Introduction:

In The Story, we come to a 300-year period known as the period of the Judges. A book in the Bible is named Judges. In the Old Testament while these judges not only could throw you in jail, they are known mostly for getting God’s people out of jail. Seven hundred years after God’s promise to Abraham, the people of God are in their own land, God is present in the tabernacle, a law guides their lives and a sacrificial system exists for forgiveness of sins. The people were truly blessed by God. But there is a problem: Sin. Sin still reigns in the hearts of the people. Sin raises its ugly head.

I. Israel’s Two Mistakes after Conquering the Land.
   a. We see the first failure of the people in Judges 1. “When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely” (Judges 1:28). They drove the inhabitants of Canaan; they confined them, controlled them, and enslaved them, but they didn’t remove them as God commanded. And it had very significant consequences for Israel. Israel began to worship the idols of the people that lived among them. Idolatry is a sin.
      i. Application: our environment can influence us toward wrong.
   b. We see the next failure of the people in Judges 2 after the death of Joshua. “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10). They did not teach their children about God and his great acts of deliverance.
      i. Application: Christianity is only one generation away from extinction.

II. The two reasons that God raises up the judges.
   a. God has blessed Israel in the eyes of all the other nations. God wants other nations to know His goodness and blessing.
   b. God powerfully intervenes when His people cry out to Him for help. When the people pray, God responds with deliverance.

III. Israel repeats a four-stage cycle in Chapter 8/Judges.
    (The cycle is repeated 6 times in the Book of Judges)
   a. Stage 1: SIN
      i. The people worship the false pagan gods of wood, stone, and metal. They are breaking commands Number 1 and 2 (Exodus 20).
         1. “You shall have no other gods before Me.”
         2. “You shall not make for yourself an image, . . . you shall not bow down to them or worship them.”
      ii. God wants to be first in their lives. Since the beginning of The Story, He has always wanted to be enough for His people. They want more.
   b. Stage 2: OPPRESSION
i. God gives His people what they want—distance from Himself. He removes His hand of protection and allows surrounding nations to oppress His people. Judges 2:22

ii. God uses 6 pagan nations to oppress His people:
   1. Mesopotamians oppress for 8 years;
   2. Moabites for 18 years;
   3. Canaanites for 20 years;
   4. Midianites for 7 years;
   5. Ammonites for 18 years;
   6. Philistines for 40 years.

c. **Stage 3: REPENTANCE**
   i. Wrong Turns. “Two wrongs don’t make a right, but three lefts do.” Not here. Turning away from God never turns out well. Time after time, the people turned away from the Lord, forgetting the challenge and warning of Moses and Joshua (Joshua 23:6-13).
      1. “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now. . . . But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.

   ii. Right Turns. If you find yourself lost or heading in the wrong direction, the first, best, right move is to STOP.
      1. The oppressed people cry out to God for help. The Israelites “return” to the Lord. Rather than continuing in the wrong direction, they decide to make a 180-degree turn in the right direction—God’s direction.
      2. If you find yourself moving away from God, or discover that you are lost, STOP and get back on the right path.

d. **Stage 4: DELIVERANCE**
   i. God raises up judges. We may get a wrong image when the Bible calls them “judges.” They are not black-robe wearing men and women who oversee trials like Judge Wapner or Judge Judy. They are not old law scholars who sit and interpret laws like Roberts, Alito, or Ginsburg. These judges are national leaders, warriors, and deliverers:
      1. Othniel delivers them from the Mesopotamians;
      2. Ehud delivers them from the Moabites;
3. Deborah, from the Canaanites;
4. Gideon, from the Midianites;
5. Jephthah, from the Amorites;
6. Samson, from the Philistines

ii. These are GREAT stories of God’s deliverance. They are not G-rated and seem more suited to dark graphic novels. Ehud and Deborah’s stories (Chapters 3 and 4) are among my favorites in ALL the Old Testament.

iii. It is important to notice that God orchestrates the deliverance, not the human judge. The judges were flawed human beings.

IV. Two judges illustrate flawed humanity.
   a. Gideon: Judges 6 and 7
      i. Gideon was from the weakest clan and was the weakest in his family. Using Gideon, God brought amazing deliverance to Israel from Midian.
      ii. “The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.” God reduces Gideon’s army from 32,000 (already outmatched) down to just 300 (a ridiculous number) so Israel and all the rest could see that the deliverance came from God, not Gideon and the army.
      i. Samson reveals the secret of his strength to Delilah: Judges 16
      ii. Samson’s pride and immaturity led to his death. Even in death, Samson brought glory to God and victory for Israel.

Application:
5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

We sin—we don’t keep God on the throne of our lives. 1 John 1:8
We are oppressed—our fellowship with God and others is broken. 1 John 1:6
We repent/confess—we are restored through the blood of Jesus. 1 John 1:9
We experience deliverance—we experience joy and fruitfulness. 1 John 1:7