

07- Judges - Everyone Did As He Saw Fit

1:1-21:25

Key Verse: 21:25

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

The book of Judges covers the period of history between the death of Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy. Judges 21:25 says, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." The Israelites under Joshua conquered the land of Canaan, but after Joshua's death, there was no central government; there was no one who taught the people God's word; there was no shepherd and no clear direction. Each man was his own law. The Israelites were influenced very much by the Canaanite culture, and, with no word of God, they fell into idolatry. This happened time after time. Each time, God removed his hand of protection, and allowed hostile neighbors to harass them. When they turned to God in repentance and cried out to him for help, he would raise up a judge, a charismatic leader, to deliver them. Then, for the rest of the judge's lifetime, the land would have peace.

These judges were men of their times. They, too, did what was right in their own eyes. But they were men of faith and they stood out like bright stars in a dark night. The major judges are listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

The need for a king and shepherd becomes abundantly clear, as the way was paved for the establishment of the kingdom.

WHO WILL BE FIRST TO GO AND FIGHT?

Judges 1:1-36

Key Verse: 1:1,2

1. Judah goes first (1-21)

The Lord had given Canaan to the Israelites, but they needed faith to go in and take it. The tribes of Judah and Simeon co-worked to take their portion in the south. They fought, defeated and executed judgment on a cruel and powerful overlord. They even put Jerusalem to the sword, but they could not conquer it. The Benjamites also failed to conquer it and had to live there with the Jebusites. Judah conquered three of the five Philistine cities, but it was a temporary victory. One hero of these battles was Othniel, the first judge. He conquered Debir and won the hand of Caleb's daughter. Caleb was an old man, but he fought giants and took Hebron.

2. The house of Joseph (22-36)

The territory to the north was assigned to the rest of the tribes, led by Ephraim and Manasseh. They conquered the Canaanites, but did not completely drive them out; they used them as

servants, and these servants later became a snare. We pay a price for compromise with an easy life.

Prayer: Lord, help me to claim the spiritual inheritance you promised me--by faith.

One Word: Take the land by faith

GOD RAISED UP JUDGES

Judges 2:1-23

Key Verse: 2:18

1. Until the death of Joshua (1-10)

The Joshua and the Israelites did not completely drive out the Canaanites. Rather, they compromised with them. God was angry, so he did not drive out the Canaanites. The evil seed of Canaanite culture and religion was planted in the life of the people. As long as Joshua and his generation lived, the people served the Lord. Then, a generation grew up who did not know the Lord or what he had done for Israel.

2. Then the Lord raised up judges (11-23)

After the death of Joshua, they had no shepherd and no word of God. A pattern of national decline set in. First, idolatry and moral corruption; Second, punishment--oppression by enemies. Third, they cried out to the Lord. Fourth, God raised up a judge to deliver them. Fifth, they had peace for a while--during the lifetime of the judge. Then, the people again begin worshiping Canaanite the gods and following their evil practices. Because Israel violated their covenant with God and did not listen, he left the Canaanites in the land to test and train his people.

Prayer: Lord, forgive our sins. Give us your word and raise up shepherds. Help us remember your grace.

One Word: God delivers repentant people

GOD TRAINS HIS PEOPLE

Judges 3:1-11

Key Verse: 3:4

1. God trains his people (1-6)

God decided to leave the Canaanites in the land (i) to train the new generation of Israel to fight and (ii) to test them to see if they would obey the Lord's commands. We too live in a real world.

We must learn to fight spiritual battles. We must not surrender to the world, or be melted in the melting pot. The Israelites lived among the Canaanites. They forgot the Lord and served Baal, the god of material success and physical pleasure. Marriage is the touchstone of faith. God's people should marry to please God, not to please themselves. They shut God out of their marriages and intermarried with the Canaanites. God removed his protecting hand and they were overrun by the Arameans.

2. The first judge (3:5-11)

When, after eight years of suffering, they cried out to the Lord, he raised up Othniel to deliver them. He was Caleb's son-in-law. The Spirit of the Lord came on him and he defeated the king of Aram. The land had peace for forty years, until Othniel died.

Prayer: Lord, help me to fight the good fight of faith. Raise up faithful shepherds for your people.

One Word: Don't compromise; please God

A MAN FOR DARK TIMES

Judges 3:12-31

Key Verse: 3:30

1. Moab's power over Israel (12-15)

Once again the Israelites did evil in God's sight. So God allowed King Eglon of Moab to have power over Israel. He joined with two other Canaanite kings and captured Jericho. He ruled Israel for 18 years, exacting tribute.

2. God raises up a deliverer (16-31)

How dark and shameful were those times when Israel had to pay tribute to her ancient enemy, Moab! When Israel cried out to the Lord in repentance, he gave them a deliverer. Ehud was a young man with a passion to set his country free. He used his left-handedness to take Eglon by surprise and kill him. Then he led the men of Israel to win a great victory. He was a shepherd who helped his people serve God in peace for 80 years. After him came Shamgar, who saved Israel from the Philistines.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for turning disadvantages into advantages and using a left-handed shepherd. Raise up shepherds who can lead your people in peace.

One Word: God used a left-handed shepherd

DEBORAH

Judges 4:1-24

Key Verse: 4:14a

1. Go! The Lord will give victory (1-16)

Deborah was the spiritual leader of Israel. She did her best to teach the people God's word and ways. But for 20 years King Jabin had oppressed Israel. It requires courage and faith to challenge the status quo. But Deborah prayed and called Barak to go and fight Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army. Deborah assured him that God would give him victory over Sisera's iron chariots. Barak agreed to go only if Deborah would go with him. She went, and they won a great victory.

2. Jael, a Kenite woman (17-24)

The Kenites were descendants of Moses' father-in-law Jethro. They lived among Israel, but kept their identity. Sisera thought he could get help from Heber the Kenite, so he fled to his tent on foot. Jael knew that in time of war there can be no neutrality. So she made a decision to stand with God's people. She deceived and killed Sisera. As Deborah had said, Barak lost his chance to become a great hero.

Prayer: Lord, grant us great women of faith who can stand on your side.

One Word: The Lord has gone ahead of you

THE SONG OF DEBORAH

Judges 5:1-31

Key Verse: 5:31

1. When people willingly offer themselves (1-18)

Deborah and Barak sang an epic poem as a duet. They praised God and honored valiant princes who willingly offered themselves. Israel had been greatly oppressed by the Canaanites. They were harassed and helpless. People could not even travel on the main roads. Village life ceased. Deborah, a mother in Israel, arose and challenged the princes of Israel with God's word. She challenged them to follow Barak into the battle against Sisera. There was much heart-searching, but most of the tribes rallied; their leaders risked their lives; they fought and won a great victory.

2. May those who love you be like the sun (19-31)

God fought for his people, possibly by sending a cloudburst. There can be no uninvolved spectators in the Lord's battles. Those who fight the good fight are blessed; those who don't want to get involved, like the people of Meroz, are cursed. Jael, the Kenite woman who killed Sisera

with a tent peg, was blessed.

Prayer: Lord, help me to offer myself willingly to join in fighting your battles. Let me be among those who love you.

One Word: May those who love God be like the sun

THE LORD CALLS GIDEON

Judges 6:1-32

Key Verse: 6:14

1. Israel's sin, and God's discipline (1-10)

When the Israelites sinned by worshiping the gods of the Canaanites, the Lord allowed hordes of Midianites to invade and oppress them. Israel was impoverished; they cried out to the Lord. He sent a prophet to teach them the reason for their suffering.

2. Gideon (11-32)

Gideon was a youngest son who worked hard to please his father. He also trembled in fear. He hid in a winepress to thresh wheat, and complained to God for abandoning his people. The angel of the Lord came and said, "Mighty warrior, I am sending you to save Israel!" Gideon said, "Who, me?" The man demonstrated his power and Gideon realized that he was the angel of God. He feared God more than he feared the Midianites, more than he feared his family and neighbors. So he obeyed God's command: One night he tore down the altar of Baal and sacrificed his father's best bull. The fear of God turns cowards into bold and fearless men. Israel's problem was idolatry, not oppression.

Prayer: Lord, grant us people who fear you more than men--people who obey your word.

One Word: Go in the strength you have!

GIDEON'S 300 MEN

Judges 6:33-7:25

Key Verse: 7:14

1. Gideon puts out a fleece (6:33-40)

Gideon summoned Israel to arms, but he was still fearful. So he tested God; he wanted some kind of assurance that God would really use him to save Israel. So God graciously reassured him, first by making his wool fleece wet, then making it dry.

2. 300 men of faith (7:1-25)

The real enemy was fear. The Lord understood Gideon's and the people's fear. Fear is overcome by trusting in God. God wanted to plant faith in the people--not just win a victory. He told Gideon to send the fearful men home; 22,000 left, leaving only 10,000. He gave these men a "water-lapping test," and chose 300 alert men who lapped water from their hands. Gideon was worried about fighting the Midianite hoard with only 300 men, so God sent him to the enemy camp to learn faith. By faith, Gideon and his 300 men obeyed God; they struck terror in the hearts of the enemy and won a great victory.

Prayer: Lord, help me to overcome the fear that permeates society and live by faith.

One Word: The Lord saves--trust him

EXHAUSTED, BUT KEEPING ON

Judges 8:1-35

Key Verse: 8:4,23

1. Gideon finishes the job (1-21)

Gideon and his 300 men were exhausted and hungry after winning a great battle, but they pursued the enemy kings. They were met with criticism and indifference. He answered the Ephraimites humbly. But when the people of Succoth and Peniel refused them bread because they didn't want to get involved, Gideon promised to come back and teach them a lesson--and he did. There is no neutrality on the battlefield. Gideon found a way through the desert. He pursued and captured and executed the enemy kings.

2. Gideon's mistake (22-35)

Gideon was a man of his times. He had no Bible, so he did what he thought was right. He refused the Israelite's offer to become king--the Lord was their king! But he made a victory trophy out of the gold earrings of the enemy. This became an idol. People with no sense of history soon forget God--and they forget his servants, too. So they forgot Gideon.

Prayer: Lord, help me to overcome criticism and indifference and finish the task.

One Word: Finish the job; give God glory

ABIMELECH, AN OPPORTUNIST

Judges 9:1-57

Key Verse: 9:8

1. Abimelech, a man who would be king (1-6)

Gideon had refused to be king. He said, "The Lord will rule over you." But his son did not think this way. Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a slave woman who was a Shechemite. He persuaded the Shechemites to support him in his bid to be king. He murdered 70 of his brothers and was crowned king by the people of Shechem.

2. Jotham's parable (7-21)

Jotham was Gideon's youngest son. He hid and escaped being killed. He stood on Mt. Gerizim and proclaimed God's judgment on Abimelech in a parable: A truly great man, like an olive tree, wants to be fruitful. It is the useless thorn bush of a man who wants to rule others. Jotham prayed that Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem might destroy each other--and that was just what happened. When treacherous men make an alliance, they will also be treacherous toward each other.

Prayer: Lord, save me from fruitless ambition, and help me to serve others for Jesus' sake and the gospel's.

One Word: Be fruitful like an olive tree

ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE; GOD'S COMPASSION

Judges 10:1-18

Key Verse: 10:15,16

1. God became angry (1-9)

The times were miserable. God raised up Tola, then Jair to save Israel. The real enemy, however, was within. Israel was influenced by the Canaanite culture and religion. They forsook the Lord and worshiped the false gods of the Canaanite nations. The Lord became very angry and allowed the Philistines and the Ammonites to shatter and crush Israel, especially on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead. He wanted to lead his people to repentance.

2. Israel cries out to the Lord (10-18)

After 18 years of suffering, the Israelites repented and cried to the Lord for help. At first, he told them to ask their idols for help. But when they confessed their sins, got rid of foreign gods and pled for his mercy, he relented. He couldn't bear his people's misery any longer. He looked for a man to send to deliver them.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your compassion. When I cry out to you with a repentant heart, you

always come to help.

One Word: God's compassion for repentant sinners

A MIGHTY WARRIOR FROM GILEAD

Judges 11:1-40

Key Verse: 11:24

1. A rejected stone (1-11)

Jephthah was the illegitimate son of Gilead. He was driven out by his brothers. But he was a mighty warrior, and when the Ammonite threat arose, the elders of Gilead invited him to return to lead them. They desperately needed a shepherd.

2. A lesson in history (12-27)

When the Ammonite king claimed the land of Gilead east of the Jordan, Jephthah gave him a lesson from history. The land in question, originally Ammonite territory, had been conquered by the Amorites. Israel had taken it from the Amorites (Dt 2:24-37) and had occupied it for 300 years. The Ammonites' god was too weak to give it back to Ammon. But God gave it to his people, Israel.

3. Jephthah's vow and bitter victory (28-40)

Jephthah's foolish vow was his own idea. God neither expects nor wants such vows. God gave Jephthah victory over the Ammonites, but it cost him dearly. Jephthah was a man who feared God.

Prayer: Lord, raise up men who fear God, spiritual leaders with a sense of history and with faith and courage to put you and your people first.

One Word: We will possess what God gives

A WELL-DESERVED REBUKE FOR EPHRAIM

Judges 12:1-15

Key Verse: 12:3

1. Ephraim's big talk (1-7)

After the battle was over, the Ephraimites--who had not lifted a finger to fight their common enemy--acted as though they had been slighted by Jephthah. They had done the same thing to Gideon (8:1-3). Gideon had been generous. Jephthah, however, fought the Ephraimites. Because

those who spoke the Ephraimite dialect couldn't make the "sh" sound properly, the men of Gilead caught the survivors at the fords of the Jordan. Jephthah's righteous zeal resulted in a bloody civil war. In those days, everyone did what seemed right in his own eyes, for there was no king, no Bible and no spiritual order.

2. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (8-15)

These three minor judges were men of their times. They brought some degree of order and peace to Israel, but their spiritual and moral influence was very poor.

Prayer: Lord, give me courage to fight and claim the victories you give, and humility to welcome and forgive weaker brothers.

One Word: The Lord gives victory

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

Judges 13:1-25

Key Verse: 13:8

1. God promises a son to a sterile woman (1-7)

Manoah lived during the 40 years of terrible Philistine oppression of Israel. He was a humble, prayerful man. He had no hope of having children, but God chose his family to bear a son who would begin delivering Israel from the Philistines. (5) The angel of the Lord instructed Manoah's wife about how to prepare for and how to raise their son.

2. Manoah's prayer (8-25)

Manoah had no doubt about God's power to give his sterile wife a son. He only prayed for wisdom to know how to raise his son in those corrupt and godless times (8). Manoah did not know that his visitor was an angel. He invited him to stay for dinner. The angel told him to prepare a sacrifice for the Lord. When fire from the Lord consumed the sacrifice, Manoah was filled with a holy fear of the Lord. God entrusted a man who feared the Lord to raise a special child whom God would use.

Prayer: Lord, help us to raise your children to be godly people, though we live in a godless world.

One Word: Ask God for wisdom

SAMSON'S MARRIAGE

Judges 14:1-20

Key Verse: 14:4

1. God's strange ways (1-4)

Samson was a man who did what was right in his own eyes. His father did not want him to marry a Philistine woman, and by moral and spiritual standards, his father was right. But God wanted to use Samson's marriage. He began the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines through this event. God's purpose was bigger than Samson's marriage. Samson did as he wanted to do, but this marriage didn't make Samson happy.

2. The lion and the riddle (5-20)

Samson's strength came from the Spirit of the Lord. He tore a lion apart with his bare hands. Later, on his way to his wedding, he ate honey from a swarm of bees that had taken up residence in the lion's carcass. At the wedding feast he told a riddle about the lion and the honey, and made a wager with the Philistines. His bride wept until he told her the answer, so he lost the wager. But the Philistines were the real losers.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust you and wait on you even when I don't understand.

One Word: God has his own plans

SAMSON AND THE DONKEY'S JAWBONE

Judges 15:1-20

Key Verse: 15:16

1. Samson's revenge (1-5)

Samson was a creative mischief-maker. When he found that his wife had been given to another man, he really got even!

2. The Philistine oppression (6-17)

The Israelites trembled before their Philistine rulers--but not Samson! Samson was an embarrassment to Israel in their relations with their Philistine overlords, so when the Philistines demanded him, 3,000 men of Judah went to capture him. He cheerfully agreed to be tied and handed over. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on him; he easily broke the ropes, killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, and made donkeys of them all.

3. Samson prays (18-20)

Samson's faith was simple and direct--he was like a child. He was thirsty, so he cried out to God, and God gave him water.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for using all kinds of people in your redemptive work. Give me eyes to see you at work even in the worst circumstances.

One Word: God raised up a deliverer

SAMSON AND DELILAH

Judges 16:1-22

Key Verse: 16:17

1. Samson's mischief (1-3)

Samson really knew how to make the Philistines angry. While they waited to trap him, he took the city gates and put them on top of a hill facing Hebron.

2. Samson tells everything (4-22)

Samson's lifestyle was anything but exemplary. But he was one Israelite whom the Philistines could not subdue--until he lost his heart to a woman. She nagged him until he told her his secret. (17) Surely he knew that she would betray him, for she had done it three times before. But when a man loses his heart to a woman, he becomes a fool. She cut his hair, making him break his Nazarite vow, and the Lord left him. His strength was gone, and the Philistines easily subdued him. They gouged out his eyes and he became a pitiful spectacle. They treated him like a bear in a side-show.

Prayer: Lord, help your young servants to give their hearts to you for safe keeping, so that they may not lose their strength and become pitiful spectacles.

One Word: Guard your heart with diligence

STRENGTHEN ME JUST ONCE MORE!

Judges 16:23-31

Key Verse: 16:28a

1. Bring Samson out to entertain us! (23-25a)

The Philistines were jubilant because the one man in Israel who was not afraid of them, the man who had made donkeys of them all, was their helpless prisoner. They gouged out his eyes and treated him like a circus animal.

2. Let me die with the Philistines (25b-31)

Samson was blind and helpless--but as his hair began to grow, his strength gradually came back. One day, the Philistines all assembled to offer a sacrifice to Dagon their god. Samson was brought in to entertain them. He prayed with all his heart for strength and God heard his prayer. He used his last strength to push down the main support pillars of the temple of Dagon. The roof fell and the rulers and all the people in the temple died with him. He killed more of God's enemies in his death than he had killed in his lifetime. God used him to lift the defeated spirits of his oppressed people and give them hope.

Prayer: Lord, you always hear desperate prayers. Help me to serve you with all my heart in life and in death.

One Word: A man used by God

IN THOSE DAYS ISRAEL HAD NO KING

Judges 17:1-18:31

Key Verse: 17:6;18:1a

1. Micah's idols (17:1-13)

An Israelite named Micah stole some money from his mother. When he confessed, his mother was so happy that she gave the silver to her son to make an idol. Sometime later, a Levite came through. Micah knew that Levites were special people of God, so he hired him to be his personal priest. He had no Bible and no shepherd to tell him that worshiping idols was a sin. Hiring a personal priest only compounded the sin. Materialism breeds idolatry.

2. The Danites settle in Laish (18:1-31)

The Danites had no word of God, and they were superstitious. They were looking for a place to settle. Their spies, with the help of Micah's priest, located an isolated Canaanite city. They decided to take it and settle there. On the way, the army stopped by Micah's house, stole his idols and hired his priest. This idolatry lasted throughout Northern Israel's history.

Prayer: Lord, help me to worship you in your way, according to your word.

One Word: Idolatry leads to destruction

THE DEPTHS OF MORAL CORRUPTION

Judges 19:1-30

Key Verse: 19:30

1. One kind old man (1-21)

The story of the Levite and his concubine gives us a vignette of life in the times of the judges. Levites were the religious leaders, but this man's main interest seems to be eating and drinking and pursuing small pleasures. On his way home with his concubine, he stopped overnight in the Benjamite city of Gibeah. The old man he met reminds us of Lot (Genesis 19).

2. The sin of Sodom (22-30)

The tragic event that happened in Gibeah was similar to the event in Sodom that brought God's judgment and turned Sodom into a smoldering furnace. The only difference was that what happened in Gibeah was worse! The writer of Judges is showing us the depth of moral corruption to which the shepherdless people of Israel had sunk.

Prayer: Lord, when people follow their sinful human nature, it leads them into the depths of corruption. Raise up shepherds and Bible teachers who can lead us out of our moral cesspool and back to you.

One Word: Such a thing should not be done

A WAR OF REVENGE

Judges 20:1-48

Key Verse: 20:13

1. Surrender those wicked men (1-13a)

The rape and murder of the Levite's concubine did not end with one man's rage. The Israelites realized that they were in a moral and spiritual crisis. They could not ignore what had been done in Gibeah, so the tribes of Israel assembled. They decided that the Gibeonites must be punished. First, they asked that the guilty men be extradited and executed. But the Benjamites refused, and mobilized for war.

2. A hard and bloody war (13b-48)

The Benjamites were confident of victory. They had some skillful special forces. The Israelites were defeated in the first onslaught. They fasted, prayed and sought God's help. They set a successful ambush and won the war. Then they put all the towns in Benjamin to the sword. Only 600 men survived. Those who tried to purge evil from Israel became more evil.

Prayer: Lord, sinful people who have no restraints cannot act with justice. Save our land from moral anarchy.

One Word: How can evil be purged?

WIVES FOR THE BENJAMITES

Judges 21:1-25

Key Verse: 21:25

1. The sorrow of all Israel (1-14)

In their righteous anger, the men of Israel had made a foolish vow. (1) Now, one tribe of Israel faced extinction. The Israelites made the marriage of the Benjamites their own problem, and called a national assembly. When it was discovered that no one from Jabesh Gilead had come, it was decided that wives for the men of Benjamin must come from this selfish city that didn't care about the agony of their brothers.

2. The girls of Shiloh (15-25)

Still there weren't enough wives. So the Israelites made a suggestion to the lonely Benjamites. (20,21) They followed the advice and went to a festival in Shiloh. They hid, and when the girls of Shiloh came out to dance, each man captured one for himself. Verse 25 is a commentary on the times. God's people needed a shepherd. The stage is set for the establishment of the monarchy.

Prayer: Lord, help me to make the problems of your people my own problems, and teach me to obey your word, not my own ideas.

One Word: God's people need a shepherd