other's memories and they were prone to look around at the nations around them rather than having faith in God. Judges 2:10 says ...another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

As a result, God commissioned the Judges, a series of charismatic leaders who would help rescue the Israelites from their attackers and help focus their hearts and minds back on God's plan and promises for them.

In Judges 3 12-30 there is a judge called Ehud and this is a summary of his story. Following oppression for 18 years by the Eglon King of Moab, and the takeover of Jericho by the King and his allies, the Israelites finally call out to God for help. God listened to their cries and commissioned Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin. The bible notes that he was left-handed which, at first reading, seems to be an unusual detail to record. However, this is a vital piece of information, as he would wear his sword on the right and not one left as was usual. Any security guards searching him would not see it.

Ehud had to take tribute money to the King of Moab, a type of tax initiated by the ruling power. Once this was completed, Ehud turned back to the King and said he had a secret message for him. So, the servants were dismissed leaving them alone, locking the door behind them. As the King rose to listen to the message, Ehud took a sword that had been strapped to his right thigh and plunged it into the King who was described as very fat. The sword sunk deep into him so that the handle could no longer be seen so Ehud left it in place. The King was very much worse for wear (the harsh details can be read in verse 22) and Ehud took his leave through a back door.

Later there is a judge called Deborah. The people of Israel were again in a dreadful situation, following 20 years of oppression by King Jabin, a Canaanite. The commander of King Jabin's army was Sisera who was ruthless. He commanded 900 iron chariots plus further warriors so knew how to intimidate. Deborah is also described as a prophet who heard from God.

In Judges 4:7 she declared God's words to Barak, commander of the army of the Israelites:

"And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

Barak, however, didn't receive God's call to arms with great enthusiasm, such was the influence of Sisera. He asked Deborah to accompany him and his lack of courage meant he would not receive glory for the victory that was promised to him. Deborah said in chapter 4 verse 9: the Lord's victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman."

Deborah announced: This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you. (verse 14) The recount of the battle in verses 15-16 says that God threw Sisera and all his chariots in to a panic, allowing Barak's army to victory. Sisera, however, escaped North on foot towards a tent. This tent belonged to a distant descendent of Moses who had moved away from the other members of his tribe and who had been known to be on friendly terms with the King of Moab. Little did Sisera know what was going to happen next. Jael, the tent owner, invited Sisera inside, she gave him some water and then she hid him under a blanket. He was so exhausted and so sure he was safe that he fell fast asleep while Jael kept watch at the door. He never awoke from his slumber, as Jael entered and drove a tent peg through his temple and into the ground where he lay. What a harsh ending but

one that fulfilled the prophecy that victory would come from the hand of a woman.

All efforts by the people of Israel to keep true to God ended in failure. There was some stability under King David but the leaders, no matter how spirit filled and faithful to God's direction, never quite hit the mark. All had some flaw, some characteristic, an imperfection that meant that they could not be the perfect leader however hard they tried.

In Isaiah 53, the prophet describes the ultimate in 'harsh but necessary' events. It foretells the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah, God's only begotten son. It tells of the horrendous suffering that had to be endured, yet willingly like a lamb to the slaughter (verse 7).

Verse 6 tells us why this was necessary:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

We are no different from the people of Israel. But, God in his mercy, provided the perfect sacrifice for our failings, our flaws and our sin, the once and for all sacrifice providing our forgiveness, that would never need repeating. Read Isaiah 53 for yourself as we lead up to Easter and consider this was prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was even born.

Jesus endured the harshest of physical and emotional abuse, and set aside his rights and privileges as the Son of God.

In Philippians 2 it says:

6 Though he was God,[a]
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges[b];
he took the humble position of a slave[c]
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,[d]
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.
9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour
and gave him the name above all other names,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father

Very harsh but very necessary- Jesus in his rightful place in heaven, having created the way back to forgiveness and reconciliation with Almighty God.



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