

# Judges

**Purpose:** An apologetic for the monarchy.

**Outline:** 1:1-2:5 – Faltering Conquest

2:6-16:31 – Cycles of Good and Bad under the Judges

17:1-21:25 – Anarchy under the Levites

**Author:** Tradition says Samuel along with, possibly, Nathan and Gad (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:29)

**Date:** Events 1375-1050 BC; Written Document – 11<sup>th</sup> Century BC

## **Reading Judges**(March 30 – April 6):

-The refrain “In those days there was no king” indicates that this was written (or compiled) when there was a king. The Judges were not judicial officers, nor were they spiritual leaders, they were military deliverers graciously sent by God to rescue Israel. Repentance doesn’t follow the Israelites cry for help, but we see God’s long-suffering and compassionate love for his people.

Another theme is the issue of God’s grace and the law. Will God’s majestic holiness overpower his covenantal promises to his people? “As much as theologians may seek to establish the priority of law over grace over law, the book of Judges will not settle this question. What judges gives the reader is not a systematic theology, but rather the history of a relationship...It is this very tension that more than anything else propels the entire narrative” (Dillard & Longman *An Introduction to the Old Testament*).

### ***Chapter 1 – The Faltering Conquest***

Compare Joshua 1:1 (Moses has died, now Joshua will lead) with Judges 1:1 (Joshua has died, now who will lead?). It is unclear how the Israelites “asked the Lord.” Possibly they used the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30), which were the sacred lots (like rolling dice) often used in crisis to determine the will of God (cf. Numbers 27:21; Proverbs 16:33).

Compare Judges 1:11-15 and Joshua 15:15-19, which are the same. God had promised to drive out all the nations, so why the repeated failures in chapter one (v.19, 21, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34)? Because Israel stopped letting God lead.

### ***Chapters 2-16 – Cycles of Good & Bad under the Judges***

#### ***-Chapter 2: Disobedience & Defeat***

Compare Judges 2:1-3 with Joshua 23:13. Compare Judges 2:6-9 and Joshua 24:29-31, which are the same (shows the continued connection between the theme of Joshua and of Judges). We are given the theme of Judges in 2:11-23.

#### ***-Chapter 3: Othniel & Ehud & Shamgar***

The theme of Judges (2:11-23) is reinforced in “report form” with the story of Othniel (3:7-11). To say that the “Spirit of the Lord” came upon him is not a statement about his spiritual condition (regeneration/salvation), but that it allowed him to become a military judge/deliverer for Israel. The Hebrew word for “judge” (shaphat) also means “vindicate, punish, execute judgment.”

Literary feature: Othniel is in “report form” the other 5 major judges are in narrative form and balance each other. Ehud and Samson (both lone heroes). Deborah and Jephthah (from the Joseph tribes – Ephraim and Manasseh respectively – facing coalition armies) and Gideon (vs. his son Abimelech – Judge and Anti-Judge).

Ehud is a left-handed Benjamite (the name “Benjamin” means “son of the right hand” and they are well known to be left-handed). Ehud kills Eglon, the King of Moab, near Jericho. This is a really funny story for the Israelites (v.17,21-22,24-25), which concludes with the conquest of Moab.

Shamgar is the first of 6 minor judges (minor – just told they existed; major – full cycle).

*-Chapters 4-5: Deborah*

Deborah is the only judge to be called a prophet(ess). She is also the only judge to be seen filling a civil duty (4:5). She goes where Barak wouldn't. Deborah and Jael are the two women who win this battle. The Song of Deborah (chapter 5) commemorates the victory.

*-Chapters 6-8: Gideon*

The Big Question is asked in Judges 6:13 – “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about...” The partial answer is given at the end of verse 14 – “Am I not sending you?” The Lord sends Gideon who is from “the weakest clan in Manasseh.” This answer is the grace-filled response to the indictment of vv.8-10. Following verse 10 you would expect a message of judgment, instead it is a gift of deliverance thru Gideon.

In chapter 7, Gideon defeats the Midianites with 300 men (God sent 31,700 home). God once again displays that he is the one who wins wars and defeats the enemy. We engage in the battle by faith – following in obedience to God.

In chapter 8, the pride of Ephraim and the fear of Succoth results in a lack of support for Joshua in attaining victory over two fleeing kings. God had already given the victory, but the lack of faith (faithlessness that Succoth would call prudence) is evident. Israel's inability to follow the Lord consistently is also evident. But God continues to be gracious in sending deliverers.

*-Chapter 9: Abimelech.*

Murders his 70 brothers in his effort to become like a king. There is a war between two groups – you want to root for neither one.

*-Chapters 10-12: Jephthah.*

After the mention of two minor judges (Tola, & Jair), the next cycle begins with Israel's evil and the Lord's deliverance through Jephthah. Judges 10:15 is the only time Israelites confess their sinfulness in this book, which is followed by actual repentance in getting rid of foreign gods. The Lord raises up rejected Jephthah as a judge. The Gileadites needed Jephthah like Barak needed Deborah (parallel literary structure). Jephthah makes a foolish vow (cf. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5) that gives background for an annual commemoration. Compare Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11:29-39) and Saul's Son (1 Samuel 14:24-45). Chapter 12 gives the “Shibboleth” vs. “Sibboleth” account. This is concluded with the mention of three more minor judges (Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon).

*-Chapter 13-16: Samson.*

Perhaps the best known of the judges is Samson. He is set apart with a Nazirite vow (cf. Numbers 6:1-21) from birth. Samson has all kinds of good stuff in him from God, but bad stuff keeps coming out. Like other judges, there are aspects that prefigure Christ (i.e. Samson's birth narrative), but their failures show them to be far less than Christ (Samson's pride and moral failures). Israel needs more than a judge, they need a king; moreover they need a perfect king.

***Chapters 17-21 – Anarchy under the Levites***

Chapters 17-21 happen during chapters 3-16, but serve a different literary function. Chapters 19-21 are rather gruesome, need to be prepared to read them. The book closes very fittingly in 21:25 – “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (the refrain of this last section).

*-Chapter 17: Micah's Idols.* Micah establishes a local place of paganized worship.

*-Chapter 18: The Danites.* This paganized worship is taken over by the tribe of Dan who migrates from their appointed inheritance to the northern frontier.

*-Chapter 19: A Levite and His Concubine.* Scene # 2 illustrating the moral corruption of Israel. They are becoming (have become) as bad as the Canaanites before them.

- Chapter 20: Israelites Fight the Benjamites*. Further descent into chaos resulting from sin.
- Chapter 21: Wives for the Benjamites*. The cycle of conflict and consequence. It's all bad.