

Judges

Where We Are in the Story	The Book of Joshua narrates Israel taking hold of and dividing the land God promised to Abraham. It's a positive book about God fulfilling his promises and his people obeying and receiving. The Book of Judges is precisely the opposite. Israel had been in the land for a number of years and bad things are happening. The writer of Judges traces it to disobedience. Because of it, the curses Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy have kicked in.
The Cyclical Pattern	In the Book of Judges, there is a cyclical pattern to the narrative that makes the book fairly straightforward in the detail of its content. (1) Israel turns from God to serve other "g"ods. (2) God removes His hand of blessing, which allows pagan nations (ex: Midianites) and/or the Canaanites (ex: Philistines) to overtake and subdue Israel. (3) Israel repents and turns back to God. (4) God raises up a judge to deliver Israel. (5) God restores Israel to their independence, and they are able to serve God as they were designed to do. (6) The land rests. (7) Then the process repeats
The Darkest Book in the Bible	Judges is the darkest book in the Bible in terms of disobedience. The writer of Judges attributes this to the following: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25). God being their king wasn't enough. Consequently, when they began doing what was right in their own eyes, judgment came in the form of God raising up their neighbors to threaten them.
Interesting Heroes	One of the most remarkable things about the Book of Judges is that the judges that God used to deliver Israel reflect their dark times. Sampson, for example, was a Nazarite who defiled the essence of what it means to be a Nazarite. Yet, God still used him to deliver Israel.
Major and Minor Judges	There are major and minor Judges in the book. By "major" and "minor," we don't mean more/less significant. All were significant. We separate them into these categories based on volume of information. For example, Gideon is a major judge because the book contains more information about him than Shamgar. (1) <u>Major</u> – Othniel, Ehud, Deboarh/Barak (her general), Gideon, Jephtah, and Samson (2) <u>Minor</u> – Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (3) <u>Anti-Judge</u> - Amimelech
Key Verses	Judges 2:10-23 is the most important passage in the Book of Judges. It explains everything that goes on in the book from a theological perspective
Outline	The best way to understand the essence of the book is to concentrate on the theological explanation (2:10-23) and focus on the major judges.

The Theological Introduction That Describes Why Things Happen Like They Do in Judges

(1) What Israel Did

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the Lord's anger ¹³ because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (2:10-13).

(2) What God Did

In His Discipline - ¹⁴ In his anger against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. ¹⁵ Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress (2:14-15).

In His Mercy - ¹⁶ Then the Lord raised up judges,^[a] who saved them out of the hands of these raiders (2:16).

(3) What Israel Continued to Do

¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways (2:17-19).

(4) What God Continued to Do

²⁰ Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to

test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their ancestors did.”²³ The Lord had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

Lessons from Othniel

(1) Disobedience Leads to Enslavement.

⁷ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. ⁸ The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years (3:7-8).

(2) How the Holy Spirit Works in the OT.

¹⁰ The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. ¹¹ So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died. (3:10-11)

Lesson from Ehud

(1) Weakness is Strength

¹⁵ Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶ Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit^[a] long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. ¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸ After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way those who had carried it. ¹⁹ But on reaching the stone images near Gilgal he himself went back to Eglon and said, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.” (3:15-19)

(2) Significance

Ehud being left-handed helped him get into the King’s chambers. Since most people were right-handed, guards would check a man’s left thigh for any weapons. But Ehud, being left-handed, kept his on his right side, successfully hiding it from them.

Lessons from Deborah

(1) Queen Bee That Had to Be Because Others That Needed to Be Lived Fearfully

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading^[a] Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’” ⁸ Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” (4:4-8).

(2) Queen Bee That Looked Forward to a Day When Others That Need to Be Will Actually Be

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: ² “When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the Lord! (5:1-2)

Lessons from Gideon

(1) God Sees You Not As What You Are at the Time of His Calling. But What You Will Be.

¹¹ The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” ¹³ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” (6:11-13)

(2) Only Faith Pleases God, Especially When He Doesn’t Make Sense

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.” ⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. ⁷ The Lord said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home.” (6:5-7)

Lessons from the Anti-Judge, Abimelech

(1) Evil Does Not Go Unnoticed, Especially from Within

Abimelech son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan, ² "Ask all the citizens of Shechem, "Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?" Remember, I am your flesh and blood." ³ When the brothers repeated all this to the citizens of Shechem, they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is related to us." (9:1-3)

(2) God Deals Justly with Wickedness, Even When We Feel Like That Justice is Delayed

²² After Abimelech had governed Israel three years, ²³ God stirred up animosity between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem so that they acted treacherously against Abimelech. ²⁴ God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers. (9:22-24)

Lessons from Jephthah

(1) Jephthah Is the Best Example of a Judge That Was a Sign of His Times

³⁰ And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, ³¹ whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering"... ³⁴ When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break." (11:30-31; 34-35)

(2) Yet, God Still Used Him

²⁹ Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. (11:29)

Lessons from Samson

(1) A Bad Example of a Nazarite

⁸ Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. ⁹ He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass. (14:8-9)

*** He also visited a harlot in Gaza (Philistine territory) and had his hair cut while asleep*

(2) But His Greatest Act of Deliverance Came Via His Death

²⁹ Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, ³⁰ Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived. (16:29-30)