

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 14: The Book of Judges, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Introduction:

The books of Judges and Ruth are most often studied together because they happened at the same time chronologically, much like the books of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles. We know this is true because Ruth starts with the phrase, *"Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, . . ."* We will take them separately, however, and refer to the timing as it applies.

The time of the Judges has been called the Dark Ages of Jewish history since: 1. The people forsook God (**Read Judges 2:13**) and God forsook the people (**Read Judges 2:23**). It covers the historical period between the death of the great military and spiritual leader, Joshua, and the creation of a human monarchy under Saul.

This was a period of approximately 350 years which was a turbulent and often tragic time in Jewish history which is well defined by the phrase which ends the book, *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

This indicates two important things:

1. They gave up the kingship of God for anarchy.
2. What was right in their eyes was contrary to what was right in God's eyes. They didn't just do wrong, they did wrong thinking it was right. That sounds very modern.

The problem is this: When a man gives up allowing God to control his life he, in doing what he thinks is right, will often do the exact opposite of God's will. Don't you find that true in your own life? So the two recurring expressions are: *"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* and *"All the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord."*

Remember, Israel has come out of a long era of bondage in Egypt. They marched directly to the border of the "Promised Land," they failed to trust God (do not pass go, do not collect \$200), they wandered around aimlessly in the desert for years, and finally entered the land and took it with a flurry of military activity.

Now the life of hardship, toil, deprivation, wandering, and warring is over. The nomads operating on minimum rations are now the settlers and city dwellers in a *"land flowing with milk and honey."* Does Scripture not teach us that there is often more danger in prosperity than in want? This was a time of moving from physical warfare to spiritual warfare.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Understanding Judges:

What was the main problem confronting the new nation? (Keys are in chs. 1 and 2)

Solemnly and repeatedly Israel was warned to have no contact with the inhabitants of Canaan. The sin of the Moabites, Ammorites, Amalikites, Canaanites, Midianites, and Philistines was extensive and intense. Their religious, moral and social life style was completely vile. They polluted the land with their abominations. Their Gods were demon-inspired and were worshiped in the most immoral ways. The worship of Ashtaroth was especially odious and offensive to God and included sexual immorality and human sacrifice in its religious ceremonies.

The fact is that Israel was instructed to remove this moral cancer from the land and to set up a land of pure worship of Jehovah God and be His witness (and a blessing, by the way) to the surrounding world. Just scan chapter one and look for "but" and "did not."

Instead they *"Forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of slavery and followed after other gods."* This caused God to angrily respond. The people's turning away and God's response to that disobedience is the story of The Book of Judges.

The story is presented to us in cycles that become the foundation for our study. Perhaps you saw it as you read: I. Rebellion; II. Retribution; III. Repentance; IV. Restoration.

There are, in Judges SEVEN cycles. I call them:

THE REPETITIVE FOUR-PART CYCLES

The Judges:

The Book of Judges gets its name from the civil leaders God raised up to deliver Israel from its oppressors. The Judges were not trained arbiters in a court of law, as they are today. They were, in fact, Spirit-gifted leaders, chosen by God for very definite and specific tasks.

As opposed to the prophets, who warned the nation of coming judgment because of their disobedience to God, the judges were the instruments of God in delivering the people when they repented. Their job was to bring justice to the oppressed people of Israel. In order to make their role clear, the NIV translators use the word "led" instead of "judged" as it is translated in most other versions.

Although the judges are remembered primarily as military leaders they also functioned as civil authorities in a time when leadership was needed to counter the anarchy.

Author:

The writer of the Book of Judges is unknown, but Jewish traditional literature presents Samuel as the writer. The book was probably compiled during the early monarchies since it indicates it was written "in the time when Israel had no king."

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Theme:

Although Israel inherited the land of promise they repeatedly disregarded their covenant with God by doing what they wanted.

Disobedience resulted in oppression at the hands of their neighbors. That oppression led Israel to cry out to God. God responded to their cries by sending judges to lead in their deliverance. The people returned to God but soon went back to their disobedience.

Reading Judges can be depressing, making this many peoples least favorite Bible book, especially after the upbeat Joshua. It seems that Israel is spending all 350 years rebelling. A careful reading and charting of the book proves about 100 years of disloyalty and 250 years of obedience.

An important thing to notice is that the nation advanced and prospered when obedient and floundered and suffered when rebelling.

Lessons of the Book:

1. Ongoing history shows God's faithfulness to His covenant when Israel disobeyed, as well as when they obeyed. He did whatever He had to do.
2. Judges explains why Israel often suffered under the hands of their enemies. God even used enemies to discipline Israel.
3. God holds his people responsible for their moral and spiritual behavior. There is no victim mentality here.
4. The book proves, again and again, that the Lord, not the gods of their enemies, is the true God. "The Lord Our God, He is one."
5. The book illustrates the moral decay that comes, even to the best people, when they ignore God's leadership. We can't make it alone
6. The book shows the power of prayer and faith. Repentance brings response.

There were fourteen Judges involved in seven cycles and, as monotonous as the book can appear, there is something different in each story. A good study is to chart the events and note those differences.

We will only have time to outline the chapters and hit some high points.

Homework:

Read: Finish or re-read the book of Judges.

Think: What are my areas of weakness that cause me to allow the world system to influence my life?

Apply: Use the power of the Holy Spirit (same power as the Judges had) by allowing Him to fill you each day this week.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 15, The book of Judges, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Introduction:

The truth about the children of God, whether in the time of the judges or in the present age of grace can be summed up in the words of the famous "theologian," Dana Scully of "The X-Files": ***"I'm afraid that God is speaking but that no one is listening"***

God has always made sure he had a witness, a voice "crying in the wilderness," a Patriarch, a Leader, a Prophet, an Apostle, a person calling His children to salvation, repentance and obedience. But often His children just won't listen . . . then He will do what He has to do to get their attention. God disciplines every child He receives.

This is the story of the period of the Judges.

The Four Part Cycle:

1. The people **REBEL**, disobeying God and turning to idols.
2. That rebellion brings **RETRIBUTION** from God in the form of allowing oppression and slavery at the hands of their enemies.
3. Retribution and its pain cause the people to **REPENT**, to cry out to God confessing their sins and asking for His grace.
4. The peoples' true repentance brings a renewed blessing from God in the form of Judges to lead them to throw off the yokes of their enemies bringing **RESTORATION** of the covenant relationship.

The Book of Judges begins with:

I. ISRAEL'S WARS (Chapters 1-2)

The early victories of Israel were not totally carried out. It is possible that the dawning of the "iron age" in Canaan brought their enemies military weapons and machines frightening them. (see ch. 1 vs. 19)

They seemed to forget that the "Lord of Hosts" was the true "Captain" of their armies. (Remember Joshua gave up his sword.) Israel would be captured by or surrender to eight nations, but worse than that they would, in turn, serve their gods:

The idols, Baal, Asherah (Asteroth), and Dagon would be served in turn.

Again and again God allowed cruel, evil and ruthless tyrants to oppress Israel. Again and again, the enemies they failed to drive out came back to haunt them, growing strong and enslaving them.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

A. The Tribe of Judah (1:1-21)

The book starts with the death of Joshua (vs. 1) and the sons of Israel asking God, "Who shall go up first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" As we saw last week, God not only answers, but promises success.

1. Promise of victory (1:1-18)

The Lord said, "*Judah shall go up, behold, I have given the land into his hand.*" (v. 2)

Judah went out and with the help of Simeon and their armies they routed the Canaanites and the Perizzites, armies that had ten thousand men. They continued on from city to city until they hit the hill country and the armies of charioteers.

2. Peril of incomplete victory (1:19-21)

These victories were great but sometimes incomplete. Especially in the hills, Judah didn't drive the enemies of God out of the land (v. 19). At this same time, Benjamin and his armies also failed to destroy or drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem resulting in their "*being there to this day*" (vs. 21).

B. The House of Joseph (1:22-3)

Moving on into the chapters we find tribe after tribe winning the physical battles but, in essence, losing the spiritual war.

1. Promise of victory (1:22-26)

"The house of Joseph went up against Bethel and God was with them" (v 22). The victory is guaranteed as long as they obey God and are true to him BUT (vs. 25), "they let the man and his family go."

2. Peril of incomplete victory (1:27-2)

As we discussed in the last lesson, "but and did not" became the operative words:

vs. 27--"But Manasseh did not drive them out "

vs. 28--"Israel . . . pressed the Canaanites into forced labor, but did not drive them out."

vs. 29--"Neither did Ephraim drive them out . . ."

vs. 31--"Nor did Asher drive out . . ."

vs. 33--"Neither did Naphtali drive out the people . . ."

vs. 34--"The Amorites confined the Danites . . ."

Chapter two gives us the climax to this scenario in verses 7 and 10. **READ THE REMAINDER OF THE CHAPTER AS IT INTRODUCES (PREVIEWS) THE CONCEPT OF THE FOUR-PART CYCLES.**

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

II. ISRAEL'S WOES (Chapters 3-16)--Six Cycles of Subjection

Some people divide this into seven sections. That is true if you count the civil war that came between the fourth (Midianite) and fifth (Ammorite) captures. Since this was a civil war I do not count it as a true "cycle."

Remember, because of their disobedience, God said, "I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become as thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare to you." (v. 3)

That is exactly what happened.

Chapter three starts by giving us two reasons why God did not drive all their enemies out:

First, to train the young Israelites, who were not battle savvy, in the art and science of war (Some had not fought because they were too young and some had not because of disobedience. (vv. 1 and 2) **Second**, to test the obedience of the people to His commands.

They failed miserably, living among their enemies, trading with them marrying them, and even serving their gods. (w. 4-7) This brought God's wrath and the first "cycle" had begun.

1. Mesopotamians (3:8-11)

The Israelites settled among the Syrian nations and sought *peace through integration*. Slowly but surely they came under the domination of a man called Cushan-Rishathaim (Cushan of double-wickedness) who was King of Mesopotamia. For eight years things got worse and worse until the people realized they had left the only hope of victory and freedom, the God of Moses and Joshua.

v 9-- *"And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, **Othniel**, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. "*

VS, 10-- *"And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged (led) Israel. "* Othniel was an experienced fighter (see Joshua 1 5) and he went to war and won.

Israel then experienced 40 years of peace and prosperity.

2, Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalikes (3:12-30)

Eglon, King of Moab, shown in this account as a fat, repulsive little man, established a provincial capital in Jerusalem and made treaties with the Ammonites and Amalekites in order to subdue and enslave Israel. He did!

This time Israel was in bondage and paying tribute for 18 years. (v 1 4)

v 15-- *"But when the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, **Ehud**, the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.."*

Why is it important that he was left-handed? Read the story and find out.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Ehud assassinated King Eglon, escaped and led the nation in a successful rebellion defeating their enemies and **bringing 80 years of peace**.

During the battle to defeat the Moabites in the east, the Philistines tried to attack from the west but God had a man, **Shamgar** to protect their flank. He personally killed 600 with an oxgoad. (v 31)

Because he was also a leader and deliverer, I add his name to the Judges.

3. Canaanites (4 and 5)

(vv. 1 and 2)-- *"the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jaban."*

Just when you think things can't get any worse, they got worse. **Jaban** has some special-forces with ten thousand soldiers including nine hundred of those dreaded chariots and led by the famous **General Sisera**. Because of their military might, **the Canaanites ruled Israel for 20 years** in a reign of terror that caused the Israelites to call out to God.

During this time a prophetess named **Deborah** was leading her people as a civil servant and settler of disputes. (vv. 4 and 5) Obviously she was a true prophet since God told her what Israel needed to do to throw off the yoke of oppression. She called **Barak** to lead an army of ten thousand men to meet Sisera at God's appointed spot, the River Kishon.

Of course, since God is now with the armies of Naphtali and Zebulun, the Israeli army routs Sisera despite his chariots. Sisera ran to Kadesh where he planned to hide in the home of **Jael**, whose husband was a friend of Jabin's. BIG MISTAKE! She drove her point home, effectively ending his career.

Both prose (4) and poetry (5) are used to describe the feats of Deborah and Barak. The song however turns to the glory of God, the true source of the great victory. Just so no one could mistake His hand in it; the stanzas in vv. 19-23 describe the river miraculously sweeping away the mighty chariots.

This victory brought a period of 40 years of peace and rebuilding.

4. Midianites (6-8)

Now we meet one of the two most famous judges, **Gideon**. He and Samson are presented in more detail and their personal exploits are presented.

v. 1--*"The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them **into the hands of Midian for seven years.**"*

Midian caused a slightly different problem for Israel. They raided their farms and brought all their own livestock and camped on their land, depleting it and causing the Israelites to live in caves in the mountains and starve. Their suffering brought them to cry out to the Lord and He chose a young farmer to be their new Judge (leader).

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

The story of Gideon is a story of a struggle with fear. The Lord came to Gideon and challenged him to lead Israel like a "valiant warrior."

Gideon passed the first test by tearing down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father. (w. 25-32) Then, after a fleece test proving God was with him, he gathered 32,000 soldiers, but God had other ideas.

God would guarantee He would alone get the credit by reducing the size of the army, first to ten thousand, then to three hundred who watched while they drank. With three companies of just one hundred men each, Gideon launched a surprise attack with trumpets and covered torches, causing panic and self annihilation in the camp of the Midianites.

No longer afraid, he defeated city after city and executed the Midianite kings. The Israelites were so grateful, they offered to make Gideon king. His answer was, "the Lord shall rule over you." (ch. 8:23)

He wasn't perfect and chapter eight accounts his weaknesses, but he was a man of faith (see Hebrews 11) and he believed God would keep his promise. **His leadership brought 40 years of peace and prosperity** but the people began to slide, becoming idolaters, even in the context of following God.

Intermission (9)

What some people consider the fifth cycle was really a **Civil War**.

Gideon had a son by one of his concubines, **Abimelech**, and he was "the man who would be king." He mounted a campaign to become just that. He got the citizens of Shechen to make him king and kill his brothers, eliminating his competition. Only **Jothan** escaped and contested against him. The battle that ensued lasted over three years until a woman dropped a mill stone on Abimelech's head as he was storming a city. Tola and Jair then led Israel for about 45 years and seemed to lead well since rebellion was only reported after they died.

5. Ammorites (10:6-12)

vs. 6-- *"Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashyaroath, etc. . ."*

The list of idols Israel was following seemed endless. This seems to be their deepest period of sin and disobedience. It led them into an **eighteen-year oppression** and affliction under the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites in the east.

The Israelites under Ammonite control called out to the Lord, "We have sinned against Thee, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baal. " (v 10)

Deliverance came this time through **Jephthah**, one cast out by the Gileadites because he was born of a harlot. He sent a delegation to the Ammonites to argue Israel's right to the land but they refused (11:12-28) The Spirit of the Lord empowered him and he moved against them. That was all he needed, but . . . To secure favor with God he vowed to offer the first thing to come out of his house

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

as a burned offering. (11:29-31) He won and he met his only daughter coming from his house at his return. (11:11:32-40) The great debate is, what happened to the girl?.

Since the other three judges mentioned: **Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon** are not discussed, it seems likely they were civil leaders but did not engage in any military activity.

6. Philistines (13-16)

The other of the two worst famous Judges was **Samson**. His story is even better known than Gideon's. It is certainly the most puzzling and confusing

Samson is an enigma. How can a man be a judge of God when he is so spiritually bankrupt?

His heritage was perfect: His parents followed an angel's instruction and raised him as a Nazirite (Numbers 6). His mother was so righteous that she even took the vow herself. (Parents can only do so much.)

He was empowered by the Holy Spirit: The Spirit was active in his life as He empowered him to do supernatural things for Israel.

He is a jock, physically strong but morally weak. He is dumb, unable to make wise decisions or listen to wise counsel. He is out of control, unable to harness his passions or his emotions. He is carnal, ignoring his spiritual position and heritage.

I can only understand it as I look at the entire book of Judges and see that, as the cycles of subjection continues, the people of God seemed to get less and less resistant to sin and their failings become more and more heinous.

Likewise, the judges, starting with the upright and heroic Othneil, moving through Deborah and Gideon, seem also to be representative of that slide. Their heritage as well as their faith, consistency and commitment seem less as time passes.

Samson is the consummate example.

You are, I believe, familiar with all of the Samson story:

- The marriage to Timnath, a Philistine woman, against his parents wise advice.
- The killing of the lion and violation of his vow by getting and eating honey.
- The riddle to Timnath's people, their treacherous act, and his response.
- The giving of Timnath to another causing him to tie torches to foxes.
- The giving over of Samson to Philistines and his killing of 1000 men with jawbone.
- The capture in Gaza lusting for prostitute, removing gates.
- The battle of strength and wits with Delilah and her people.
- The capture and humiliation of Samson and his explosive death.

The Philistines succeeded in oppressing Israel for forty years including the twenty years of Samson and the leadership of the Judge/Prophet Samuel. The Philistines were not truly subjugated until David, recorded in II Sam. 5.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

II. ISRAEL'S WAYS (Chapters 17-18)

The final section of Judges gives us **three prime examples of Israel's moral defection**. Sin permeates the religious, moral, and political life of the nation.

A. Religious Apostasy--The Tabernacle (17-18)

vs. 1-- *"Now there was a man in the hill country whose name was Micah. "*

The account of **Micah**, his theft of money from his mother, the way he restored the money only to make an idol of silver from part of it is a weird story. Micah set up a false religion, based on the worship of his idol and made his son the priest until persuading a passing Levite to take over. **He really thought he was pleasing God with his shrine and priest.**

His idol was stolen by some passing adventurers from the tribe of Dan and, a wise Levite opportunist who became priest to their tribe.

Micah's priest, Jonathan, was a true Levite, a direct descendant of Moses (18:30). ***This episode illustrates*** how low even the true spiritual leadership of the nation had gone, setting up rival sanctuaries (with idols) in a land meant to have the Tabernacle and worship the true God.

B. Moral Awfulness--The Home (19)

The second account is of a **Levite** who retrieves a runaway concubine and is returning home in Ephraim. Night falls and he seeks shelter in **Gilbea** because it is inhabited by Israelites, rather than pagan Jerusalem.

Wrong choice. In shades of Sodom and Gomorra, the men of the town come to have sexual relations with the Levite. His host, to avoid this breach of his protection, pushed the concubine out to them instead. They ravaged her and left her for dead. The Levite cut her body into twelve pieces and sent one to each of the tribes of Israel.

This could be the most gruesome story ever related in Scripture. Why is it here? The answer is here for us in verse 30: *"And it came about that all who saw it said, 'Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up.'"*

This episode illustrates how low the children of Israel could go, even in the treatment of their own people and was a call to clean up their act.

C. Political Anarchy--The Nation (20-21)

Covenant law required that the tribes punish the guilty among them or they would all be punished (Remember Ai). Since Benjamin refused to turn over the guilty, **civil war ensued, all Israel vs. the Tribe of Benjamin.**

There were numerous wars, with numerous casualties ending with, only 600 Benjamite survivors. In finding wives for the survivors to reestablish the tribe, Israel went to surrounding peoples again and intermarried with all the inherent problems.

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

The end result was that the Nation broke up into tribes (21:24) and this brought a sad ending to the tale: verse 25-- *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. "*

This episode illustrates that no man can living without a king. They will serve God or a man. They will move into anarchy and chaos.

THREE THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL LESSONS FROM JUDGES:

- 1. The God of History uses whoever and whatever He needs to test or correct his errant people. God's ultimate goal, however, is to save, bless and aid His people as they live in close personal relationship to Him.**
- 2. The God of History is able to chose whoever He wants as His instrument: weak, strong, man, woman, highborn, lowborn, righteous, or unrighteous.**
- 3. The God of History often ordains government to punish sinners and protect the righteous.**