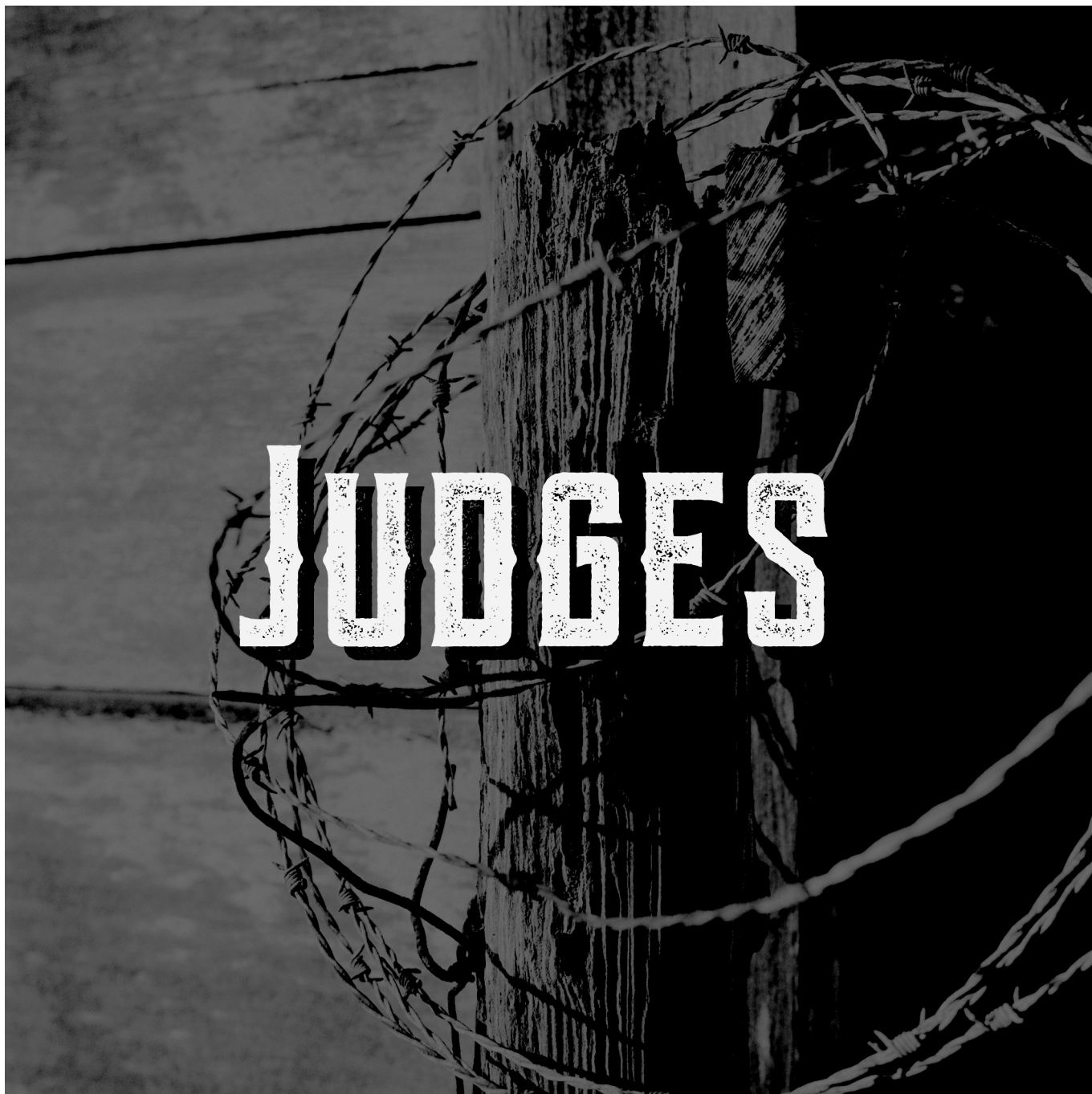


# Bible Study

## Judges



# JUDGES



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# Before you begin

Imagine you're in a jungle. It's tropical: the air is hot and sticky, the trees are covered with creepers, and the sky is full of the sounds of exotic, unseen animals. It's dark: the canopy is dense. And it's freaky: snakes curl around branches and huge, hairy spiders stare at you with too many eyes and creep around on too many legs.

But then, suddenly you're in sunshine! You blink your eyes in the sudden light and realise you're in a clearing. There is lawn all about you. Hedges and neat flowerbeds fill the space. A table and chairs sit under a tree. It's a garden.

Your first thought is: What an amazing garden! Your second thought is: What an amazing gardener, who could form such a wonderful space out of the awful jungle around it. And your third thought is: I want to stay here.

This garden is what Old Testament Israel was meant to be. Ever since Genesis 3, humanity had rebelled against God and the world had become a jungle of sin and suffering. But God was resolved to reclaim his world and began by forming a new nation, Israel. In the book of Joshua, God put this nation into a new land, Canaan, and commanded them to drive out its inhabitants so that Israel could live there in peace. It was also so that Israel wouldn't be tempted to worship the Canaanites' gods and revert to paganism, thus becoming indistinguishable from the nations around it. Israel was to be a 'showcase' of what a nation living under God could be like - a 'garden in the jungle'. Remaining distinct from the world was hence vital.

Judges is the story of how Israel went at this mission after the death of Joshua and before the rise of the kings. And the answer is: badly. Almost from the start, Israel compromises, failing to expel the Canaanites, letting them keep their idols and, eventually, worshipping them themselves. God, understandably, gets angry, and punishes the Israelites by sending the Canaanites to oppress them. Eventually, Israel cries out for help, and God, in his mercy, raises up a leader - a 'judge' - to rescue them, bringing peace for a time. But then the judge dies, the Israelites fall back into their old ways, and the cycle begins again: sin, oppression, repentance, deliverance, peace, sin, etc. This is basically the story of Judges.

What Judges tells us is that there is nothing inherently special about Israel: left to its own devices, it quickly 'reverts to jungle' like everyone else. But what it also tells us is that God is merciful. Time and again, Israel sins, and time and again God intervenes by sending a judge to save them from their enemies. By the end of the book, the question we're asking is, 'How on earth is Israel still here?' and the answer is, 'Only because God has saved them.'

But what Judges also tells us is that, for God's people to survive in the long term, they need a king. Listen to the book's last line, seemingly explaining all their problems: 'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.' (Judges 21:25; see also 17:6; 18:1; 19:1) What Israel needed was a king to stop people from simply doing as they saw fit and so break the cycle of sin and judgement. The judges saved them from their enemies; what they needed was a king to save them from themselves. This side of Jesus, we know exactly the king they need.



**Read Judges 2:6-3:6**

6. 2:10-19 summarises the entire period of the judges. What pattern do the Israelites follow during this time?
  - a. 2:11-13
  - b. 2:14-15
  - c. 2:16
  - d. 2:17-19
  
7. How does God respond? (2:20-22)

**Read Judges 5:6-8**

8. What are we?
  
9. What did God do?

**To finish**

What are the idols in life - e.g. money, work, relationships - that are most likely to compete with God for your affections? Functionally, what are you trusting in to keep yourself from them?

**Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God that, even when we were still powerless to save ourselves from our sin, he intervened by sending Jesus.
- Pray that, when we are tempted to worship the 'idols' of this life, we would cry out to God for help to worship him properly.

# **Ehud: the deceptive judge**

## **Judges 3:7-31**

### **Getting started**

Christians can sometimes be tempted to be deceptive in our evangelism. Can you think of examples of this?

### **Light from the Word**

**Read Judges 3:7-11**

1. In 2:10-19, *Judges* has already established the cycle of sin → oppression → crying for help → deliverance → peace → sin that will characterise Israel's life under the judges. How well does the story of Othniel fit that cycle?
2. What do we know about Othniel? (See also 1:12-15) Why do you think God picked him?
3. What role does the Spirit play in Othniel's role? (See also 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 19; 15:14)

**Read Judges 3:12-31**

4. How does the story of Ehud fit the cycle of *Judges*?



# **Barak: the dishonoured judge**

## **Judges 4-5**

### **Getting started**

Is it ever right for Christians to be given glory and honour? To seek it?

### **Light from the Word**

#### **Read Judges 4**

1. How is the 'cycle' of *Judges* repeated here? (4:1-3)
2. Who is Deborah? (4:4-5)
3. What does she ask Barak to do? (4:6-7)
4. How does Barak respond? What is unusual about this? (4:8)
5. How does Deborah respond? (4:9)
6. How does the rest of this story see this play out? Who is 'the woman' into whose hands God delivers Sisera? How does this compound Barak's dishonour?

**Read Judges 5**

7. Where does each of the characters from chapter 4 turn up in this song?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Who is ultimately honoured as the victor of the battle?

**Read John 12:20-28**

9. What is Jesus' attitude towards his Father and what is the result?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What should our attitude be towards Jesus and what will be the result?

**To finish**

Someone thanks you for something at church. How should you respond?

**Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God for the godly people in our lives who we should honour because of their God-honouring lives.
- Pray that we might be motivated to obey God because we know obedience brings honour to him.

# **Gideon: the weak judge**

## **Judges 6:1-8:28**

### **Getting started**

Think of a time when God used your weakness for his glory. What happened?

### **Light from the Word**

**Read Judges 6:1-10**

1. The land has just had forty years of peace (5:31). What happens next?

2. Why?

3. What do the Israelites do in response?

**Read Judges 6:11-32**

4. What does God do in response to the Israelites' cry?

5. What impression does the passage give you of God's choice of saviour?

**Read Judges 6:33-7:25**

In 6:33, the Midianites and their allies gather to battle against the Israelites.

6. What unusual tactic does God tell Gideon to adopt in the battle?

7. Why?

8. How does the battle turn out? (See also 8:28).

### **Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

9. What unusual tactic does Paul adopt when it comes to preaching the gospel?

10. Why?

### **To finish**

Think of a ministry you're involved in. How might what you've learned today impact how you conduct yourself in it?

### **Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God that he can glorify himself despite - even because! - of our weaknesses.
- Pray that we would rely on God's strength to live the Christian life, not our own.

# **Abimelek: the man who would be king**

## **Judges 8:29-9:57**

### **Getting started**

'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,' Lord Acton.  
What do you think of this statement?

### **Light from the Word**

**Read Judges 8:29-9:6**

1. As soon as Gideon dies, what happens? (8:33-35)
2. Until now, life under the judges has followed a predictable cycle:  
sin → oppression → crying out → salvation through a judge & peace. Now for the first time the cycle breaks. What breaks it? (9:1-6)
3. We have already met kings in Judges: Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim (3:8); Eglon king of Moab (3:12); Jabin king of Canaan (4:2). What do you think we are meant to think of them?
4. What kind of king is Abimelek?

**Read Judges 9:7-21**

5. Jotham, the one brother who escapes Abimelek's murderous purge, tells a parable. What does it mean?



# **Jephthah: the bargaining judge**

## **Judges 10-12**

### **Getting started**

What's the key to driving a good bargain?

### **Light from the Word**

#### **Read Judges 10:6-16**

1. How is the cycle of *Judges* repeated here? How is it the same as previous cycles? How is it different?

#### **Read Judges 10:17-11:3**

2. What do the Israelites do in the face of the Ammonite crisis?

3. Who is Jephthah?

#### **Read Judges 11:4-40**

4. Judges 11:4-40 is a series of episodes, each of which has a dialogue at its centre in which different parties bargain with each other. In each of the following episodes, who is bargaining, what are they bargaining about, and what are the results?
  - a. 11:4-11







## Study 7

### Read Hebrews 11:32-33

9. Judges 16 brings us to the end of the account of the lives of the judges. For the most part they have been pretty flawed, and by the end they are downright awful. What is therefore surprising about the way the writer to the Hebrews describes them?

10. Why do you think he describes them this way?

### To finish

What can you remember when you're tempted to stop living a distinctive Christian life?

### Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks that God accepts the faith of imperfect people like us (and the judges!)
- Pray that God would give you the strength to keep living an attractive, distinctive Christian life.

# There was no king in Israel

## Judges 17-21

### Getting started

Imagine life without a government. What would it be like?

### Light from the Word

Judges 3:6-16:31 told us about the judges who led Israel after the death of Joshua. It told us the history of Israel from the 'top down', from a leadership perspective. Now, in Judges 17-21, we are told what life was like from the 'bottom up,' for regular people. As such, 17-21 comes at the same time chronologically as 3:6-16:31, but from a different perspective.

That perspective reveals that there was another threat to Israel other than its oppression by foreign nations. Israel is in religious (17-18) and moral (19-21) chaos. If the middle of Judges describes the external threats to Israel's existence, the end of Judges describes the internal threats. Because this section is long we won't get into much detail in the text. The point is just to get a broad picture of what everyday life was like during time of the judges. Chapters 17-18 has just described the religious chaos people had fallen into. Chapters 19-21 describes the moral chaos.

### Read Judges 19

1. List all the bad things that happen in this story.

### Read Judges 20

2. List all the bad things that happen in this story.

3. Read 1:1-2 and then 20:18. What does this tell us about how far Israel have turned aside from their original objective?

## Study 8

### Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25

4. What did everyone do in those days?
5. Why? (See also 18:1 and 19:1).
6. Why does *Judges* say this?

### Read Acts 13:16-23, 32-39

7. How was David an answer to Judges 21:25?
8. How was Jesus *the* answer?

## To finish

A non-Christian friend of yours points to all the injustice in the world and says, 'If you say God is so good, then why does he allow so much suffering to still go on?' What do you say?

## Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks that God has appointed Jesus as the permanent king of the world and that his rule will one day restrain all evil, even as it is already restraining evil now.
- Pray that God would help us to be obedient to Jesus, our true king.

# Notes

