



Judges

Survey Of The Book Of Judges

A Review of Israel's Dark Days Of Sin.

Storing Up Treasures:

Discovering The Rich Teaching Of Scripture



Israel's Dark Ages

If "Dark Ages" refers to a time of brutality and ignorance, then Israel's Dark Ages took place during the days of the Judges. There is no place in Scripture where God's people are painted with more earthy tones. The brutality of the times rivals anything found in pagan history. It was a time of moral and spiritual decay where the only king was self!

The title "Judges" comes from the Hebrew title which reflects the main characters of the book, "*The Lord raised up judges*" (Judges 2:16). The word judge is not used like our

Judges

modern concept of hearing complaints and rendering legal decisions. The elders and priests were the final interpreters of religious law. The Judges were actually "Deliverers," "Saviors" or military liberators who led armies to defeat enemies. They were more like generals than politicians. Like generals they would lead military campaigns and then provide some leadership in the

aftermath. These judges were not kings and did not establish a dynasty. The judge was a man or a woman selected by God to drive out the opposition and give the land rest.

In most instances the Judges were not people of ideal character. God did not choose them because of their great faith. Their very presence was a matter of God's grace extended to preserve His people in spite of their wickedness. The Judges served for the most part in local areas. At times there probably was no judge. At other times there may have been two operating in different areas at the same time. During the entire period the government of Israel was largely local and very basic.

This book does not contain an account of all of Israel's Judges. Moses, Eli and Samuel are all said to have judged the people, but in this sense "judge" is used more in the modern sense of one who settles disputes which called for men of high moral character. The Judges of the book of Judges had no power to make laws, for the Lord had already been given at Sinai. Their prime responsibility was to enforce God's law by dispensing justice.

The Need For A King

The original intent of the book of Judges is seen by the time of its writing and author. Ancient Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of the book to Samuel. Samuel may or may not have written the stories in this book, but it is clear that the book was compiled during his time. There is strong evidence to think that Samuel at least edited this volume. For example, it is clear that the book was put together after the Ark was removed from Shiloh (Judges 18:31;



20:27). The book was put together before the crowning of David, because it says the Jebusites were living in Jerusalem “unto this day,” and David took the city as his own during his reign. This time frame would put the date of the book right during the lifetime of Samuel. This connection is made even stronger by similar phrases used in Samuel’s book and Judges. The phrase, *“the Spirit of the Lord came upon him,”* is used seven times in Judges, and is later used by Samuel in anointing both Saul and David as Kings. The same is also true of the use of the phrase *“evil spirit”* (Judges 9:23; 1 Samuel 16:15,16,23).

In addition the often repeated phrase, *“In those days there was no king in Israel,”* indicates that when it was compiled there was a king in Israel (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Samuel was the one the Lord used to anoint the first kings of Israel. The book of Judges provided a lesson book for the kingship established under Saul and David. Judges was used to show that when Israel had no godly king she was a nation in chaos.

The implied message of the book is that God’s chosen people need a *righteous* king. Life without a righteous leader leads to moral decay and death. Of course, Israel had a king, Jehovah. One of the most

“I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.” (Judges 8:23).

profound statements in the book is made by Gideon. God took him from fear to faith, and the people wanted to make Gideon their king, and he said, *“I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.”* (Judges 8:23). Israel had a King, but she quit listening to Him, and the result was servitude to cruel world powers. Israel needed a righteous leader who would model God’s righteous standards for the people, and restrain their fleshly tendencies. (God knew Israel would need this kind of kingly leadership and provided for it in the Law.)

In the same way, God is King of all by creative right, and when people choose to ignore His rule they plunge themselves into the same moral cesspool found in the book of Judges. What we need is a King who will model for the people righteous living, and

“He is blessed and the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” (1 Timothy 6:15).

bring the fleshly impulses of the people under control. This is what is provided in Jesus. It should be enough that God gives us His Law. He is King by right and deserves to be obeyed. However, our weaknesses make us poor

citizens. We need a “Deliverer” to rescue us from our fleshly ways (book of Judges). We need a “King” to model for us righteousness (book of Samuel, especially David). We need the “King” typified in the book of Samuel or we will be stuck in the downward cycle of sin typified in the book of Judges. As a friend once wrote to me, “Only the hope of Jesus can brighten the pages of Judges” (Kyle Nix). The need for a righteous King is supposed to be keenly felt as one travels these troubling pages.

(By the way, Gideon’s statement is more true today than ever! No man is fit to be our ruler. Only the Lord shall rule over us, and that is Jesus Christ, the head of the church!)

Warning To Next Generation Believers!



What is so striking about the sordid history of this book is that it follows so closely on the heels of Israel’s great conquest. In just one generation the faithful conquerors became the disobedient captives. *“Joshua died...After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.”* (Judges 2:10). The transition from the Book of Joshua to the Book of Judges is abrupt. If Joshua rings with shouts of victory, Judges echoes with sobs of

defeat. Possession of the land becomes oppression within the land. Freedom and progress give way to bondage and regression. The faithfulness of God's people in Joshua is countered by their faithlessness in Judges. If the Israelites are walking by faith in Joshua, they are living in the flesh in Judges.

The lesson gleaned from the transition between these books is sobering. It is a warning to next generation believers. What is received with gratitude and devotion by one generation is scorned and neglected by the next. What is experienced by one, is taken for granted by the other. The lessons of obedience and holiness, are replaced by acceptance and permissiveness. The writer of the book of Hebrews was trying to keep his Jewish Christian readers from repeating the history of their ancestors. Their fathers had come to experience the blessings in Christ, but the children were in danger of counting their faith a "common thing," so he wrote, *"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."* (Hebrews 2:1). "Next" generation believers tend to elevate "self" over "Scripture." They tend to downplay the need for holiness in order to accommodate the world. "Fit in!" rather than "come out!" is their motto. And as a result the book of Judges teaches us,



"Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands ... they corrupted themselves more than their fathers in following other gods and serving them" (Judges 2:17,19).

A Generation That "Knew Not God"

<i>Joshua</i>	<i>Judges</i>
Victory	Defeat
Possession	Oppression
Freedom	Bondage
Faithfulness	Faithlessness
Walking By Faith	Living In The Flesh
Unity	Disunity
Consecration	Degradation
Zeal	Indifference
Strong Leader	No Leader

Outline Of Judges & Much More!

There are many meaningful lessons to be gleaned from considering the outline of the book of Judges. One is that the Biblical Books of History are written to communicate spiritual truths. The book of Judges does not present a chronological, all-encompassing account of Israel's history. In fact, some of the stories are told out of historical order, and we are only told a few events that happened in over 300 years. Basically the stories of six deliverers, and two sinners are told to illustrate man's sinfulness and God's graciousness.

Another lesson gleaned from considering Judges' outline is the praise due the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The structure of this book shows an orderly presentation intended to make a point. The point? "The Darkness of Disobedience!" That point is made in the familiar book, or sermon format, of introduction, body, and appendix (supplementary material usually attached at the end of a piece of writing).

The book of Judges really needs no introduction, because it supplies its own. The first two chapters introduce the reasons for Israel's terrible condition. Then the main body of the book tells six stories that illustrate Israel's depravity and God's mercy. The book then ends with an appendix which gives three illustrative stories. The first two illustrate

the sinfulness of Israel, the third, the mercy of God. The first two appendices illustrate the idolatry and immorality behind the often repeated phrase, *“Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”* (Judges 2:11). And the final appendix illustrates the often repeated phrase, *“the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned”* (Judges 2:18).

The outline is presented in the chart below, and following a major lesson from each section will be highlighted.

The Book Of Judges <i>The Darkness of Disobedience</i>																											
Reason For Israel’s Apostasy Ch. 1 – 2			Introduction																								
<p>Incomplete Conquest (1:1– 2:9) <i>“never drove them out completely”</i></p> <p>Immoral Children (2:10– 3:6)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">“Did evil”</td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">}</td> <td style="width: 30%;">Apostasy</td> <td style="width: 30%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>“God’s anger”</td> <td style="text-align: center;">}</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>“Israel’s distress”</td> <td style="text-align: center;">}</td> <td>Servitude</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>“Israel cried out”</td> <td style="text-align: center;">}</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>“Lord raised up a Judge”</td> <td style="text-align: center;">}</td> <td>Deliverer</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>“Land had rest”</td> <td style="text-align: center;">}</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>				“Did evil”	}	Apostasy		“God’s anger”	}			“Israel’s distress”	}	Servitude		“Israel cried out”	}			“Lord raised up a Judge”	}	Deliverer		“Land had rest”	}		
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Record Of Israel’s Apostasy Ch. 3 – 16			Main Body																								
Apostasy	Servitude	Deliverer	Peace																								
Judges 3:5-8	To King of <i>Mesopotamia</i> 8 years	Othniel (3:9-11)	40 years																								
Judges 3:12-14	To King of <i>Moab</i> 18 years	Ehud (3:15-30) (Shamgar)	80 years																								
Judges 4:1-3	To King of <i>Canaan</i> 20 years	Deborah (4:4-5:31) (Barak)	40 years																								
Judges 6:1-10	To <i>Midianites</i> 7 years	Gideon (6:2-8:35)	40 years																								
Judges 10:6-18	To <i>Philistines</i> 18 years	Jephthah (11:1-12:7)	Lead 7 years																								
Judges 13:1	To <i>Philistines</i> 40 years	Samson (13:2-16:31)	Lead 20 years																								
Results Of Israel’s Apostasy Ch. 17 – 21			Appendix																								
<p>The Idolatry Of Micah (17-18)</p> <p>The Immorality Of Gibeah (19-21)</p> <p>The Faithfulness Of God (Ruth)*</p>																											

Inspiration from “Explore the Book” Baxter; “Notes on Judges” Thomas Constable

**The third appendix is the book of Ruth. It was originally the concluding portion of the Book of Judges. Ruth was not separated from Judges until sometime after the time of Josephus (A.D. 90). Why was this done? Apparently to facilitate the ease with which this material could be read at the feast of Pentecost. The newly created book was placed along with four other short Old Testament books in a collection called in Jewish tradition Megilloth (“Scrolls”). Rabbinic tradition required that each of these small books be read at major religious observances.*

Hoover Dam, on the Nevada-Arizona border, is a massive structure that supplies a great deal of electricity to the Western United States. In it's visitor's center you can watch a 20 minute film about how the dam was built: how long it took, how the great hydroelectric generators work, the significant role the project played in our nation's history, and how important it's function is to the livelihood of the Western United States. Now, you could probably look at that great structure and be impressed without seeing the film, but the film teaches you to look at that dam in a way you would not have known before. You appreciate it much more, once you understand the why's, and the how's.

Judges 2:6-3:6 functions as a sort of visitors' center film for the Book of Judges. It provides the necessary preview for understanding what is happening in the rest of the book, particularly chapters 3-16. This section is a summary which interprets for the reader the significance of the judges' stories. If you want to understand Judges you must stop here for perspective to appreciate the upcoming stories. In particular, 2:6-3:6 will show you what God is doing in the period of the judges—and, for understanding the Bible, nothing could be more crucial than that.

In this carefully constructed introduction to the book the holy writer identifies the true Judge of the book, and why He is executing judgment against the people of Israel.

THE Judge Speaks

God speaks three times in Judges 1-3, and each time God speaks it goes from bad to worse. In these three speeches we see a pattern of spiritual decay, disobedience, and disaster that will repeat itself throughout the book.

The Directive (Judges 1:1-36). The first time God speaks to His people is in the first two verses of the book. The question which Israel puts to the Lord is a military one. The occupation of the land she has invaded is not yet complete. The armies await orders. What, in the judgment of the Commander-in-Chief, is to be the next move? *“Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?” The LORD said, “Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands”* (1:1-2). Orders came from headquarters, “Judah was to go first,” and the command was clear before this that “every tribe was to go and thoroughly conquer their land, driving out to the last man any native inhabitant.”

However, the field-report in chapter 1 is “Disappointing.” An excellent start tails right off. We must get this sobering pattern firmly in our minds, because it will be the pattern of the whole book. We note that chapter 1 begins with the obedience of Judah and ends with the disgrace of Dan, and shall not be surprised to find that the overall history of the twelve judges is likewise an increasingly unsatisfactory one all the way from Othniel the Judah-ite to Samson the Danite. The Lord keeps his promises, but will his people do their part? Will they accept his directive, and then act on it, or will they ignore him and do their own thing?

God has always started by giving people His directives, His commands. In the beginning it was as simple as, “Do not touch the fruit!” For ancient Israel it was the moral and ceremonial laws of the Law. For us, we have the directives laid out in the New Testament. God has always given people His commands.

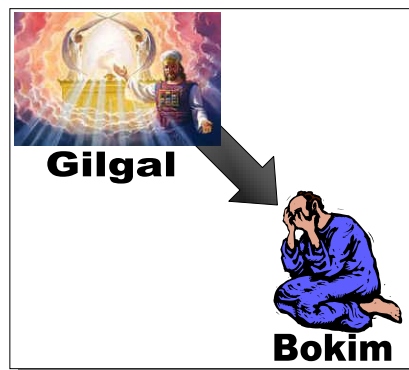


And our results have been no less disappointing, and disobedient than Israel's. Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3). No one is righteous, no not one by the Law of Moses (Psalm 14:1-4; Romans 3:9-20). We've all fallen short of God's demands (Romans 3:23). As a result our sinfulness is exposed. When we live by our own self-will we disobey our Commander-in-Chief. And therefore do not enjoy the inheritance that God has prepared for us. Chapter 1 is the story of each of our lives. The Lord has directed, we have disobeyed, and we end up with disappointing results.

The Doom (Judges 2:1-19). This leads to the second time the Lord speaks in this introduction. If the character of the Lord's first utterance was *military*, the character of this one is *legal*. Where that was a directive, this is an accusation. A charge is brought, a plea is made, and damning evidence is produced. What is more, instead of chapter one's mere reporting of events, we have here a probing of *motives* and an exposing of *attitudes*.

The geography of this speech of the Lord is loaded with meaning. It says, "**The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim.**" Gilgal was a place associated with the Lord's presence and power. The tabernacle was originally located at Gilgal (Joshua 4:19-20). Gilgal, "the Circle," was the stone monument marking the place by Jericho where Joshua had first brought Israel across the River Jordan into Canaan. It was there that the men of Israel were circumcised and "rolled away" the reproach of Egypt (Joshua 5:2-9). It was also there that the Lord appeared to Joshua and assured him of victory as he began his campaign to conquer Canaan (Josh. 5:13-15).

One the other hand, the angel went up to a placed called "Bokim" meaning "Weeping." It was the place of Israel's covenant betrayal. The angelic messenger is physically following the path is Israel's history. From God's power used for them, to God's power aimed against them. From victory to weeping! From Gilgal the angel of the Lord brought Joshua a message of encouragement; but to the new generation described in the Book of Judges, He brought a message of punishment.



The Charge! The charge is not what we might have thought. "**You have not obeyed my command**" (2:2). What disobedience has the Lord seen as he has followed the progress of his armies in chapter one? A failure to expel the people of Canaan? Yes, but that is not the substance of the charge. The heart of the matter is the command to "**make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land.**" It is of disobedience at that point that Israel stands accused. And that of course was the forbidden covenant, the kind of agreement implied in every paragraph of 1:27-35.

The Evidence! The rest of the chapter provides the evidence that this doom is real. The first generation stayed faithful (2:6-9). But the second generation did not know the Lord (2:10). And the third generation did even worse than their fathers (2:19). A spiral downward. Doom, yes, doom.



We must not missed the progression of events. God issues directives, and when we fail to carry those out the result is doom. These verses in chapter 2 describe the hopeless consequences of sin, which just grow worse and worse. Without God we are left going in circles. We live at Bokim, not Gilgal!

And yes, the people respond with tears, and they offer sacrifices. But the form of the remorse doesn't matter. Whether the accused is penitent, or merely remorseful, or even

shameless, they stand condemned. Adam and Eve hid in shame, but they were condemned. By the time you get to the end of Judges 2:19, you see little light, little hope. There seems to be no way out of this downward spiral of sin and its consequences.

The Deal (2:20-3:6). The final time God speaks to His people in this introduction, however has a breath of hope. While He speaks from His anger, He expresses His grace. He would work in the midst of their sin to give them hope.

He Would Use The Enemy To Train Israel. He would use the enemy to train Israel, to help the new generation learn the meaning of war (Judges 3:1–2; see Exodus 13:17). Life had been relatively easy for the Jews in the Promised Land, and they needed the challenge of ever-present danger to keep them alert and disciplined. The Jews had to keep some kind of standing army, or their enemies could quickly unite and overpower them, especially when Israel was at such a low ebb spiritually. In the years to come, both Saul and David would need effective armies in order to overcome their many enemies and establish the kingdom.

He Would Use The Enemy To Test Israel. God also used the Canaanite nations to test Israel and reveal whether or not His people would obey the regulations Moses had given them from the Lord (Judges 3:4).

The principle is that God can and is willing to work with man even in his disobedience and doom to strengthen and mature so they can be successful in the future. God allows temptation and trial in our life for the same reason.

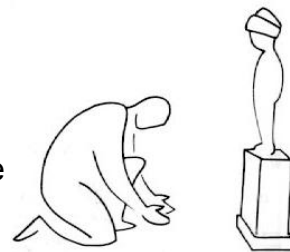
Notice the progression. God issues a direction, man disobeys, and as a result is doomed, but God devises a plan to give man hope. That's the story of Judges, the Bible and your life. The overall message of these statements from the Lord is, "We need The Deliverer!"

The Nation Sins

At the heart of this introduction to the book of Judges the author gives a detailed account of how Israel sinned and bore the consequences of those sins (Judges 2:10-19). In essence, it becomes a table of contents for a large section of this book. It describes a cycle of sin that is going to be played out over and over again in the book. So, implant this in your mind; for two reasons. First, so you will recognize it in the text. Secondly, so you might avoid it in your life.

Disobedience (Judges 2:10-13). First, Israel's demise began with her disobedience. And the text identifies two reasons for her disobedience. Same two apply today.

Because They Did Not Know The Lord. Israel's apostasy was the lack of experiential religion in the succeeding generation. As 2:10 says: ***"All that generation was gathered to its fathers as well; then another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor even the work he had done for Israel."*** When we contrast this description with that of the previous generation ***"who had seen all the great work of the Lord"*** (v. 7), we might surmise that the problem was ignorance, that the next generation did not know about Yahweh and his works. But that is surely incorrect (or incomplete). It was not that they did not know about the Lord but that they did not know the Lord.



The *“they did not know the Lord”* of verse 10 is parallel to the same clause in 1 Samuel 2:12, where it describes the two raunchy sons of Eli, who were, unfortunately, priests at the Lord’s sanctuary, and *“they did not know the Lord.”* That does not mean they did not know *about* the Lord (obviously they did) or that they were ignorant of his mighty acts according to Israel’s creed (surely they were not). Rather it means that they had no regard for the Lord. So in Judges 2:10, this next generation did not acknowledge the Lord; the Lord and His works didn’t matter to them, had no influence over them.

The Bible is clear: amnesia produces apostasy. That is why Scripture is so frantic about the church not forgetting what the Lord has done for us (see Deuteronomy 4 and 6).

Because They Did Worship The God’s Of The Land. The Israelites maintained no distinctive separation from the paganism surrounding them (1:27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).

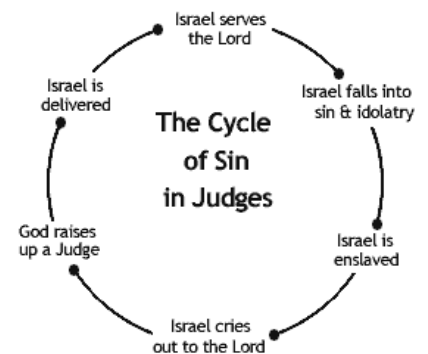
Psalm 106 records the approach of the times,

³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples
as the LORD had commanded them,
³⁵ but they mingled with the nations
and adopted their customs.” (Psalm 106:34-35)

Israel failed to properly combat a godless culture. The church needs believers who live godly lives that can discern and expose the godlessness in our world. That are not seduced by worldliness. That know what it means to live holy.

D*iscipline (Judges 2:14).* Israel’s disobedience then lead to God’s discipline. Verse 14, *“In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.”*

When they went out to fight their enemies, Israel was defeated, because the Lord wasn’t with His people. This is what Moses had said would happen (Deuteronomy 28:25–26); but that isn’t all: Israel’s enemies eventually became their masters! God permitted one nation after another to invade the land and enslave His people, making life so miserable for them that they cried out for help. Had Israel obeyed the Lord, their armies would have been victorious; but left to themselves, they were defeated and humiliated.



In His covenant, God promised to bless Israel if the people obeyed Him and to discipline them if they disobeyed Him (see Deuteronomy 27–28). God is always faithful to His Word, whether in blessing us or chastening us; for in both, He displays His integrity and His love (Hebrews 12:1–11). God would prefer to bestow the positive blessings of life that bring us enjoyment, but He doesn’t hesitate to remove those blessings if our suffering will motivate us to return to Him in repentance.

By their disobedience, the nation of Israel made it clear that they wanted the Canaanites to remain in the land. God let them have their way (Ps. 106:15), but He warned them of the tragic consequences. The nations in the land of Canaan would become thorns that would afflict Israel and traps that would ensnare them. Israel would look to the Canaanites for pleasures but would only experience pain; they would rejoice in their freedom only to see that freedom turn into their bondage.

D*espair (2:18).* Then the people would cry out in despair. Don’t confuse this with repentance! The *“groaning”* of verse 18 is a noun used only three other times in the Old Testament, two of which are in Exodus (2:24; 6:5). There the “groaning” is that of Israel under Egyptian slavery, a groaning that God hears—and he remembers his covenant and delivers them.

Simply put, sin hurts, and the fleshly groan under it's pain. It's then that hopefully they are ready for God's grace. In fact, some times in Judges the people are so far in sin they don't even despair. They don't call out. And yet, God does this next step anyway.

Deliverance (2:16,18). God delivered His people by raising up judges, who defeated the enemy and set Israel free. This is an act of grace, then, and today! The Hebrew word translated "judge" means "to save, to rescue." The judges were deliverers who won great military victories with the help of the Lord. But the judges were also leaders who helped the people settle their disputes (4:4-5). The judges came from different tribes and functioned locally rather than nationally; and in some cases, their terms of office overlapped.



A Sad Reality (2:19). When that judge died, they would again worship Baal. *You discover the true nature of people by observing them when they are not bound by external constraints.* Take a class full of second graders. Let the teacher leave the room and all Cain gets raised. They, like Israel, are showing their true nature. During a judge's lifetime Israel tolerates an external righteousness. But let the judge die, let the "restraining one" be taken out of the way, and there is continual slopping back into idolatry. Even the kindness of God (2:16, 18) does not move the Israelites to faithfulness or repentance. They do not keep themselves from the slavery of sin (2:19); they are held in sin's grip; they have Baal in their blood.



The Cycle Of Sin Illustrated

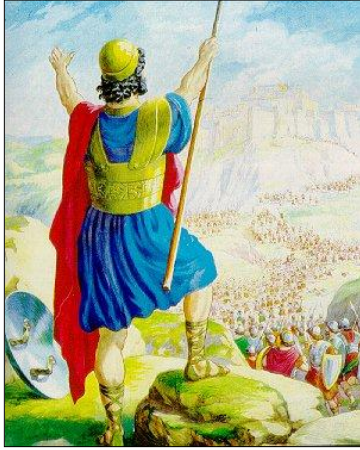
The Cycle of Decline and Revival	Judges 3:7-11	General
They knew not the Law (Judges 2:10)	Sin (7)	Disobedience
Forsook God and served Baal (Judges 2:11-13)	Servitude (8)	Discipline
God delivered them into hands of enemies (Judges 2:14)	Supplication (9)	Despair
They cried unto the Lord (Judges 3:19)	Salvation (10)	Deliverance
God raised up a deliver (Judges 2:16)	Silence (11)	Rest

Israel in Judges is Sin's captive. Generation degeneration is complete. From *"the people served the Lord"* (2:7) we have come to *"they served their gods"* (3:6).

Literary Features Of Judges

It is clear the book of Judges was written in a particular style to communicate certain spiritual lessons. Those lessons are often highlighted through the use of certain literary features. Some of these features are highlighted below.

The Joshua Opening.



First, the Book of Judges is bracketed in the opening verse with reference to the death of Joshua, and in the closing verse (21:25) of the Book with the notice that *“in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* These statements pretty much sum up this book, chronicling the history from the point of Joshua’s death until the establishment of a permanent monarchy. It was a history characterized by rebellion and willful apostasy, a time of spiritual darkness and wickedness.

And is it not still the case that men do what is right in their own eyes? The sheer blindness of the people and the extent of their rebellion is one of the compelling reasons for studying this Book. Times have not changed all that much.

The death of Joshua is recounted in Joshua 24:29 and Judges 2:8 in addition to Judges 1:1. It forms the literary seam between the Book of Joshua and the subsequent events. The departure of Joshua, Moses’ successor, who had led the people into the land of Canaan, was significant, since his influence was for good (*“the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua”* - 2:7). But after his death things went wrong.

Dale Ralph Davis, in his commentary on Judges, highlights the other books of the Old Testament which begin with the notice of a death: Exodus, with the death of Joseph, Joshua, with the death of Moses, and 1 Kings, with the death of David. God had raised up men through whom His greatest deeds were done. Yet he is not dependent on any of those through whom He works. They are taken away, but His work continues.

The Judah Bracket. There is a second important literary ‘bracket’ in this book. In 1:1 the people ask, *“Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?”* A similar question is asked in 20:18 – *“Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?”* In both cases the answer is the same: God says ‘Judah will go up first’. In other words, although the fact of sin and rebellion constitute a major theme here, there is an equally important sub-theme: that of the line of God’s promised salvation through Judah.

Judges 1:1

Judges 20:18

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Or is it the other way round? Perhaps it is because of God’s continuing, gracious and determined plan to bring a king out of Judah – first David, and ultimately Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah – that the message of rebellious apostasy is so prominent. The point is that God is fulfilling his ancient promise to bring a Savior into the world, descended from Judah. It is hinted at in this book, and is an all-important pointer on which the storyline hinges.

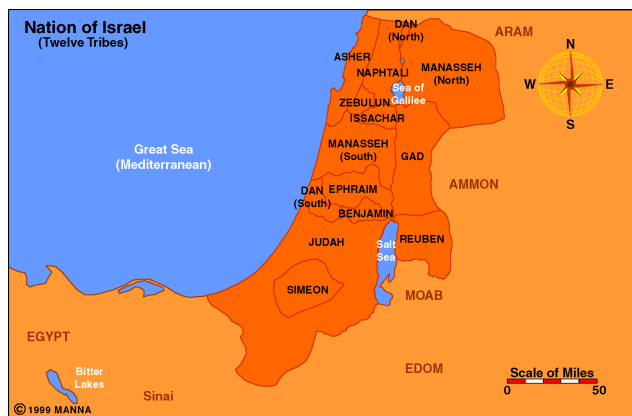
Covenant Faithfulness & Unfaithfulness. Third, there is the important literary theme of covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness. The Lord speaks as the Angel of the Covenant in 2:1-10. On God’s side, the claim is made *“I said, I will never break my covenant with you”* (2:1). But on Israel’s side, the charge is laid, *“I said ... you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land ... but you have not obeyed my voice”* (2:2).

Here is the contrast that furnishes the key for interpreting the Book of Judges: God’s covenant faithfulness over against the reciprocal unfaithfulness of the covenant people. This book tells the story of a people in rebellion against their God, and yet of One who remains their God in spite of it all. The covenant is the measure of all things. It is because of the standard of God’s commitment to his people, and his call to them to be submissive to him, that we read of a cyclical pattern in their history, in which sin leads to oppression, then to lamentation, then to deliverance, then to momentary respite, then to sin again. As that wheel of experience turns, the covenant measures the behavior both of God and of his people. He remains loyal to them, even when they act in disloyalty to him.

So if we reduce the question of interpretation to ask ‘What is the Book of Judges about?’ -- it is about the covenant, outworked in history, showing the people in their true light, and showing God in his true light too.

Geographical Significance. Fourth, there is the importance of the geography of all this. One is tempted to hurry over the place-names of chapter 1, until one realizes that they tell their own very important story.

The first part of the chapter, from 1:4-26, tells of the successes of Judah in the southern part of Canaan. Acting in obedience and loyalty to God, their way is made successful. But then, from 1:27, the chapter moves northwards, and the story is one of continuing disloyalty to God. Instead of expelling the Canaanites from their territories, as God had commanded, the northern tribes subject them to forced service and to servile labor. They try to accommodate the Canaanites by harnessing their resources. But that is no way to win victory in the spiritual battle, and the consequences are there for all to see. By the time we reach Dan in the north, far from pursuing and expelling the Amorites, the Amorites are pursuing him (1:34)! That is always what happens when we compromise on God’s standards.



So the geography has much to say to us, and indeed lays the foundation for the later history in which the kingdom will be divided, and in which the north will apostatize while the southern kingdom carries the line of God’s redemptive purpose in history.

The Reason For Israel’s Apostasy

Compromise! The care in putting the book of Judges together is seen in the fact that the author or editor began the volume with an introduction. The first two chapters have little narrative, and choose rather to preview for the reader the reasons for Israel’s demise in the pages to follow. The reason given for Israel’s apostasy is, incomplete conquest, which caused the subsequent immorality of the next generation. The tragic story of Judges illustrates failure through compromise. The key phrase is, *“they never drove them out completely”* (2:28, followed by “nor did...” for each tribe) Sidlow Baxter writes, “Let the words burn into the mind, and burn out any easy-going toleration of the unholy or questionable thing. We can never enjoy God’s promised rest for long if we tolerate only partially crushed



sins to continue with us. If we make league with questionable things because they seem harmless, we shall soon find ourselves wedded to the desires of the flesh again, and down from the heights to which God had lifted us. Failure through compromise! Oh that Israel had heeded the message of the book! Oh that a compromising church today never disregard it! God's word to His people today is still that of 2 Corinthians 6:17-18, *"Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. ¹⁸I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

Joshua records how Israel crossed the river and began to conquer the enemy, but the book ends with *"much land yet to be possessed"* (Joshua 13:1; 23:1–11). "Crossing the river" signifies death to self and separation from sin; it means entering into our spiritual inheritance by faith (Ephesians 1:3). But after we have taken this step of faith, it is easy to faint, or to compromise with the enemy. Israel entered into her land, but she failed to possess the total inheritance. She first tolerated the enemy, then mixed with the enemy, and finally surrendered to the enemy. It was only through God's deliverers (the judges) that the Israelites found victory. How easy it is for Christians to "settle down with sin" and miss the blessings of complete dedication and complete victory!

The Record Of Israel's Apostasy

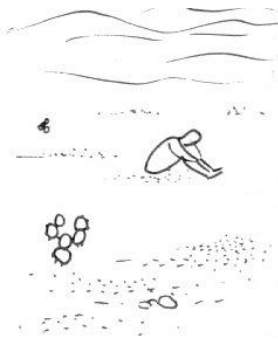


The Subtle Deadliness Of Sin. The Book of Judges demonstrates the terrible consequences of disobedience to God. The path to destruction is clearly marked in the book. Disregard for God's command to drive out the Canaanites led to toleration, compromise, intermarriage and outright apostasy. This path led to political disunity, foreign oppression, social chaos, and individual immorality. A basic lesson in Judges can be discovered by placing in juxtaposition two emphases. Twice the book declares that *"every man did what was right in his own eyes"* (17:6; 21:25). Seven times Judges states that *"the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh"* (2:11). These two emphases stress that the natural man is inclined to do evil. Without revelation and the motivation to obey it man will inevitably choose the path of destruction.

The six stories at the heart of the book teach us the subtle deadliness of sin. Conquest did not give over to defeat in a moment. The decline was gradual, and we must note carefully the stages of the decline; first there is toleration, then accommodation, then assimilation. Perhaps the best New Testament example of this book is Demas, who forsook the Lord *"because he loved this present world."* (1 Timothy 4:10). Or, perhaps it is illustrated more accurately by the countless number of believers who have taken the name of Jesus, and tried to maintain a friendship with the world. *"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."* (James 4:4). But no believer sets out to hate God, they are subtly *"hardened by sin's deceitfulness."* (Hebrews 3:13).

How God Deals With His People:

Faithful Anger. When the Lord gave Israel over to her enemies, he was only executing what he had already threatened to do should she prove faithless (Leviticus 26:17; Deuteronomy 28:25). The Lord's hot anger shows his faithfulness to his word. It is a faithful anger (See Judges 2:14-15).



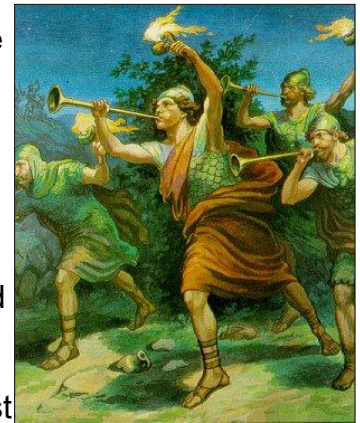
God deals with the sins of His people by loving, yet stern discipline. In Judges the anger of God burns against sin (2:14, 20). He “sold” his people (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7) or “gave” them (2:14; 6:1; 13:1) into the hand of some enemy. Once God is said to have “strengthened the hand” of an enemy against Israel (3:12). Thus the God of holiness cannot and does not ignore sin but on the contrary, he punishes it.

Such anger should not surprise us. It is the price we pay for being loved. The Lord had told Israel he would accept no rivals, “for The Lord's name is Jealous; he is the jealous God” (Exodus 34:14). Jealousy is the flip side of love; it is required where exclusive love is called for.

What would you think of a husband who has the sad but true evidence that his wife is having an affair with another man, who then responded by saying, “Oh well, no big deal.” You would think if he really loved his wife he could not be so indifferent. Jealousy is love burst into its proper flame.

“Love divine” is not soft laxity but blazing intolerance, an absolute claim (cf. Matthew 10:37-38). Such is the God of Israel whose jealous love makes him faithful in his anger toward you. Who ever heard of love and fidelity like that? You forsake him and he will pursue you—in his anger.

Astonishing Salvation. Again, our God is astonishing when we consider the incredibility of his salvation (Judges 2:16). Here is the fundamental wonder of the Bible: that the God who rightly casts us down to the ground should—without reason— stoop to lift us up. If there is a reason for Israel's salvation, it can only be the depth of his compassion. Even in the face of Israel's persisting apostasy, the Lord would raise up judges and use them to save Israel from their enemies. Why? Because He heard their groaning and responded in compassion. God's heart is stirred by the sheer misery of his people. Once you see God's heart in Judges you are not shocked when you meet God's Priest in Hebrews 4:15.



Astounding Mercy. The real message of Judges is the astounding mercy of God. He does not treat us as we deserve. The Book of Judges also illustrates the principle that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Romans 5:20). Five times Israel “cried” out to God (3:9,15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10). Three times God spoke to his people, presumably through prophet-like individuals (2:1–3; 6:8–10; 10:11–14). *Only once* is national repentance clearly indicated in the text (10:10–16). Nonetheless, the Lord was moved to pity by the groaning of his people in the midst of their various oppressions (2:18). Therefore, he raised up a deliverer for them (3:9, 15) through whom the current enemy was subdued (3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). Then the land would enjoy “rest” for a time (3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28). The lack of emphasis on the repentance of Israel in the text serves to underscore the amazing grace of God in this book.

Some miss hearing the mercy of God on these pages because the filthiness of Israel's sins shouts so loud. But it is simply that sinful shout that makes God's mercy all that more astounding. While it is true that God would often raise up a Judge in response to the people cry for deliverance, He knew their cry arose from a selfish desire for peace, and not from a horrified conscience stricken with sin. And the fact is God raised some Judges when the people didn't cry to Him. They were so far gone into idolatry that they didn't even think of calling to God. In the case of Samson, one of the longest accounts and the final Judge in the book, God raised him up to deliver Israel without her repentance. What is the point? That God overlooks sin, and will not judge it? Not at all! Judges shows how patient and persistent God will discipline His own to bring them back, and how willing He is to act in mercy to open to them the door of salvation. Today God disciplines His creation to know the consequences of sin, so that all might find deliverance through Judge Jesus. The key word in the book of Judges is "deliver," it is used nearly 50 times! That's what God wants to accomplish—the deliverance of those who would put their faith in Him.

Lengthy Patience. The Lord continues to amaze us, for we see the length of his patience in Judges. Here is the Lord is the God who is "slow to anger," which gave Jonah fits (Jonah 4:1-2) but should create wonder in us, for even Christians—if they've any sense of their sinfulness at all—can only say, "*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed*" (Lamentations 3:22).

Some ideas gleaned from "Such A Great Salvation" Ralph Davis

The Results Of Israel's Apostasy

The appendices of Judges teaches us the horrifying results of apostasy. The main body doesn't usually detail out the sin that caused God to discipline His children, it simply says, "*Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord.*" The first two appendices illustrate just what that evil looked like. They are intended to teach us in vivid relief the result of compromising with the world system.

There may be a connection between the introduction and the appendix that emphasizes the outcome of compromise. In the introduction Judah has great success in driving out the Canaanites from their inheritance. It specifically says, "*The Lord was with the men of Judah*" (1:19). Granted they did have trouble with some iron chariots, but Judah seems to be portrayed as more zealous and more successful in driving out the enemy than the other tribes. In fact, it appears that many of the other tribes didn't even try to get rid of the residue of the enemy within their inheritance. In the appendix of the book, it is the tribe of Dan that is obsessed by idolatry; it is the tribe of Benjamin that is given over to immorality. However, in Ruth we see pictured the fidelity in the tribe of Judah. All was not completely black in Israel's dark ages. Boaz, "*a man standing*," is portrayed as a devout and obedient follower of God. These three stories are vivid illustrations of the need to drive sin and worldliness from your life, for in the end the compromise carries a bitter harvest, but those zealous in battle reap a beautiful life of love.

Compromise Leads To:

- ✦ Idolatry—Micah (17-18)
- ✦ Immorality—Gibeah (19-21)

Commitment Leads To:

- ✦ Love & Inheritance (Ruth)

The last five chapters of Judges are different. There is no refrain of Israel's apostasy, no announcing of a new oppression, no central judge-figure. The writer changes his style in

order to portray the confusion of a sinful people. He will do this by displaying both Israel's confusion and her sinfulness. In two stories he will hold the mirror in front of Israel, as if to say, "Here you are, Israel— making your own gods [chapters 17-18, Micah and the Danites] and destroying your own people [chapters 19-21, Gibeah and Israel]." Here is Israel wallowing in her own religious and moral mess.

Israel Had No King <i>Life apart from God and righteous guidance</i>	
Judges 17-18	Judges 19-21
The Ugliness Of False Religion	The Ugliness Of Moral Decay

Here the problem is not the enemy without but the cancer within. Here, so the writer says, Israel has hit bottom. Hard. Yet not without hope.

Gideon's Transformation

Gideon's transformation is a model from Judges to remember. It was intended to provide an example of how God can transform a leader under His control. When we first Gideon he is a pathetic figure of unbelief. He is hiding from the enemy, and unsure of God's ability. Granted, Gideon still made his mistakes later in life that cost his family dearly, but Gideon's transforming experience at the hands of God might give us some guidance. His transformation had three stages, each essential.

He Was Converted!

"²⁴So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-Is-Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." (Judges 6:24).

He Was Consecrated!

"The Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; ²⁶and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down." (Judges 6:25-26).

He Was Controlled!

"³⁴But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judges 6:34).

God Chooses The Weak & Foolish

Judges illustrates the principle that God chooses weak and foolish things to confound the wise and powerful things of this world (1 Cor 1:27). To gain the victory in Judges God

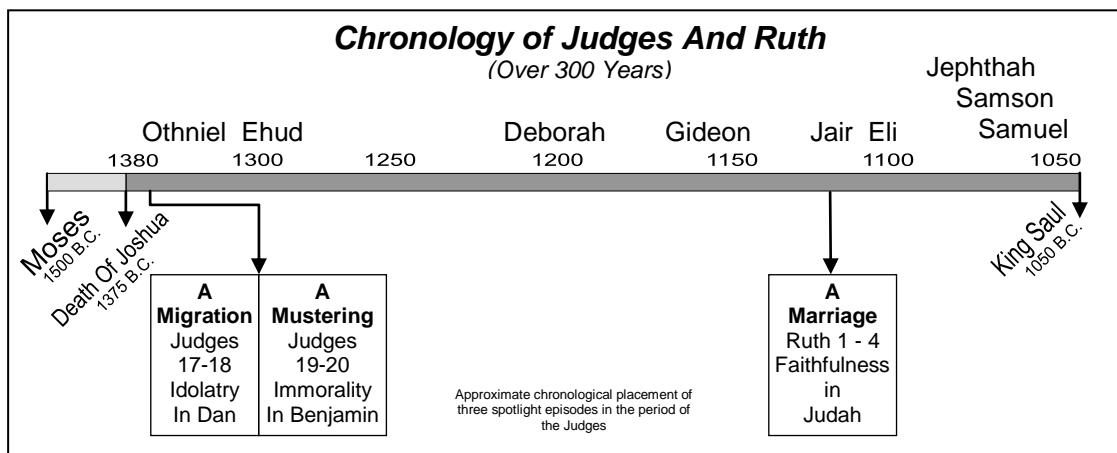
- used an ox goad (3:31),
- a nail (4:21),
- some trumpets, pitchers and lamps (7:20),
- a millstone (9:53)
- and the jawbone of a donkey (15:15).

Some of the deliverers God raised up were most unlikely candidates: a bastard son, a ladies' man, a left-handed butcher, a mother, and a cowardly idol worshiper.

Chronology of Judges

Perhaps a word should be said about the chronology of Judges. It is a book of History, but it presents the student with the most difficult chronological problem in the Old Testament. The opening verse announces the death of Joshua and gives the impression that what follows occurred after the old warrior had departed this world scene. However, some of the episodes narrated in that first chapter have already been recorded in the Book of Joshua. To complicate matters further, the death of Joshua is narrated a second time (2:8). Apparently the author began this book with a series of episodes, some of which happened before the death of Joshua and some of which followed his death.

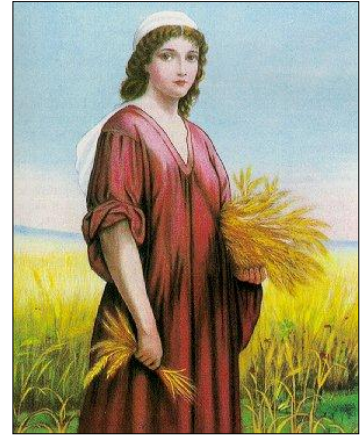
A still more formidable are the chronological problems in the last five chapters of Judges. Two episodes are recorded in these chapters: (1) the Danite migration; and (2) the civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. A careful study of the details in these episodes indicates that they most likely transpired even before the invasion of Cushan. Since the Danite migration is recorded in the Book of Joshua (Joshua 19:47), Judges 17-18 may be narrating an event which transpired even before the death of Joshua! The follow chart might help the reader understand the timing of events in Judges and Ruth



Information from "Books of History" Smith

Women In The Book Of Judges

Judges is not a very pretty book. If someone made an accurate movie about it, it would have to be “R” rated because of all the violence and sexual immorality. And yet, it plays an important role in telling the history of Israel. It shows how the leadership of the people passed from men like Moses and Joshua, to kings like David and Solomon.



In addition to a historical purpose, the book of Judges serves a powerful moral purpose. It shows the societal consequences of letting sin and selfishness reign. Car wrecks have a way of sobering up the most carefree driver, and Judges shows the wreckage of a society without God. The wise will listen and learn.

In the beginning God set Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden, and they enjoyed all things until sin entered. Then there was pain, division and death. In the same way, God set Israel down in a land flowing with milk and honey for them to enjoy, but sin entered and pain, division and death followed in mass.

There are many ways to see the moral instructions of this book, but one of the most powerful is in it's use of women. Judges is unique in the Old Testament in how prevalent a role women play in the book. Women have always played an important part in God's plan for man. Even the first prophecy of Scripture talks about the role a woman would play in the plan of redemption (Genesis 3:15). But there are a significant number of women who play important roles in the book of Judges. (The book of Ruth was originally a part of the book of Judges, and it is about two women.)

Show Me To Your Leader!

There must be a reason for the author to include so many women in the story of this age. And indeed when you see the role women played in the book of Judges you see a powerful lesson begin to emerge about the condition of Israel during this time. It has been said, “You can tell a lot about a society by how it treats women,” and that is true in Israel at this time.

The book of Judges demonstrates the importance of competent leadership to the people of God. Although God raised up several judges or leaders to accomplish military victories, the spiritual climate in Israel grew bitterly cold as violence and anarchy swept through society. The book's final chapters include a sordid account of idolatry, gang rape, civil war and kidnapping. The book concludes with the somber words, *“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit”* (21:25; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1).

It's in the absence of godly male leadership, that the women in the book of Judges really begin to shine. You cannot read through the book of Judges without noticing that women appear at several strategic points in the narrative. Their changing roles throughout the book contribute powerfully to the book's portrayal of the disintegration of Israelite society. The portrait culminates in 1 Samuel 1 with the oppressed figure of Hannah, through whom the Lord reverses the downward spiral detailed in Judges and brings to realization the leadership ideal presented at the beginning of the book.

The roles women played in the story of Judges illustrate, in a dramatic way, the way Israelite culture was disintegrating.

Achsah: An Inspiring And Blessed Woman (Judges 1-3). The book of Judges begins



with a story about a woman who was inspired brave warriors and was blessed by her father. This takes place in a section of the book when the author paints a picture of militarily effective men who display daring and courage. Here we learn of how Judah take control of part of the promised land. We are introduced to the daring of men like Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar. These three judges bravely deliver Israel from foreign oppressors. It is during this time we see an inspiring, blessed woman named Achsah. She was the daughter of Caleb.

A Woman Inspired Brave Othniel. To inspire leadership among the people of Judah Caleb offered his daughter in marriage to the man who would lead them to victory against the Canaanites (1:12). Othniel steps forward and easily takes the land by God's strength and receives a wife from a godly home. At the beginning of Judges the hand of a woman inspired noble courage.

A Woman Was Blessed By Her Father. Godly Caleb then showed that he was not only concerned with the battles of Judah, but he was also interested in blessing his daughter.

A Father Blesses His Daughter With A Husband. It might seem to us at first that Caleb is not treating his daughter very well when he offers her as the prize for bravery, but Caleb's challenge to the soldiers would ensure that his daughter married a strong and brave man who would more than likely be the leader of the family and provide for her.

I think we can also conclude that if this warrior took the city, it would be because he had faith in God. That was the only way the Israelites ever won a battle. So the chances were also good that Caleb would be providing a man of God for his daughter. And indeed, Othniel goes on to be the ideal illustration of God's judge (3:7-11; "the spirit of the Lord came upon him."). The author doesn't tell us about any of his mistakes or weaknesses. He is a role model. For the author of Judges, Othniel is a model of the ideal warrior who follows Joshua's directive, bravely defeats the enemy and takes the land God has given his people. Unfortunately, no Israelite warrior would fully measure up to the ideal established by Othniel until David emerges hundreds of years later.

A Father Blesses His Daughter With A Land. As a result of Othniel's victory and his marriage to Achsah, Caleb then further blesses his daughter with a land in the Negev, full of springs of water. Caleb's gift to his daughter also illustrates the protective concern which fathers should display towards their wives and daughters.

Achsah will contrast sharply with the women in the end of the book. But here she is a daughter and a wife who is blessed by godly leadership.

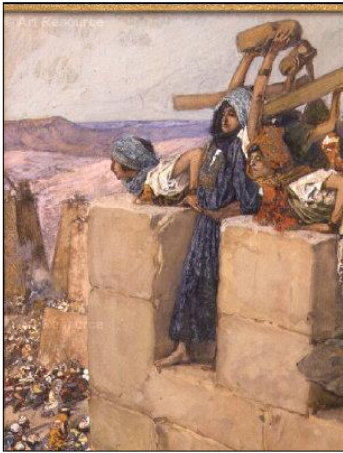
Jael: A Foreign Woman Lures A Foreign Warrior To His Death (Judges 4-5). In the next story we see is that a woman is leading Israel at this time, her name is Deborah. Why is she having to take the lead? Because, there were no men brave enough to lead. Barak was ordered to lead Israel into battle, but in fear he told Deborah, ***"If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go, I will not go."*** (Judges 4:8). Because of this unsuitable attitude Barak would not receive the honor for the victory, but a woman would (4:9).



Barak does defeat the enemy, but Sisera, the king, escapes and seeks shelter in the tent of an ally. Here we are introduced to Jael. In spite of her husband's loyalty to Sisera, she is loyal to Israel. So she lures Sisera into a trap (reminding us of the crafty actions of Ehud who was the lone assassin who used deception to slay a foreign oppressor behind closed doors (3:12-30)). Jael invites Sisera into her tent, gives him some milk, tucks him into bed because he is exhausted from fighting all day, and then, while he is sleeping, she drives a tent peg through his head (reminding us of Shamgar's use of an unconventional weapon, he used an ox goad (3:31)).

Ultimately, it is not Barak who is honored for the victory, but a foreign woman named Jael. In chapter 5 Deborah composed a song commemorating the event. In the song, special praise is given to Jael for defeating Sisera. This could have been sung in Barak's honor. In this song, we are also introduced to Sisera's mother in (Judges 5:28-29). She is seen looking out the window waiting for her son to return. She assumes his delay is because he has defeated the enemy and is raping a woman or two. The irony is that he is being killed by a courageous woman.

By the end of this story, we see that Israel has taken a step backward in terms of male leadership. Fortunately, two women rose to the occasion to compensate for the men's weakness.



Woman At Thebez: A Woman Delivers Israel From Domestic Oppressor (Judges 6-9). Next we have the story of Gideon. He is best known for defeating the Midianites with only 300 men. But Gideon sends us mixed signals. He is full of doubts and fear. He questions and tests God throughout the story. But God has patience with him and uses him to destroy the enemy. This can offer encouragement and hope to us that God can use us in spite of our fears and doubts.

Look at Gideon from the perspective of declining male leadership. Like Barak, Gideon is initially hesitant when called into action. Barak responded to Deborah by saying "If..." Gideon responds with a big "IF" in Judges 6:17(also 6:36).

Later, although he rightly refuses to become king when the people ask him, he turns right around and makes a golden ephod (8:27), which became an object of idolatrous worship to he and his children . So he contributes to the spiritual decline of the nation.

In addition, Gideon He has many wives and a concubine, which give him 70 sons and another son named Abimelech. There is much contention in the family and Abimelech ends up killing all his brothers and declaring himself in charge. He, in fact, had no inheritance rights because his mother was a concubine. Abimelech went on to terrorize the countryside.

Deliverance By A Woman. At this point the next important woman enters the story. When Abimelech was at Thebez a woman threw a millstone down on his head (9:53). The text emphasizes she did this by herself and that she "threw" the millstone. This suggests an heroic act of strength and casts the woman in the role of a warrior. So, in the account of Abimelech's death, a woman delivers Israel again. Only, this time the oppressor is an Israelite. One author notes the change in this way (Gooding, D. W. "The Composition of the Book of Judges.")

"Things have seriously deteriorated when the bondage from which Israel has to be delivered in this fashion is no longer a bondage to some foreign power but a bondage to one of Israel's number, who, instead of being a

deliverer of Israel, has installed himself as a tyrant and is maintaining his tyranny by ruthless destruction.”

So, what we have seen so far is that the role of the women has changed from one who inspires brave warriors to go into battle, to delivering Israel from the foreign oppressor by herself, to delivering Israel from oppression from one of her own countrymen. Leadership is disintegrating. Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar were brave and wise warriors. Barak was not so brave. Gideon was not so brave and not so wise.

A Woman Is Cursed By The Leadership Of Her Father (Judges 10-12).



Immediately we see that Jephthah is a “valiant warrior,” but he was the son of a prostitute. He is like Abimelech in this regard. His half brothers, the legitimate children ran him off, and he began to associate with “worthless fellows.” But in learning to survive and fend for himself “on the street,” he became stronger in the process, and when things got really bad in the land, the elders asked him and agreed to let him lead the nation if he would help them.

Then, the Spirit of God came to help him (Judges 11:29), but Jephthah was not as confident in God as he should have been and he made a bargain with God. Like Barak and Gideon he uses a big “IF” prior to the battle. *“If you give me success I will offer to you the first thing that comes out of my house as a burnt offering.”* (Judges 11:20-31). The vow proved to be a rash and foolish one, because when he returned, victorious, the first person he saw coming out of his house was his daughter.

What he actually did can be debated, but the fact that it was a mournful curse upon his daughter can not be debated. In contrast to Caleb, who brought blessing on his daughter, Jephthah’s foolishness brought a curse on his daughter.

Finally, Jephthah is embroiled in a civil war against the Ephraimites (Judges 12:4). In contrast to Ehud who took the fords of the Jordan against a Gentile army, Jephthah is fighting against fellow Israelites at those same fords.

The changing role of Israel’s women is telling the story of a disintegrating society, starving for godly male leadership.

A Foreign Woman Lures an Israelite Warrior to His Death (Judges 13-16).

Next we have the story of Samson. He appears to have the qualities necessary for a great leader. He is supernaturally conceived which would indicate that God had a special purpose for him. Like Othniel, he was divinely empowered, fearless and did not hesitate to attack the Lord’s enemies. Like Ehud he has cunning. We can see this because he loves riddles. Like Shamgar, he was able to slaughter hundreds, even with an unconventional weapon. His weapon of choice was the jawbone of a donkey.

However, we don’t have to look very far to find his weakness for women. He marries a foreign, Timnite woman (God sanctioned the marriage (14:4), but I believe in the sense that God was going to utilize it, without approving of it.) Later, he is involved with a prostitute in Gaza. Finally, he is also involved with another Philistine prostitute, Delilah, which proved to be his downfall.



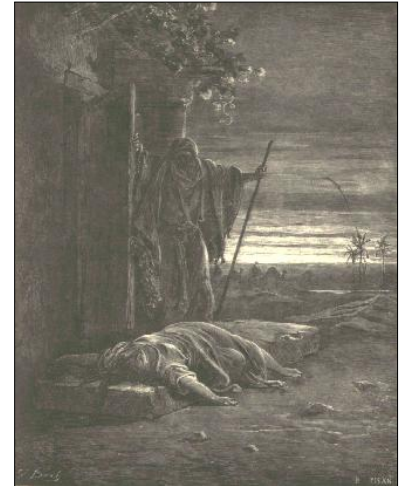
There is some irony here. The text says Samson “*saw*” a Timnite woman (14:2), and he “*saw*” a harlot in Gaza (16:1). When he is captured by the Philistines, they poke out his eyes so he won’t be “seeing” any more women.

In contrast to Jael, who lured a foreign general to his death, a foreign woman, Delilah, lures the greatest of Israel’s warriors to his death. Samson is now in the role of Sisera. God allows Samson to avenge himself, but he dies in the process.

Samson’s death in the Philistine temple makes the decline in Israel’s leadership complete. Deficient faith has given way to lack of wisdom. No more individual leaders appear in the book. The final chapters describe a period of anarchy which surpasses the turmoil produced earlier by Abimelech.

Israelite Women Oppressed By Their Countrymen (Judges 17-21). Without effective spiritual leadership, the people of Israel fell away from the Lord. Idolatry, immorality and civil war take over. The cesspool of suffering that inadequate leadership creates is illustrated in the appalling treatment of Israel’s women by their own countrymen.

The Levite’s Wife. The women in this section play prominent roles as innocent victims. In chapter 19 a Levite, traveling with his concubine and decides it would be safer to spend the night in Israelite territory than in Jebusite territory. Again, more irony. He was wrong. It would have been safer to stay in Jebusite territory. A group of Israelite men come to the place he is staying to have sexual relations with him. (The parallel to Sodom and Gomorrah.) He sends his concubine out to satisfy them and they rape her all night and leave her to die.



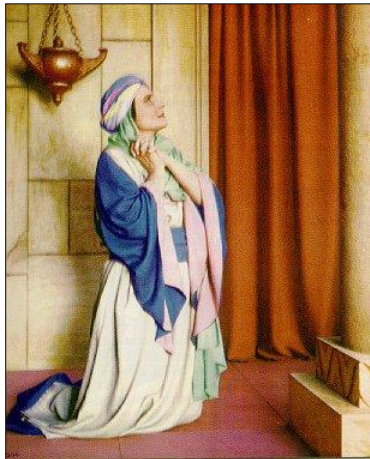
The Women Of Benjamin, Jabesh Gilead & Shiloh. When the Levite asks the Benjamites to turn over the perpetrators, they refuse, so he cuts up the dead woman into 12 parts and sends her parts to the different tribes and calls the other tribes to help him and civil war breaks out. The Benjamites are almost wiped out. The cities, women and children are destroyed and only 600 men escape. So that the tribe of Benjamin will not become extinct, the other tribes annihilate the town of Jabesh Gilead, who would not take part in the civil war, give 400 virgins to the 600 Benjamites and then send the other 200 Benjamites to Shiloh to kidnap 200 more women dancing in the vineyard during the harvest celebration.

It is ironic and deplorable that the nation has stooped so low. Although the Israelites supposedly abhorred what the Benjamites did to the Levite’s concubine, they repeated on a mass scale, the same crimes.

Israel’s moral decline is complete. Women in the beginning of the book inspired men to great deeds, then they played the role of national deliverers – first from external oppressors and then from internal oppressors. Now they are being raped, kidnapped and slaughtered by their own countrymen. Compare the end of the story with the story of Sisera. In the beginning the threat to the women was from outside the land. It was Sisera’s men who would have raped the women if they had won the battle, but now we see that the decline in male leadership is so bad that Israelite men are oppressing their own women. In the absence of godly male leadership people suffer, whether in a nation, in church, or in a home.

Looking For Hannah

In the end, the poor leaders and harsh treatment of women in Judges leaves us looking for something better. They are indeed, preparing the way of godly Hannah and her son Samuel. This would be the woman, and the godly leader that would begin to turn things around for Israel. We are prepared for Hannah’s arrival by three more women. (Connected by the phrase “there was a certain...”)



Samson’s Mother. Like Hanaah Samson’s mother was barren and the angel of the Lord appeared to her and said she would have a son whom she would dedicate to the Lord’s service and she had Samson (Judges 13:2). Barren Hannah would have Samuel, who she would dedicate to the Lord’s service. Samuel would prove to be the great leader of the nation which Samson was not.

Micah’s Mother. Next, there is Micah’s mother who is not concerned about her son’s faith in God, but who in fact, condones his thievery and idolatry. In the end, it is the idolatry that she began through her son that is used by the Danites to establish a religious cult at Shiloh (Judges 18:30-31). Conversely, Hannah’s son would serve in the tabernacle of the Lord, and call all Israel back to their covenant God.



Obed’s Mother. Then there is Ruth, who stands out like a bright light in the midst of the darkness of the period of the judges. She is a model of faithfulness, loyalty and love—which is God’s ideal. But we see that it is a foreign woman who fulfills the ideal, and not one of God’s own people. Through her faithful devotion to God’s ways she has a son named Obed, who had a grandson named David. This David would be destined to meet Hanaah’s son one day and become the king, the righteous leader, the days of the Judges longed for.

The Women Who Paved Further The Way For Hannah

		Hannah
Samson’s Mother	Barren Son an inadequate leader	Barren Son a great leader
Micah’s Mother	Gave her son idols Caused Israel to sin	Gave her son to the Lord Caused Israel to return
Obed’s Mother (Ruth)	Gave birth to the king	Gave birth to the last Judge & the anointer of kings

See Hampton Keathley "The Role Of Women In Judges"

Seeing The Savior

Hearing The Message Of The Bible



In a book as dark as Judges the events and people that foreshadowing are hard to see. The following parallels with the life of Jesus are not definitive. I'm not positive the Holy Spirit intended for these to point us to Jesus. However, by looking at the earthly delivers in the book of Judges, we can learn some truths about the Deliver.

Despised And Rejected By Men

There is probably nothing more painful than to be rejected by those who are supposed to love you. All of us know of situations where a husband, or a wife, or a child was supposed to love us, care of us, accept us, but they treated us with contempt and rejected our relationship. And that hurts.

You are not alone. The Lord knows exactly what that feels like. The gospel of John begins with this statement, *"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."* (John 1:10-11) How tragic for the Creator to be rejected by His creation. Even more tragic that the covenant God is Israel be rejected by His own people, who for thousands of years He had carefully revealed Himself to. Isaiah saw the days of Jesus and described it like this, *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."* (Isaiah 53:3)

How careful we should be not to treat our Creator and Redeemer with such disregard. And yet, it's not beyond God's people to do just that. In the days of the Judges God's people despised Him and rejected Him. This in spite of the fact that He delivered them from Egyptian slavery, made them a nation, gave them a land, and constantly rose up deliverers to keep them safe. And yet, the darkness always hates the light (John 3:17-20), so Israel increasingly rejected her God.

In the story of Jephthah Israel's rejection of God is personified in His Judge. In the same way Israel treated God with contempt, they treat Jephthah with contempt. Jephthah becomes a living illustration of God. Israel must learn to return to the one they despised if they are to be free from the affliction of their sin. So the story goes for every sinner who has ever walked this earth. May we learn the lessons of Israel so we may return to our Savior more quickly.

A Daughter Points To A Son?

There is always much debate as to what really happened to Jephthah's daughter. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah empowering him go fight against the Ammonites. While filled with the Spirit of the Lord Jephthah makes a vow that if God gives him success upon returning home Jephthah would offer to God the first thing he saw coming out his door as a burnt offering (Judges 11:30-31). This has often been explained as a "rash vow."



However, it is interesting that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and the first thing he did was make this vow. Could it be that God was setting up a type of the kind of sacrifice deliverance would entail in Christ? When Jephthah returns home and finds it is going to be his daughter that he's going to lose as the price of deliverance he weeps, and in that we see the pain of the Father as His Son, Jesus dies in pain on the cross.

And the *daughter* herself makes one think of Jesus. She too was the only child. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (John 3:16). She too willingly gave herself to fulfill her father's will. *"Father...not My will, but Yours, be done."* (Luke 22:42). The completeness of the sacrifice required makes one think that Jesus *"became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross!"* (Philippians 2:8). It could be that a daughter, in the dark days of the Judges, is intended to point us to the Son!

A Savior Is Born!

Whenever in Scripture God announced the birth of a child it was a significant event. When God told Abraham and Sarah they would have a child, it was significant. When the angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a child who would prepare the way for the Lord, it was significant. When the angel told a young virgin Mary she would have a child named Jesus, it was significant. So, significant in fact, that the angels in heaven announced His birth by saying,

"Today, in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10). Each time the birth was announced the conception was miraculous. Each time the birth was announced the person was significant.



When God announced to Manoah and his barren wife they would have a baby it too was special. Their baby would not be as high a quality of a person as John or Jesus, but he would be vitally important to the destiny of God's people. In fact, at his birth an angel announced "A Savior Is Born." His name, Samson.

The significant thing about Samson's birth is when it happened. The text in Judges 16 begins the common way saying, *"Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord."* But then something is missing. Every other time God raised up a deliverer it was in response to the people crying out in misery. This time there is no cry. Israel has made peace with being in bondage to the Philistines. They were content with slavery rather than victory. But, God loved His people too much to let them grow comfortable with the consequences of sin. He raised a Savior to show them the enemy can be destroyed.

In one sense the story of Samson is the greatest account of God's grace in the book of Judges. When God's people had so firmly rejected Him that they no longer even turned to him in their misery, God still acted for their good. What love!

That love is seen in Jesus who...

"...Demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (Romans 5:8-11)