

JUDGES

INTRODUCTION

1. AUTHOR & DATE – Judges appears to have been written during the early years of the monarchy about 1025 B.C. Samuel as the leading member of the prophets is a candidate for author, although there is no evidence or claim.
2. DATES COVERED – The book begins with the death of Joshua about 1390 B.C., and ends just before Samuel and the monarchy about 1025 B.C.
3. NAME – The book takes its name from the 12 men appointed by God to deliver and "judge" the nation.
4. KEY PHRASES – "The Israelites did evil...so the Lord gave them over... Israel cried to the Lord...the Lord raised up..." "Every man did what was right in his own eyes." "There was no king in Israel." See 17:6, 21:25.

OUTLINE

The story of the Judges is told following a pattern or cycle. The cycle began with Israel's disobedience and sin, followed by God's punishment. Then Israel cried out to God, and God delivered. The pattern or cycle occurs several times.

1. THE SETTING OF THE JUDGES. CH 1:1-3:6 – (This fills in details in the history of Joshua 13-21.)
 - A. Israel fails to obey God commands to destroy the Canaanites. (Ch1)
 - B. The pattern of the rule of the Judges is explained. (Ch2:1-3:6)
2. THE STORIES OF THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL ARE TOLD. CH 3:7-16:31
 - A. Othniel (3:7-11); B. Ehud (3:12-30); C. Shamgar (3:31);
 - D. Deborah & Barak (4-5); E. Gideon (6-8); F. Abimelech (9);
 - G. Tola (10:1-2); H. Jair (10:3-5); I. Jephthah (10:6-12:7);
 - J. Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8-15); K. Samson (13-16)
3. TWO STORIES ILLUSTRATE THE DEPTH OF THE SINS OF ISRAEL. CH 17-21
 - A. The story of Micah, the idols and the Danites. (Ch17-18)
 - B. The story of the Levite and his concubine, civil war, and the tribe of Benjamin. (Ch19-21)

THE IMPORTANCE OF JUDGES

1. The promise and potential of Israel in the Promised Land is ruined by Israel's disobedience.
2. The failures began as Israel failed to drive out only a few of the Canaanites. Sin, even in its worst form, begins as only a "small" disobedience. Instead of modeling God's greatness and provision for their children, the next generation, they modeled disobedience in small areas that seemed to multiply in the following generations. We need to obey God in all areas, whether we think our children are around or not. When we do not obey, we need to model repentance and confession.
3. God's mercy and patience are demonstrated by His repeated deliverances. How many times should he forgive and deliver them?
4. God used all kinds of men and women to deliver. The key is obedience. These are not the stories of "great" people such as Moses and Joshua. God uses ordinary people who will be sold out to him.
5. The author seems to see the lack of one key figure and godly example as the source of Israel's problems. "No king in Israel" prepares for Saul. See 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.
6. Israel failed to realize all of God's promises because of her sin and disobedience.

JUDGES

1 – This is one of the darkest and lowest sections of the Bible. Note how many of the tribes of Israel failed to obey the commands of the Lord by driving out the inhabitants of the land God promised them. For example, see V21 “But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.” God did so much for them by bringing them out of Egypt, giving them the law, and showing them how they must obey him completely. Yet they still disobeyed him. Are we not just as sinful? Do we not show that we are committed to rebel against God? How much we need the grace of God in Jesus!

2 – The people rejected the ways of the Lord and did the things that he commanded them not to do and he sent the consequences that he had warned them about. V2 “But you have not obeyed my voice.” The people of Israel went after other gods. V15 tells the result. “Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.” We need to pay attention just as much to God’s warning as we do to his promises because he always keeps his word. Note the phrases that describe how badly the people acted in turning away from God. V12 “They abandoned the Lord.” V12 “They went after other gods.” V17 “They whored after other gods and bowed down to them.”

3 – There are several explanations of God’s purposes in this chapter. V2 “It was in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.” V4 The Lord left some of the inhabitants of the land there “for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.” V6 “They served their gods.” God then strengthened the enemy against them. God is so in control as people obey or disobey him. He is able to deliver with even one person. Ultimately each judge pictures Jesus as God’s One Son whom he sent to deliver all who put their faith in him.

4-5 – One of the times that an enemy oppressed the Israelites, God sent a woman, Deborah to deliver them. She called on Barak to lead the battle. Note how the Lord controls the battle. While horses and chariots of the enemy look too intimidating, God ruins the plans with weather that makes the chariots stick in the mud. V15 “And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.” Let us rely on the Lord and his word and always stand for him and his ways trusting that he is sovereign and will work out the victory. The ultimate is in Jesus and his death on the cross. Israel did well with celebration of God for victory that turns into not only a worship time but also a song that can remind future generations of God’s deliverance. Don’t you wonder how many of the songs we sing today will be around for future generations? V3 “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.”

6 – The story of Gideon begins in this chapter. Gideon is one of the judges God used to rescue his people. They disobeyed again. God sent the Midianites to oppress them. V6 “And the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord.” When the angel announced to Gideon, “The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor,” (V12) Gideon answered that it sure did not look like the Lord was with them. That is a valid response and one that God honors with further detail. Note how patient he was with Gideon, providing several confirmations for Gideon despite a seeming lack of faith by Gideon. As with Moses, what God promised was that he would be with Gideon. The basis of his courage should be that the Lord was with him. Gideon pulled down the altar. That sounds like a picture of Jesus in the temple destroying and casting out the moneychangers. It may very well be that the Angel of the Lord who appears to Gideon is another preincarnate appearance of Jesus. V34 “But the spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon...”

7 – Note the ratios of the army of the Midianites compared to the army that God used with Gideon. There were 120-135,000 Midianites versus what ends up as 300 soldiers with Gideon. And they only had torches and trumpets. God chose to deliver Israel through Gideon but he would do it only in a way that gave him the credit and glory and so that Israel could not boast. V22 “When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord set every man’s sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah...” Jesus came as a human, a servant, and was executed as a criminal and left 12 men (really 11) yet conquered the world. How much can he do through us if we will give him the credit? We give that credit by prayer and testimony.

8 – Some people who refused to commit to Gideon when the battle was ahead want credit and participation after the victory had been won. Gideon’s wise answers to those who did not join his fight remind me of the answers Jesus gave when attempts were made to trick him into incriminating himself. The Lord delivered Israel through Gideon as he delivered sinners through his Son, Jesus. Note what happens at the end of the chapter. V33 “As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god.”

9 – This is a complex story. Mostly what it shows is what happens when people turn away from the Lord and his ways. V56-57 “Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads and upon them came the

curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal." God "gave them over" and they suffered under the hand of each other. It was this kind of sin that we all commit that makes us need Jesus to be our savior.

10 – The people of Israel committed more disobedience. When the people cried out for help, God announced that he had saved them in the past and would no longer save them. V13 "Yet you have forsaken me, and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more." We need to pray that the Lord will preserve us from this kind of disobedience. It helps us understand how wicked our sinful nature is and how desperate we are in need of a Savior.

11 – This is the story of a man named Jephthah. He was the illegitimate son of his father's union with a prostitute so his brothers banned him from the family. However, when they were in trouble, they called on him to help. He agreed. The Ammonites claimed that certain property was theirs and Jephthah tried to avert war by a lengthy history lesson about the relationship between them. When that failed, V29 "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah" and he defeated them in battle. He made a vow to give to the Lord whatever came out of his house first to greet him. His only child, a daughter was the one. She insisted that to thank the Lord for the victory he must keep his vow. Commentators are not sure how extensive the vow was but it is unlikely that he offered her as a burnt offering. This again shows how far away Israel is from the Lord and his will.

12 – The story of Jephthah continues this lesson. When people turn away from the Lord, they engage in all kinds of behavior that deserves condemnation from God. We see not only oppressors from the outside but also civil wars from within. In this case, the men of Ephraim accuse Jephthah in such a way that there is civil war. V3 "And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into my hand." Jephthah led the men of Gilead to defeat the men of Ephraim, one of the tribes of the sons of Joseph. They killed 42,000 of them. This is just another vivid reminder for us that only Jesus can save. They are no different than we are and we also will only be saved by Jesus' death.

13 – The Israelites continued to disobey God and this time he sent the Philistines to oppress them. This lasted forty years. The chapter tells the story of the birth of Samson. V24-25 "And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him..." The announcement of the birth came from an unusual figure who turns out to be the "angel of the Lord." This may be another preincarnate appearance of Jesus. As with Sarah who bore Isaac, Elizabeth who bore John the Baptist, and Mary who bore Jesus, this is another miracle birth from one with no children.

14 – Samson is a flawed character. God used him to accomplish his purposes even though it seems that he did everything the wrong way. At the same time note in V4 that what he planned "was from the Lord." Note also that "the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him" two times (V6, 19). How much greater does this disobedience of Samson show the contrast to the perfection of Jesus! At the same time it seems that the relation between Samson and God is not fully explained in this story.

15 – Samson was able to set up and kill 1000 Philistines. It appears that Samson's motive each time was revenge. He wanted something to happen so that he could take out vengeance. Is this legitimate or is this just his excuse to carry out judgment on the Philistines? Again V14 "the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him" and that is the reason he accomplished the victory. See again the miracle that God did for Samson in V19. "And God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi and water came out from it." His own people sought to betray him. The book was written to show how far God's people fell away from him when they rejected him. Only in Jesus is there hope of salvation.

16 – Another of Samson's weaknesses seems to be women. He gave away his riddle to his "wife" in chapter 14. Here two more women try to seduce him and learn his secret. Samson succumbs to Delilah, gave away the secret of his strength and lost it. How great a tragedy that Samson did not realize his strength was gone. V20 "But he did not know that the Lord had left him." It does not appear that Samson was a great giant of a man or strong looking. The secret of his strength was the presence of the Lord. When the Lord left, Samson was very ordinary. Celebrate the grace of God in V22, "But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved." Samson asked for vengeance once more for his eyes and is willing to die. V30 "So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life." As great as Samson was, and he delivered Israel for twenty years, only Jesus is perfect. He is our Deliverer.

17 – When people disobey God their lives spiral downward so rapidly that the consequences affect every part of their life. These chapters are about as low as people can go in their disobedience of God and abandonment of his ways. Here a Levite is hired by a family to be its priest for an idol. Note what the people commend in this chapter. The mother is so happy that it was her son who stole from her that she honors him by having an idol made out of the money. V13 "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as priest." A key theme in Judges is expressed in V6. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." We all need a Savior.

18 – A group of spies from the tribe of Dan accidentally discovered the Levite and the idol. When they asked to be blessed and their mission went well, they recommended that the Levite and idol be taken to be theirs. V19 “Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?” He left with them. They destroyed a peace-loving city and captured it for their own.

19-21 – It does not seem like sin can get any worse but it does. In this story, there is an attempted homosexual rape, an actual rape and murder, a cut up body mailed to the nation, and civil war. The culture was so strongly supportive of the concept of treating guests well that the man offered his “virgin daughter” and the guest’s concubine in place of giving away his guest, knowing what the treatment would be. How horrible sin is. How we need a Savior! Do we know or ever see our hearts as this sinful? It may well be that this is how wicked our hearts appear to God in our sin. Even Israel began to catch a glimpse of their wickedness when they regret that one of the twelve tribes is missing and they do what they can to restore it. It is in the context of the wickedness of the time of the Judges that we have the contrast of the story of Ruth and then the period of the final judge and first prophet, Samuel.

RUTH

INTRODUCTION

1. AUTHOR – Unknown, possibly Samuel or a later prophet.
2. DATE WRITTEN – Unknown, but finished after David rules. See 4:21
3. DATE COVERED – Took place "in the days when the judges ruled." See 1:1
4. NAME – Ruth, from Moab, a Gentile woman who is the book's key figure.
5. KEY PHRASES – Naomi – Mara, Kinsman – Redeemer.

OUTLINE

1. Ruth, the Gentile girl from Moab, married into an Israelite family and moved to Bethlehem. Ch 1.
2. Ruth met Boaz, her "Kinsman Redeemer"(2:20), who treated her kindly. Ch 2
3. Boaz made arrangements to redeem Ruth. Ch 3
4. Boaz married Ruth. They were ancestors of King David and the Messiah. Ch 4

IMPORTANCE OF RUTH

1. God's grace is clearly seen by redeeming a woman of Moab, an outsider, during the time of Israel's stumbling, the time of the Judges.
2. Naomi's relationship to the Lord is an example of God's plan working out for good. See 1:5, 2:21; 2:20; and 4:14. As satisfied as Naomi is at the end of the story with the birth of a grandson, there is no way that she understands all God has ahead for her line which will include King David and the Messiah.
3. God's Sovereignty took Ruth from a condemned Gentile to a redeemed ancestress of David and the Messiah. See Matthew 1:5
4. Boaz is a picture of Christ, redeeming a helpless and condemned outsider, just as Jesus our Savior "Kinsman - Redeemer" redeems us. See Romans 3:4

DEVOTIONAL NOTES

1 – In the middle of Israelite rebellion, God reached out to save a Gentile woman, a Moabite named Ruth. This is a great story. Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons leave the Promised Land for Moab because of a famine in Israel. Elimelech died. The two sons married and then they died. The two daughters-in-law wanted to stay with Naomi, but she counseled them to return to their own land as she headed out for home, near Bethlehem. Ruth refused to leave her. Naomi described her life as bitter. V20-21 "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

2 – Naomi had a relative of her husband named Boaz. It is no coincidence that Ruth ended up harvesting in his field. He took note of her and protected her, making sure no one harmed her and that she gathered enough food. Naomi noted how much food she returned with and knew that someone was looking out for her. V20 "And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!' Naomi also said to her, 'The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.'" Boaz is a picture of our Redeemer, Jesus. He cares for us and redeems us.

3 – The story progresses as Boaz moved to redeem Ruth and Naomi. The parallels to our Redeemer Jesus break down at this point, as there is no redeemer closer to us than Jesus. Boaz' grace and generosity are wonderful illustrations of the grace and provision of Jesus. In fact, Jesus went so far as to die for us.

4 – Boaz redeemed Naomi and married Ruth. The story of the book is really more about Naomi than Ruth. She started with so little, lost it and became very bitter. God restored her, gave her a family and a grandson and she seemed content. She has no idea that God will also make that grandson to be in the line of the king, David, and also in the line of the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Lord, grant us the insight to trust you to work out that which is far better than whatever else we would choose in our own way. Help us to abandon sin and seek your ways trusting that your ways are really the best for us and will bring the most glory for you. Amen.