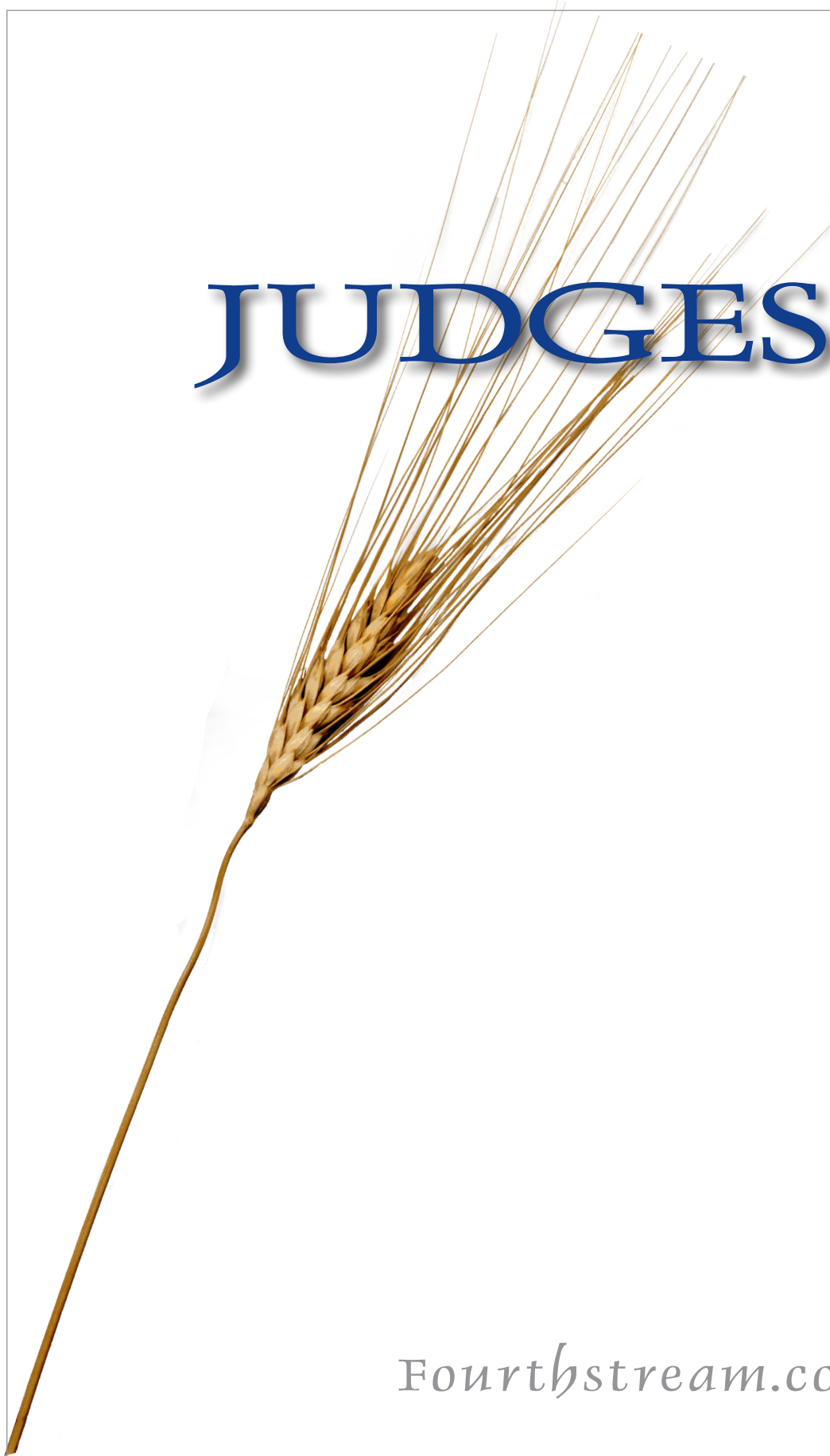


JUDGES



Fourthstream.com



Welcome to the Book of Judges!

To understand the book of Judges, we must first understand that it represents yet another transition in human leadership for the Jews. Consider the transition from Moses to Joshua. While Joshua was certainly a courageous warrior and man of faith (Joshua 14:8), he didn't wield the same authority given by God to Moses. Why do you think this was true?

The book of Judges begins with the death of Joshua. Israel perceives a need for a leader to fight for them. Notice that God's answer to this need does not center on one person as it had before. Why do you think that this was true?

As you consider the overview below and look up the references in each section, examining how each relates to God's desire to lead His people on righteous paths and to deliver them from bondage.

JUDGES

Climate for Testing

No Leader (1:1)
No Persistence (1:27)
No Knowledge (2:10)
No Power (2:20-23)
No Commitment (2:1-3)

1-2

Cycles

Climate for Compromise

No Perspective (8:22-23)
No Appreciation (8:33-35)
No Loyalty (10:13)
No Conscience (19:22-30)
No Choice (20:3,18)
No Understanding (21:3)

3-18

Every man did what was right in his own eyes! 17:6

Open your heart as you read!

In Judges we see cycles of sin that inevitably occur because of mankind's refusal to acknowledge and abide by the leadership of our Heavenly King. The generations during the period of the Judges of Israel had not seen firsthand the wonders in Egypt. There is no mistaking God's hand of deliverance from their oppression through the judges He raises up. Consider the subtleties of the compromises that lead to oppression. See if you can draw correlations to your own walk of faith from the examples given in this instructive book!

AUTHOR AND NAME

The authorship of this book is uncertain, though Jewish tradition attributes it to Samuel. It is most likely that Samuel edited and compiled the records, as he is the link between the period of the judges and kings and was the most prominent spokesman for God during this time period. The title of the book is based on the type of leadership Israel experienced during the period after the death of Joshua and up to the ascension of King Saul to the throne. There are fourteen military leaders or "judges" mentioned in the book. These judges involved themselves in delivering and ruling over the tribes of Israel. The establishment of the office of judge was first mentioned by Moses (Deuteronomy 16:18; 17:9; 19:17).

DATE

Both internal evidence and tradition suggest an origin for the book of Judges during the early years of the monarchy. Davis, in *Conquest and Crisis*, says that it appears that the book was most likely written sometime in the latter days of Saul or in the early days of David for the following reasons:

1. The Jebusites (1:21) still controlled Jerusalem, hence a date before 990 B.C.
2. The Canaanites still controlled Gezer (1:29), hence a date before Solomon's reign.

OTHER BACKGROUND

Someone has called the book of Judges the account of the dark ages of the Israelites. The people forsook God (2:13), and God forsook the people (2:23). The period of the Judges lasted about four centuries. It was unique in that it was a period of great hope, but often resulted in great disappointment. The reason there was such hope and promise for Israel was because their form of government had God as sole ruler. This form of government is called a theocracy. God desired this for His people. It would cause them to depend more completely on Him. But the people rebelled, disobeyed, and began to turn away from their God. The theological term for such behavior is "apostasy".

Apostasy often begins by passively withdrawing and later actively rebelling against God. In Judges, the nation moves through the same five step cycle of apostasy a total of seven times. Each of these periods of apostasy are marked off by the words, "and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord" (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:33; 10:6; 13:1). It is interesting to note that God caused these dark periods in Israel's history (3:8, 12; 4:2; 10:7; 13:1). These were punishments, not accidents. In the life of the believer today, there are no accidents, only incidents, divinely planned or allowed by God for our benefit.

PURPOSE

The book of Judges was written in retrospect, viewing the condition of a nation tested by God to see if they would follow Him. But disregarding God and His standards, each man "did what was right in his own eyes." The resulting cycles (Idolatry-Bondage-Deliverance) are written as examples (1 Corinthians 10:1-14) for us - both of the consequences of sin and the faithfulness of God.

Why Study the Book of Judges?

In our present society the banner theme is "do what is right in your own eyes." Along with that viewpoint resides an attitude that what someone else does is none of your concern. Hopefully through the study of Judges we can see the need to overcome such attitudes and begin to see Jesus' authority to rule and reign over our lives.

There will always be cycles as long as we live, but the length and depth of these cycles can be greatly impacted by understanding and commitment - and insight from the good and bad examples in the book of Judges.

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
1		
2		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the one phrase that is repeated over and over that represents Israel's primary transgression? What reasons can you see from the context to explain this? What character qualities are lacking in the hearts of the nation?
2. Compare 2:22-23 with 23:30. What were the people supposed to learn?

What about today?

Do you make it your goal to drive "inhabiting sin" out of your life? As Paul states in Romans 13:14, "Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Do you take seriously the warning that "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33)? It is easy to think that we can maintain close worldly relationships, enjoy the apparent benefits that these relationships provide, and not fall victim to the consequent thorns and snares. This is a great deception! Remember what we learned from Genesis 4:7!

My thoughts on driving the inhabitants of the land out of my life:

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
3		
4		
5		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. God was all too aware of Israel's disobedience. In what sense was leaving these foreign nations within Israel a test (3:1-5)
2. Other than delivering Israel from oppression, what was the function of the judges? (3:10)

What about today?

Often as we test the waters of sin, they seem quite pleasant. It is usually too late by the time we realize we are in over our heads. Are you harboring a seemingly harmless area of disobedience or sin? We must learn to realize that we are being tested to see if we will follow our Lord as did our forefathers in faith. This apparently included a precious minority from the time period of the Judges of Israel as well!

My thoughts on the factors that cause me to forget my God:

Gideon the Judge

Read Chapters 6-8

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
6		
7		
8		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What was Israel's sin? (6:10)
2. Would you consider Gideon's response to God's call a lack of faith?
3. Do you think Gideon lacked courage?
4. Why was Gideon unwilling to be ruler of the people?

What about today?

What would you consider to be the gods in your world? How could fearing any of today's gods alter your worship of the Most High God? In what ways do feel that you recognize the Spirit's leadership in your life?

My thoughts about following God by faith in the midst of difficult and sinful times:

Israel's Judges!

Read Chapters 8-12

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of interpersonal conflicts did Gideon experience?
2. What do you learn about his character and the character of those with whom he was dealing?
3. What are some of the pitfalls associated with kings and rulers that are presented in these chapters?
4. What words would you choose to describe the conditions of this time period?

What about today?

Gideon's perspective, which he apparently passed on to his sons, was that his leadership was restricted to himself and his family. When called Gideon responded to God for a specific task and then returned to his primary position in life. When they sought to make Jesus king, do you remember His response (John 2:23-25)? This is a good thing to ponder as you are enticed and pressured by the others to expend your energies for the goals and aspirations of others!

My thoughts on experiencing distinction in a time of disruption:

Weakness & Strength!

Read Chapters 13-16

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
13		
14		
15		
16		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the ultimate source of Samson's strength?
2. What was his downfall and how does this reflect the spiritual moral, and ethical climate in Israel at the time?
3. What are the obvious indicators of Samson's spiritual condition?
4. Why do you think the Philistines were such a thorn in the side of the Jews?
5. Consider the subject of "eyes" as Samson's weaknesses unfold!
6. How does the story of Samson make you feel?

What about today?

Do you know where your strength lies? Is it something that you choose to protect?

Do you know where your particular strengths are vulnerable?

How does a person put limitations on what captures his or her eyes?

My thoughts about recognition of true strength:

Idolatry's Depths

Read Chapters 17-18

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
17		
18		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Consider how far the idolatry has developed since the early chapters of the book. Over 400 years have elapsed and the tribe of Dan still has no inheritance in the land.
2. Why do you think that after the death of each judge there was a return to apostasy? What does this teach us?
3. We chose our key verse to explain the extent of the idolatry and moral decline. Review the verse. Why is it a good representation of the spiritual message of the book?

What about today?

Where does the blame fall for idolatry and moral decline in our society? In the church? In our own lives? Do we even have a problem with moral decay in America? As you hold your life up to the standard of Jesus Christ let Him rule and reign over the natural tides of decay that can roll over us and rob our spiritual lives! (Colossians 3:15; 1 Peter 4:1-7)

My thoughts about moral decay over time:

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
19		
20		
21		

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Here we see a continuing search for someone who will take leadership in battle. The Lord's answer remains constant! What was the tribe of Judah's role supposed to be? Should they have needed to ask?
2. What is the repeated question asked in these chapters? (20:3, 12; 21:3) Consider 1:21 as the beginning of the answer to this ongoing question.

What about today?

Are we taking responsibility to lead by example in the areas over which we have influence? One cannot ask "How do these things happen?" without knowing that idolatry and moral decline are a direct result of rejecting God's authority in our lives!

Just as God wished to rule in the lives of the people who lived during the time of the Judges of Israel, He wishes to rule us through hearts that are made clean by renewing through His Word!

The challenge is no different today. Our ability and responsibility to comply remains. May we find a personal response of faith to our personal God! (Hebrews 11:6)

My thoughts about escaping the pitfalls found in Judges:

4 CYCLES OF SIN

The cycles of apostasy we see in the book of Judges are specific and graphic. If seen through the eyes of a weak faith, this would seem to indicate a hopelessness in our earthly walk. As we look at the progressive steps that led to Israel's bondage, hopefully we can learn how to help each other avoid making similar errors.

Step 1 Neglected Relationship (Judges 2:10)

This verse says a lot about the previous generation's failure to pass on the personal reality of the God who had done such miraculous things for them - as they left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness. It is not enough to tell stories about God to each other or to our children. We must be seen expressing our reverence, awe, thankfulness, and familiarity with Christ if others are to hunger for their own personal knowledge.

Read Hebrews 11 several times and consider each personal expression of faith and draw comparisons to your expressions of faith. Note also 2 Samuel 6:14-21.

It can be all too easy to be caught up in our obedience to external standards and lose sight of God Himself. (2 Corinthians. 11:2; John 17:3; Luke 10:41-42)

Step 2 Rejected Standard (1:19)

The beginning of Israel's failure to keep God's covenant was the people's failure to completely drive out and destroy the inhabitants of the land (1:19, 21, 27). A key word in verse 27 is the word "persisted." Unfortunately, it applied to the Canaanites instead of the Israelites. To God, compromise is synonymous with rejection.

It is easy to read verses 22 and 23 of chapter one and lay down your weapons and quit. This time the key word is "quickly." God's plan was for Israel to progressively possess the land, (Exodus 23:30), step by step. When keeping God's standard seems to be difficult, can we change the standard because of our circumstances?

Step 3 Redirected Faith (3:7)

We are, by nature, creatures of faith. What remains to be determined is where we will place that faith. Do you have an understanding of what constitutes an idol in today's society? An idol is anything in which you put your trust, desire, or energy to the exclusion of God. Most idols are fashioned from commonplace and often necessary things in our lives. Read 2 Chronicles 16:7-14. Asa looked to the world around him for the solutions to both his military and his medical problems. Asa's consultation of a physician was not wrong. Asa not seeking and trusting in the Lord's ultimate power to deliver formed the basis for Asa's sin. All areas of our life must be given over to faith in our Creator. (1 Peter 4:19)

Step 4 Afflicted Souls (10:15)

Praise God that He is faithful to afflict our souls to the point of spiritual recognition even when our own hearts are weak. Consider 1 Samuel 12:1-14; Psalm 39; Psalm 32; and Psalm 51 concerning affliction.

Step 5 Divine Deliverance (7:2)

God's deliverance can easily be passed off as circumstantial events. If Jesus was dependent upon His Father, why should it surprise us that we should need Him as well? See John 5:19 and also Psalm 33:13-22. Are you trusting in anything or anyone other than Christ? Your job? Your intelligence? Your bank account?

Step 6 Passionate Resolve (21:1-6)

In the book of Judges, *resolve* never lasted one moment longer than the *deliverer* that God raised up. If we learn nothing else, we must keep our eyes off of men and upon Jesus Christ, as our example, our Lord, and our friend! Consider: Philemon 3:7-14; Hebrews 10:19-25; James 1:2-4.

4 JUDGING ONE ANOTHER

The Hebrew word for Judge is *sopet*, which means one who dispenses justice. During the period during which the Judges ruled Israel, God raised up and empowered men and a woman to execute the office of judge. In most cases their task was two-fold:

1. to lead in battle, dispensing justice on the oppressing nations, and;
2. to rule in peace, dispensing justice in Israel as it related to both religious and civil law.

It is interesting to notice that neither the first or the last battle recorded during this period was led by a judge. Judges were made necessary by the paralyzing effects of idolatry and moral decline. The challenge is to determine our own responsibility in either leading in battle or ruling in peace. The other choice is to allow every man to "do what is right in his own eyes"?

Consider these passages and try to get a firm understanding of each point before drawing any final conclusions.

God alone is judge.

- a. James 4:12
- b. Isaiah 40:23
- c. Revelation 19:11
- d. Psalm 50:6
- e. John 8:50; 5:22
- f. Romans 14:1-4
- g. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5

We are not called to wage war with the world (leading in battle) by dispensing justice, but through upholding God's grace in the world.

- a. 1 Corinthians 5:12
- b. Matthew 5:38-48
- c. Romans 2:1-5
- d. Acts 7:60
- e. Luke 23:34

By judging ourselves accurately.

- a. 1 Corinthians 2:15-16
- b. 1 Corinthians 11:31-32
- c. Matthew 7:1-5

By judging others appropriately (ruling in peace).

- a. Matthew 7:1-5
- b. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13
- c. 2 Corinthians 2:6
- d. 1 John 1:6
- e. Matthew 18:15-17
- f. Luke 17:3

Even after considering these passages you may wonder how to reconcile God's clear command to "not judge unless you are judged," with our commanded responsibility to rebuke our brother (Luke 17:3). The answer certainly must be that the Supreme Judge has set His standard, and it is every believer's responsibility to uphold (Philippians 3:12-16). This will include reproof, rebuke, and exhortation as God gives us wisdom and discernment (2 Timothy 4:2). We should never involve ourselves in passing judgment on a man's heart, but dealing openly and with confident authority of God's Word with regard to our actions.

Some Final Thoughts: Jude 22 and 23; Galatians 6:1