

Judges: When Everyone Does What Is Right in Their Own Eyes

Judges 2:6–23; Judges 4:1–24; Judges 6:1–24; Judges 21:25

New Testament Connection: Hebrews 11:32–34

Bible Study – September 2, 2026

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Joshua Recap

In Joshua we learned:

- God remained faithful to the promises He made generations earlier.
- God's presence gave Joshua courage to lead Israel into a new season.
- Israel had to respond to God's promises with faith and obedience.
- God brought Israel into the land He had promised.
- Joshua challenged Israel to remain faithful to God.

Joshua ends with the people declaring:

"We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God." Joshua 24:18 NIV

Judges begins by showing us what happened when succeeding generations failed to maintain that commitment.

Big Idea

Judges teaches us what happens when God's people abandon His direction and begin determining right and wrong for themselves.

Icebreaker

When you think of the book of Judges, what people, stories, or events come to mind?

Biblical Context

The book of Judges takes place after the death of Joshua and before Israel had kings.

Israel was living in the Promised Land, but the people had not completely driven out the nations living among them as God had commanded.

As new generations arose, Israel repeatedly turned away from God and adopted the practices of the surrounding nations.

Judges records a recurring pattern:

Sin → Oppression → Crying Out → Deliverance → Peace → Sin Again

When Israel turned away from God, they experienced the consequences of their rebellion.

When they cried out to God, He raised up judges to deliver them.

These judges were not courtroom judges like we think of today. They were leaders whom God raised up to rescue Israel from oppression and provide leadership during times of crisis.

Some of the best known judges include:

- Deborah
- Gideon
- Samson

The book begins with Israel struggling to remain faithful to God and ends with the nation experiencing deep spiritual and moral disorder.

Judges reveals both **the danger of abandoning God's direction and the remarkable mercy of a God who repeatedly responds to His people's cries.**

Theme 1: The Cycle of Rebellion and Deliverance

Scripture

Judges 2:18–19 (NIV)

"Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies... But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors."

Biblical Insight

Judges 2 provides a summary of the pattern that repeats throughout the book.

Israel turns away from God.

They experience oppression.

They cry out.

God raises up a judge.

God delivers them.

They experience peace.

Then they turn away from God again.

The problem was not simply that Israel sinned once.

The problem was that Israel repeatedly returned to the same pattern.

Digging Deeper: A Generation That Did Not Know the Lord

Judges 2:10 tells us that after Joshua's generation died, "another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel."

This does not necessarily mean they had never heard God's name. The larger context shows that they did not live with the same covenant knowledge, loyalty, and experience of God's mighty works that characterized the previous generation.

Joshua's generation had witnessed God's faithfulness firsthand, but something changed as the story was passed to the next generation.

Judges therefore raises an important question about what happens when knowledge of God's faithfulness is not faithfully carried from one generation to another.

Cross Reference

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (NIV)

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children."

Discussion Questions

Judges describes a generation that "knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel." What do you think happened between Joshua's generation and the generation that followed?

Why do you think Israel repeatedly returned to the same behaviors even after experiencing the consequences?

What does the repeated cycle in Judges teach us about human nature?

Each time Israel cried out, God raised up someone to deliver them. What does God's response reveal about His character?

Reflection Questions

Judges tells us that a new generation arose that did not know the Lord or remember what He had done for Israel. What concerns do you have when you think about the faith of the generations coming behind us?

When you think about your children, grandchildren, or younger people in your life, what do you most want them to understand about God that you have learned through your own journey?

What can we do to make sure our experiences of God's faithfulness are passed on to the generations coming behind us?

Do you think there is a difference between younger generations knowing about God and personally knowing and trusting God? What might help them move from one to the other?

What responsibility does the older generation have for helping the next generation develop their own relationship with God?

Theme 2: God Uses Ordinary and Unexpected People

Scripture

Judges 4:4–5 (NIV)

"Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time."

Biblical Insight

During another period of Israel's rebellion, the Israelites were oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan, whose military commander Sisera possessed a powerful army and nine hundred iron chariots.

God raised up Deborah, a prophet and judge, to lead Israel.

Deborah summoned Barak and communicated God's command that he lead Israel's forces against Sisera.

God ultimately gave Israel victory.

The story demonstrates that God is not limited by the people or circumstances we might expect Him to use.

Digging Deeper: Deborah and God's Deliverance

Deborah stands out in Judges as both a prophet and a leader of Israel.

Her story also includes Barak and Jael, demonstrating that God's deliverance involved several people serving different roles.

The emphasis of the narrative is ultimately not on human greatness but on God's ability to accomplish His purposes through the people He chooses.

Judges repeatedly introduces unlikely deliverers, reminding us that God does not depend upon conventional human strength to accomplish His purposes.

Cross Reference

1 Corinthians 1:27 (NIV)

"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."

Discussion Questions

During a time when Israel was being oppressed by a powerful enemy, God raised up Deborah, a prophet and judge, to provide leadership. What does God's choice of Deborah teach us about the kinds of people He can use?

God used Deborah to provide leadership, Barak to lead Israel into battle, and Jael in an unexpected way to help bring Israel's enemy to defeat. What does this teach us about God using different people for different purposes?

Israel's enemy had a powerful army and nine hundred iron chariots, yet God used people who appeared to be at a disadvantage to bring deliverance. What does this teach us about the difference between human strength and God's power?

Deborah's leadership demonstrates that God is not limited by the expectations people may place on who can lead or whom He can use. Why do you think people sometimes overlook individuals whom God may be preparing to use?

Reflection Questions

What are some qualities God may value in a person that other people sometimes overlook?

What are some reasons people may overlook the ways God has equipped them to serve?

Sometimes we focus on what we cannot do instead of what God can do through us. How might that keep us from responding when God gives us an opportunity to serve?

God used Deborah, Barak, and Jael in different ways. How can recognizing that God gives people different roles help us appreciate the gifts and contributions of others?

Theme 3: God Meets Us in Our Fear and Weakness

Scripture

Judges 6:14–16 (NIV)

"The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?'"

Biblical Insight

When God called Gideon, Gideon did not see himself as a great leader.

Israel was being oppressed by the Midianites, and Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide it from them.

When God called him, Gideon immediately questioned whether he was capable of doing what God asked.

God's answer was not primarily to build Gideon's self confidence.

God promised Gideon:

"I will be with you."

Gideon's story reminds us that God can call people who feel fearful, inadequate, and uncertain.

Digging Deeper: "The Lord Is With You, Mighty Warrior"

When the angel of the Lord encounters Gideon, he calls him a "mighty warrior" while Gideon is hiding from Midian.

Gideon's circumstances and his perception of himself did not seem to match God's calling.

God saw what Gideon could become through God's presence and power.

The key to Gideon's assignment was not Gideon's greatness.

It was God's presence.

Cross Reference

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Discussion Questions

Gideon was hiding when God called him a "mighty warrior." Why do you think God addressed Gideon according to something Gideon could not yet see in himself?

Gideon's first response to God's call was to point out his limitations. Why do you think people often focus on what they lack when God calls them to something difficult?

God responded to Gideon's insecurity by saying, "I will be with you." Why was God's presence more important than Gideon's ability?

Reflection Questions

What are some limitations people allow to convince them that God cannot use them?

How does knowing God is with us change the way we view our weaknesses?

Why might God sometimes call us to something that feels larger than our own ability?

Theme 4: When Everyone Becomes Their Own Standard

Scripture

Judges 21:25 (NIV)

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

Biblical Insight

Judges begins with Israel failing to fully obey God and ends with profound spiritual, social, and moral disorder.

The final statement summarizes one of the central problems of the book:

"Everyone did as they saw fit."

Instead of allowing God's covenant and commands to determine what was right, people increasingly determined right and wrong for themselves.

The result was not greater freedom.

It was greater disorder.

Digging Deeper: The Downward Spiral of Judges

Judges is not simply a collection of disconnected stories about heroes.

The book becomes progressively darker.

Israel's spiritual condition deteriorates, the judges themselves become increasingly flawed, and the nation moves further from God's covenant expectations.

By the final chapters, the question is no longer simply whether Israel needs another temporary deliverer.

The book leaves the reader recognizing that something deeper is wrong.

Israel needs faithful leadership, but ultimately humanity needs more than another human leader. We need God's lasting redemption.

Cross Reference**Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)**

"There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death."

Discussion Questions

Judges ends by saying that "everyone did as they saw fit." What do you think that statement reveals about Israel's spiritual condition?

What happens to a community when everyone determines right and wrong according to their own standards?

Why do you think doing what "seems right" to us can sometimes lead us away from what God says is right?

Reflection Questions

Judges says that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Where do you see or hear that same message reflected in our culture today?

How can we distinguish between what feels right to us and what is actually consistent with God's Word?

What can happen in our own lives when God's Word stops being the standard that guides our decisions?

New Testament Connection

Hebrews 11:32–34

Biblical Insight

Hebrews remembers several of the judges among the examples of people who lived by faith.

Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are specifically named.

This is significant because none of these individuals was perfect.

The book of Judges openly records their weaknesses and failures.

Yet God worked through imperfect people who trusted Him.

Hebrews reminds us that biblical faith is not about human perfection.

It is about placing our confidence in a faithful God.

At the same time, the repeated failures of the judges point beyond themselves.

Israel needed more than temporary rescuers.

The larger biblical story ultimately points us toward Jesus Christ, the perfect and lasting Deliverer.

Final Reflection Questions

What does Judges teach us about God's mercy toward people who repeatedly fail Him?

After studying Judges, what do you think the book teaches us about our need for God?

Reading for Next Week

Ruth: Redemption, Faithfulness, and God's Providence

Read:

- Ruth 1:1–18 • Ruth 2:1–13 • Ruth 3:1–13 • Ruth 4:9–17

New Testament Connection:

- Matthew 1:1–6

Preview

Judges ends with spiritual and moral disorder throughout Israel.

Ruth takes place during that same period but tells a very different kind of story.

Instead of focusing on national rebellion and warfare, Ruth focuses on an ordinary family experiencing loss, loyalty, provision, and redemption.

Through Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, we will see God's faithfulness working quietly through everyday circumstances.

Ruth also becomes part of a much larger story.

Ruth and Boaz become ancestors of King David, and ultimately Ruth appears in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Big Idea for Next Week

Ruth teaches us that God can be faithfully working through ordinary people and difficult circumstances even when we cannot yet see the larger story.