

# JUDGES

Eden to Exile Leader's Guide

John D. Morrison, PhD

# OT LEADER'S GUIDE

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## JUDGES

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*OT Leader's Guide: Judges*

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Published by Lakewood Baptist Church

2235 Thompson Bridge Road

Gainesville, Georgia 30506

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# OT19

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Greetings! Welcome to our journey through the Old Testament from Eden to Exile! I am so excited about what we are going to learn together and how we are going to grow together as we read God's Word together in these next twelve months.

Our reading the New Testament in a year as a church was a much broader and deeper success than we ever imagined. We saw God work in individuals and in relationships as his Word was made a daily priority. God tells us that his Word is powerful to accomplish his purposes (Isaiah 55:10-11), and we saw that on full display last year.

We believe that all of God's Word is, as Paul tells us, "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). It is our commitment as a church to the whole counsel of God that has led us to read the Old Testament this year.

I am even more excited about this year because of a new and added "twist." Each week you'll read from the Old Testament, but you'll also find a devotional for the end of the week written by a member of our Lakewood Team. These devotionals will draw the connection between what you read each day and the New Testament. We are about to discover more regarding the unity of the Scriptures. God's Word tells us the one story of salvation freely offered through Jesus Christ.

Please keep current and encourage others to read along with you. I would love to hear your thoughts and impressions as you reflect on each day's reading. Please email me at [tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org](mailto:tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org)

We are blessed as a ministry to have such a talented, gifted, and doctrinally sound staff who each have the competency to lead us into a deeper understanding of God's Word. As you read their devotional thoughts and commentary, consider letting them know how their words have impacted your daily walk of faith.

Enjoy our journey from Eden to Exile!

Dr. Tom

# INTRODUCTION

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Judges is not a dull read! It is filled with amazing stories of murder, intrigue, and seduction. What are these doing in the Bible? How does this book fit in within the rest of Scripture? To the question of why Judges is in the Bible, Tim Keller offers,

The answer is an important one - it is the gospel! The book of Judges shows us that the Bible is not a 'Book of Virtues;' it is not full of inspirational stories. Why? Because the Bible (unlike books on which other religions are based) is not about following moral examples. It is about a God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through us despite our constant resistance to his purposes. Ultimately, there is only one hero in this book, and he's divine.

Judges reveals central truths of the gospel. Judges shows human nature and our desire to reject God's rule over our lives. It goes on to portray vividly the consequences of that rejection. And yet, human rejection of the Lord is not the end of the story. He is a gracious and merciful God who intervenes to rescue his people.

Judges, then, is fundamentally a book about God. He is faithful to his promises. He is full of grace. He delivers his people from oppression in spite of their own rejection of him. Judges testifies to the goodness, faithfulness, and love of our Lord.

## **Setting**

Judges begins, as 1:1 informs us, "after the death of Joshua." The Lord used Joshua to bring his people across the Jordan River and into the promised land. Here, the promises the Lord made to Abraham are coming to fruition. His descendants have become a great nation, and they are taking possession of Canaan. The third part of God's covenant with Abraham — that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him — remains unfulfilled.

With Joshua's death and the rise of a new generation, the question remains: will Israel be a blessing to the world? The answer of the book of Judges is, "Not anytime soon."

God's people will only be a blessing to the world when they live under God's rule. Time and again during the period of judges, God's people reject his rule. Rather than driving out the pagan nations in the land, they become like them. The Israelites are not blessing the world but becoming like the world. As the Israelites reject their God, they, in turn, are oppressed by the nations around them.

## **Cycle of Judges**

A pattern emerges through the book of Judges. God's people reject the Lord, and then they are oppressed by the nations surrounding them. Eventually, the people cry out to God for help, and then the Lord delivers them through a judge. This cycle of rejection, repentance, and deliverance continues throughout the book.

This cycle is not merely repetitive. It is a downward spiral. The situation in Israel is ever-worsening as evidenced by how terrible the events of the final few chapters. These last two stories show the shocking extent of evil. The book concludes with this assessment: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The people of God are in the promised land, but moral and spiritual anarchy reign. The whole of the book calls into question whether or not these people who reject the rule of God can rightly be called the people of God.

Seven times, Judges informs us, "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals" (2:11; cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). While the immorality of God's people at this time may stand out to us, their fundamental problem was first and foremost spiritual. Their immorality was merely an outworking of their rejection of the Lord. They exchanged the God who had redeemed them for the gods of the Canaanites. The cycle of each judge began with the rejection of the Lord.

## **Who are the Judges?**

Our picture of a judge involves a courtroom, but in the book of Judges, they do not wear black robes and powdered wigs. Rather than being judicial rulers, the judges of the Old Testament are better understood as deliverers. They are leaders of the people that God raises up to free them from their oppressors.

Judges 2:16-19 outlines the nature of the Old Testament judges. The Lord himself raises up these judges; he is the source of their authority and power. Their purpose was not to settle internal disputes but to deliver the people from “the hand of those who plundered them.” These judges are deliverers.

These deliverers are remarkable for how unusual and unexpected they would have been as leaders in their own day. Othniel was not a native-born Israelite. Ehud was left-handed and so would have been considered handicapped. As a woman, Deborah would not have been viewed as able to deliver. Barak comes across as cowardly. Gideon is fearful and skeptical. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute, takes up with a band of robbers, and makes rash vows. Samson leaves much to be desired as a leader.

The character of the judges points beyond them to the source of their power and authority: God himself. Throughout the book, it is not the people or the judges who are the heroes but the Lord himself. The people are delivered because God intervenes on their behalf.

### **New Testament Connection**

The book points forward to the need for a king who will help God’s people live under God’s rule. David partially fulfills this role, and yet he shares the same faults as the judges. Ultimately, this vision for a king who will bring God’s people under God’s rule finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus does not just deliver us from our external enemies, but he fights the enemy within. He gives his people new hearts — hearts that desire to love and to obey God.

### **Applying Judges Today**

The most fundamental application of Judges for our lives today is that we need to trust in the Deliverer whom God has sent to rescue us. We need to trust in Jesus Christ, the true king of God’s people who works by his Spirit to give us new hearts. Judges shows us our need for the true Savior.

Another key application of Judges is knowing God. There is nothing more practical for life than knowing our creator and redeemer. True, abundant, and everlasting life is knowing “the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:31). Judges reminds us of

God's grace and mercy. It points us to the fact that our God is a deliverer, and the book makes clear that God is in control no matter the circumstances. We can always trust him.

For those of us who are trusting in Jesus Christ, Judges also proves to be a call to spiritual renewal. Like the people of ancient Israel, we live in a pagan world that our hearts can find enticing. We easily can be drawn away from the one, true God. Our subtle reject of the Lord makes itself plain in our rejection of his moral standard. Morality, however, is only a symptom of the greater problem: we have stopped loving and worshipping the Lord alone. Our problem is fundamentally a spiritual problem. Like God's people in Judges, we need to repent and to turn back to worshipping him alone. We need spiritual renewal which he freely gives as we study and meditate on his word (Romans 12:1-2).



# JUDGES 1-5

OT19 WEEK 29

## Discussion Questions

- 1:2 - The book begins with the tribe of Judah. Consider the last verse of the entire book, 21:15, and also Genesis 49:10. Why would the story of Judges begin with this particular tribe?
- 1:19-36 - The first 18 verses of the book seem to be a continuation of the events from the book of Joshua, but then in verse 19, the people of God do not fully control the land. Why is it significant that they do not drive out all the other nations?
- 2:1-5 - How does this section account for the failures detailed in the verses before it?
- 2:1-5 - The Lord says he “will never break my covenant with you” (2:1), and yet because of their disobedience he declares that he will not drive them completely out from before them (2:2-3). Do God’s promises depend on human obedience?
- 2:10 - How does this verse reveal the people’s disobedience? Who in your life has the Lord placed there for you to share the knowledge of him and what he has done?
- 2:11-15 - What was the fundamental problem in Israel at this time? How does this relate to our own lives today? Do you agree that the most important thing about us is who or what we worship? Why or why not?
- 2:16-19 - What did the judges do? From whom did they receive their authority and power? How does this passage draw our attention to the Lord?
- 3:1-6 - What explanation is given here for why the other nations were left? How have you experienced difficulties in your life that the Lord has used to test and to refine you?
- What pattern emerges in chapters 3 through 5? What lessons do we learn about our own hearts here?

# JUDGES 6-12

OT19 WEEK 30

## Discussion Questions

- 6:1, 10 - What led to Midian oppressing the people of Israel?
- 6:11-27 - What impression do you get of Gideon from these verses? How is that an encouragement to you?
- 6:36-40 - What do we learn about Gideon in these verses? What do we learn about the Lord? Are Gideon's actions portrayed as being worthy of emulation?
- 7:1-25 - What is unusual about this battle plan? What do the Lord's instructions teach about how he works? Why did God work with fewer man and with odd tactics? How does that answer help us make sense of God's work in our own day?
- 8:22-28 - What good thing did Gideon do at the end of his life? What evil thing did he do? How are we tempted to worship created things rather than the Creator?
- 9:56-57 - These verses portray God as a God of justice. We will all be held accountable for our actions. Compare these verses from Judges with Galatians 6:7-10. How is God's justice different than karma? As sinful people, what hope do we have in the face of God's justice?
- 10:6-16 - What led to Israel being crushed and oppressed? Was this genuine repentance? How do their actions compare with the godly grief described in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11? What does genuine repentance look like in your life?
- 11:29-40 - What was Jephthah's goal with his vow? How do we see that Jephthah has a false view of God? How do we try to manipulate God into giving us what we want?

*Jephthah's view of Yahweh is that he is essentially like the pagan gods of Canaan. These pagan nations sacrificed their children to the gods with the hope of getting from their gods what they wanted. Jephthah's vow should be seen as another attempt at his negotiating. He negotiated*

*for the leadership of Gilead, and then he tried to negotiate with the Ammorites. Now, he wants to negotiate with Yabweb. Note that the passage attributes his victory not to the vow but to the Spirit of the Lord.*

*This passage should lead us to question how we attempt to negotiate and to manipulate God. Do we think he will love us more if we read our Bible today? Do we think we will receive more good things in our lives because we've been to church every Sunday this month? Such thinking is not biblical but pagan. Our good works are an overflow of the fact that God has already given us everything in Christ.*

- 12:1-7 - What does this incident reveal about the state of Israel at this time? Is Israel in a better or worse place than it was during the rule of the first few judges at the beginning of the book? If we leave sin unchecked and do not put it to death by the Spirit (Romans 8:13), does our sin (1) improve? (2) plateau? (3) or worsen? Why?

# JUDGES 13-17

OT19 WEEK 31

## Discussion Questions

- 13:1-3 - What was miraculous about this birth? What other miraculous births come to mind from Scripture? Why does the Lord seem to follow this pattern of bringing about key people through miraculous births?
- 13:4-7 - What was a Nazarite? See Numbers 6. What was the goal of someone taking such a vow? What did it indicate about Samson's life? From chapter 13, who does Samson sound like from the New Testament?
- 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14 - Who came upon Samson to give him the strength? Why is this emphasized so often in this account? Is this the same Spirit who indwells believers? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the lives of Christ followers?
- 14:1-3 - How is Samson's desire here a rejection of God's law? What does Samson's story reveal to us about the nature of temptation and the hardness of our own hearts?
- 16:1-21 - Delilah proves to be Samson's downfall. What warning signs of this downfall were there earlier in his life? Reflecting on your own life, what patterns of sin and temptation are there that you need to put to death by the Spirit (Romans 8:13)?
- 16:28-31 - How does the end of Samson's life offer us hope even after we have been ravished by our own sin?
- 17:1-6 - What is wrong with the picture of Micah and his household in this section? How does this go against what the people of God were supposed to do? How does 17:7-12 add to the picture of how far Israel has fallen?

# JUDGES 18-21

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OT19 WEEK 32

## Discussion Questions

- 18:14-26 - How does this episode show the deteriorating spiritual condition of Israel? How are we tempted today to worship God in any way we would like rather than in accordance with his Word?
- 19:1-3, 20-30 - Why is a Levite involved in this story that aims to show how evil is pervasive in the land? What story from Genesis does this call to mind? Why is this such a negative comparison for a city that was supposedly made up of the people of God? What does this account reveal about Israel at this time?
- 20:1-48 - Compare this chapter with chapter 1. Who were the Israelites supposed to be fighting in the land? Instead, who were they fighting? What does this reveal about the condition of God's people at this time?
- 21:25 - How is this a fitting summary of the book? Who was supposed to rule over God's people? How would a king be a corrective to what is going on in Judges? Do the kings that will come in Israel's history lead to a better outcome than 21:25? Why?



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