

Judges 1–10

Life Without God

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INTRODUCTION

Philosopher George Santayana wrote these famous words, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The book of Judges is a sobering reminder of man’s inability to learn from the past and a warning to all people that a failure to do so is dangerous. Judges, with its “seven cycles of sin”, testifies to this truth more than any other book in the Bible.

Judges is God’s microscope through which we can examine the heart of man (including our own) and a telescope through which we can see great spiritual truths. The book of Judges will teach you God’s passionate love for His people and His relentless war against all sin. The message of the book of Judges speaks as clearly today as it did over 3,000 years ago.

Historical Background

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis-Deuteronomy, known as the Pentateuch) describe the creation of the world and the earliest history of man. They also describe God’s deliverance of His people Israel from Egypt (Exodus) and His dealings with Moses and His people before they entered the Promised Land – the promise of a homeland that God gave to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

God also promised His people victory over their enemies if they obeyed Him and chastisement and enslavement by their enemies if they disobeyed His law (Deuteronomy 28). The record of their sin and their subsequent enslavement, as well as their deliverance from their enemies, is the subject of the book of Judges. Judges covers about 300-350 years of Israel’s history time from the death of Joshua, Moses’ successor, to the dawn of the monarchy and its first king (Saul).

Theme

Perhaps no book in the Bible has a clearer theme than Judges. Judges concludes anti-climatically with these chilling words **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes”**(Judges 21:25). Judges is God’s warning to all people and all nations that believe they can unshackle themselves from God’s moral truth without digressing into sin, self-deception, and social destruction.

Function of the Judges

The title of Judges reflects the Hebrew word *sh^ephatim* or *sop^etim* which is translated judges. The meaning of the Hebrew verb form *shephat* is “act as a law-giver, judge, or governor.” Much of the content of Judges centers on God’s dealing with Israel and several judges He used to deliver Israel from their enemies. Although the basic concept of these Old Testament judges includes the modern judicial counterpart, the role of the judge went far beyond the pronouncement of judicial decrees. The judge functioned primarily in the dual role as; 1) civil administrators or governors of the people and 2) God’s military protectors who delivered His people from foreign oppressors. Some of the judges served regionally and some even served concurrently with other judges. Finally, God also used the judges to function as His agents of divine justice.

“Seven Cycles of Sin”

There are seven cycles of sin and restoration in Judges with each one following a predictable pattern (rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration). Each cycle led to a greater expression of decadent behavior than the previous ones. At the lowest ebb of each cycle, God sends a judge to deliver His people from their oppressor. The seven cycles of sin teach two valuable spiritual lessons: 1) unrepentant sin leads to greater expressions of sin and bondage and, 2) sin inevitably brings God’s judgment, often at the hands of civil authority and foreign oppressors.

Purpose and Importance

Judges offers several spiritual lessons for those believers who look beyond the grim details of one of Israel’s darkest periods. The book of Judges demonstrates that a nation’s relationship to God determines its’ political, moral, and material condition. Those who believe that ‘separation of church and state’ demands the complete removal of moral and religious influence from society fail to grasp this fundamental lesson taught so clearly in Judges. Secondly, God’s intense love for His people never obscures His hatred for sin. Judges is God’s official record of His impartial hatred for sin and His official warning and declaration of impending judgment on those who wink at His commands. Nevertheless, God is merciful and always delivers those who cry out to Him in sincere repentance. For the ancient Israelites, God provided the

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judges the people. For the redeemed, God provides the Eternal Judge and Ultimate Deliverer, Jesus Christ. Lastly, Judges teaches that those who are regarded as insignificant by human standards can be greatly used by God. The book of Judges reminds us that life without God leads to personal bondage and social ruination — a powerful truth that must not be overlooked by any generation, especially ours.

ONE

CHARIOTS OF IRON HEARTS OF STONE

Read Introduction, Judges 1;
other references as given.

Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 2:7-22) and Joshua led them into the land God originally promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3; Joshua 1:1-9). The Israelites conquered the main military resistance in the land (Joshua 11:16-23), but enemy strongholds remained in the land at the time of Joshua's death (Joshua 13:1-7).

In Judges chapter one the Israelite tribes attempt to conquer these remaining strongholds, but they fail. Their failure teaches an important spiritual truth — there is a life-transforming difference between knowing about God's promises and trusting in God's promises. You will also learn that faith allows a Christian to overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable from a human perspective. Biblical faith does not abandon the intellect, but human reason is limited, and it's only by faith that individuals can transcend those limitations. Without faith, individuals are constrained by the boundaries of their mental capacities, but faith enables the believer to experience the reality of God's promises. Before you begin ask God to reveal Himself to you and transform you into the image of Jesus Christ.

1. The books of Joshua and Judges stand side-by-side in Scripture, but they are poles apart about what they record about Israel's relationship to God. Joshua is a book of faith and victory; Judges is a book of doubt and defeat. Both Books teach powerful truths about God and living by faith.



Lombardi Time
Rule:

If the leader
arrives early, he
or she has time to
pray, prepare the
room, and greet
others personally.

ADD GROUP
INSIGHTS BELOW

- a. What was the first thing the Israelites did after Joshua’s death (Judges 1:1)?

- b. List three things you observe about the Lord’s response (Judges 1:2)?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

2. The word Canaanite is a generic term that refers to the heathen nations (tribes) living in the land of Israel at that time (Judges 1:1). God’s command to destroy these people has led some to question His character. Why did God command Israel to destroy these nations (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 7:1–4)?

3. The name Adoni-Bezek (Judges 1:5) is likely used as a title or dynastic name (Joshua 10:1) rather than a proper name. The Israelites cut off his thumbs and big toes to incapacitate him as a warrior and as a priest — a dual function common among many ancient kings. This action is a good example of “lex talionis,” the ancient law of retribution that demanded an “eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:23–24).
 - a. The Israelites’ action toward the Adoni-Bezek appears to fulfill the Law of Moses requirement for retributive justice. Based on God’s command through Moses to the Israelites, how would you evaluate their action (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:10–18; Joshua 11:20)?

- b. Some believers substitute obedience to Christ's commands with alternatives (praying for another person rather than providing their physical or financial help, James 2:14–15). Give two additional examples of things believers do that appear spiritual, but they may be substitutes for their obedience to God's commands.

1. _____

2. _____

4. It is not surprising that Adoni-Bezek accepted his specific punishment as "lex talionis," but it is surprising this pagan king believed God was judging him for his sin (Judges 1:7).

- a. What does his answer reveal about man's knowledge of God before he is redeemed or born again (Judges 1:7; Romans 1:18–20, 2:14–15)?

- b. What do the following passages teach about a non-Christian's understanding of God?

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11: _____

2. John 3:19: _____

3. Romans 1:18–20: _____

4. Psalm 53:1: _____

- c. God has set the reality of eternity in the hearts of all people (Ecclesiastes 3:11). They know about Him in a general way even though they are not saved and they suppress the truth (Romans 1:18) In what way *do you*



Zip-It Rule:

Group members should agree to disagree, but should never be disagreeable.

ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

think this truth should affect the Christian's relationship to the unsaved, including his sharing of the gospel with them?

5. Caleb was a godly man who trusted the Lord (Numbers 14:24). Nevertheless, he offered his daughter Achsah in marriage to any man that would conquer the city of Kirjath-Sepher (Judges 1:12). The idea of arranged marriage seems strange in the Western World, but it was common in antiquity (ancient times) and it still occurs in some parts of the world. With a high rate of divorce in many parts of the developed world, what part, if any, *do you think* parents should play in their son's and daughters' choice of a spouse?
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6. The tribes of Judah and Simeon joined forces and captured Jerusalem (Judges 1:8). In Judges 1:21 the Bible seems to contradict itself when it says the tribe of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites living in Jerusalem (Judges 1:21). What *do you think* happened?
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7. The tribes of Judah and Simeon also fought against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, the Negev, and in the lowland or coastal plains (Judges 1:17–18). The Israelites took possession of some of the outlying areas, but they couldn't defeat the inhabitants of the lowlands (Judges 1:19). Why couldn't they dispossess the Canaanites from the land (Judges 1:19; Deuteronomy 7:1–2; Judges 1:2–6)?
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8. During the original settlement of the land, eight and one half Israelite tribes settled west of the Jordan River and two and one-half tribes settled east of the Jordan (half of the tribe of Manasseh settled on each side of the Jordan). The Lord separated the priestly tribe of Levi to be a spiritual influence and they were dispersed among the other eleven tribes. They received cities within the tribal allotments for their inheritance (Joshua 13:33).

- a. Of the 8½ tribes who settled on the west side of the Jordan River, how many possessed the inheritance of land that God promised them (Judges 1:17–36)?

- b. What four-word phrase occurs five times in Judges 1:21–36?

What *do you think* the repetition is trying to teach you?

9. It is easy to study the lives of people in the Bible and say, “What’s wrong with these people? God promised them victory over their enemies, but they still didn’t trust them.” But God has given us precious promises and the Holy Spirit to empower us to fulfill His will. We also have God’s Word that testifies of His past faithfulness. Perhaps the Old Testament believers could say to us “What’s wrong with these people? God promised them victory over their enemies, and they have God’s Word and the Holy Spirit so why don’t they trust God.” Check the promises God has given you that you are having trouble believing and applying to your life.

___ God’s promise of eternal salvation (John 10:28–29)

___ God’s promise to meet your needs (Matthew 6:25–34)

___ God’s promise to give you wisdom (James 1:5)

___ God’s promise to forgive your sin when you repent (1 John 1:9)



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ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

ADDITIONAL
INSIGHTS

- ___ God's promise of victory over temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)
- ___ God's promise to never leave or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)

- 10. a. God promised the Israelites victory over their enemies (Judges 1:1), but they didn't believe they could defeat them because they had iron chariots (Judges 1:27–36). Christians face their own "iron chariots" — problems that seem insurmountable from a human perspective. What is your "iron chariot" problem (anger, unforgiveness, lust, uncontrolled fear, jealousy, envy, fornication, an uncontrollable desire for revenge, etc.)?

- b. How can a Christian live victoriously (Romans 6:12–14, 8:37; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 5:4)?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Lesson 1: Chariots of Iron, Hearts of Stone

1. a. The Israelites asked the Lord which tribe should be the first to fight against the Canaanites. Perhaps they received a direct answer to prayer, or they used the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and Thummim was a means God occasionally revealed His will to His people (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21; Nehemiah 7:65).
- b.
 1. God heard their prayer. Christians should never doubt that God hears their prayers.
 2. God answered their prayer (**Judah shall go up**). Christians should never doubt God's willingness and ability to answer their prayers directly and immediately. This does not mean that Christians will receive direct and immediate answers to all their prayers, but it does mean that God has the power to do so if He wills.
 3. God promised them victory (**I have delivered them into your hand**). God's promises in His Word are often His answers to our prayers. The Christian can also receive assurance from the Holy Spirit that God has answered his prayer according to His will.
2. The heathen nations had spurned God's truth and grace for several generations (Genesis 15:16). God directed Israel to function as His instrument of judgment against them. In the same way, God used heathen nations to be His instrument of judgment when Israel sinned (Judges 3:8, 12, 4:2; Habakkuk 1:5-11).
3. a. Sinful.
 - b.
 1. Giving financially to a church's missions program, but not being willing to witness for Christ themselves.
 2. Informing the church leadership about another Christian brother or sister who is living in sin, but not being willing to talk with the individual (Matthew 18:15-18). Several other answers could apply.
4. a. God has placed a knowledge of Himself in the heart of all people. This general knowledge of God is enough to condemn man, but it is

not enough to save or redeem him. Adoni-Bezek's confession is an excellent example of this truth.

- b.
 1. Ecclesiastes 3:11: God has placed the reality of eternity in the heart of every individual.
 2. John 3:19-21: Men love darkness (sin) and they hide from God and His truth because they don't want their sinful deeds to be revealed.
 3. Romans 1:18-20: The knowledge of God (theologians call this General Revelation) is enough to condemn men, but it is not enough to redeem him.
 4. Psalm 53:1: Only a fool says "No" to God. Although many Bible versions translate Psalm 53:1 something like "**The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."**", a better translation may be "The fool has said in his heart, "No, God." In other words, the fool is not saying there is no God. He has a general knowledge of God (Romans 1:18-20) but he doesn't want to submit to God.
- c.
 1. Non-believers have a general knowledge of God whether they acknowledge it or not.
 2. Christians should realize that unbelievers are rejecting the truth that God has placed in their hearts.
 3. Christians should not be surprised when non-Christians oppose them and the truth. If a believer is walking closely with God, he or she represents the truth and non-believers suppress (literally hold down) the truth and oppose those who seek to advance the truth. Non-believers might not realize they are opposing the truth, but that does not mean that they are not doing it.
 4. Witnessing to the unsaved about God is not convincing them to believe something they know nothing about. It is testifying to them about God who they know about in a general way even though they are not willing to submit to Him personally in salvation. Other answers could apply.
5. Christian parents should endeavor to live wholeheartedly for God and seek to model a God-honoring marriage relationship. Parents should teach their children about the importance of having a Christ-centered marriage and home. They should also instill in their children the importance of marrying a spouse who is truly born again and who is living a godly life. Other answers could apply.

6. The city of Jerusalem was situated on the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The Judahites captured the main part of the city, but it appears they could not conquer the inner fortified part of the city that offered much greater resistance to the Benjaminites. King David eventually conquered the entire city (2 Samuel 5:6-9).
7. The most obvious answer is the Canaanites had iron chariots, but the Israelites were not able to defeat their enemies because they didn't trust God. God was not willing to remove their enemies if they were not willing to trust Him. While their administration of the law of retribution appeared to be a fulfillment of the Mosaic command that required a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:34), it was an example of masked disobedience. Perhaps the leaders' actions satisfied the people, but it did not fool God.
8.
 - a. None.
 - b. **Did not drive out.**
9. Answers will vary.
10.
 - a. Answers will vary.
 - b. First of all, A Christian must believe God wants him to live in victory and has enabled him to do so (Romans 8:37). God makes a way for him to live victorious even though his problems seem insurmountable (like a foot soldier fighting an enemy with an iron chariot). Regarding the temptation to sin, the way of escape/victory is to turn completely to Jesus Christ in faith, believing that God will never allow him to be tempted beyond his ability (in Christ) to resist the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). Secondly, if the believer sins, he must confess his sin to God and accept His complete forgiveness and His cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). To not accept God's forgiveness as He has promised is to deny God's Word. Concerning the general trials of life, the believer must learn that resolute faith in God will always lead to victory regardless of the outcome.