

Judges: a cycle of sin and deliverance

Key verses –

Judges 2:16-19

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. ¹⁷ Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands. ¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Because there is no king in Israel, everyone does what is right in their own eyes ([Jdg 21:25](#)).

Deborah - Deborah the Judge was one of the 15 judges who ruled over the land of Israel during ancient times, before the Israelites had kings. Deborah also was a prophet and the wife of Lappidoth (Judg. 4:4). Deborah's reign as a judge began during a difficult time in Israel's history. Jabin, the king of Hazor, had been subjecting the land for 20 years when Deborah became a judge. Deborah roused her people to bring an end to the oppression.

As explained in Judges 4, Jabin's army commander, Sisera, had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron to aid in the suppression of the Israelites within the land of Canaan. The people cried out for help from God.

Deborah sent for a man named Barak and told him to gather an army of men from the northern part of the land of Israel. Barak told Deborah that he would follow her command if she accompanied him, and she did.

In Judg. 4:15, Barak led an attack with his army at Mount Tabor and that the Lord routed Jabin's army. Barak's men killed all of Jabin's soldiers. Sisera, Jabin's army commander, escaped on foot but was killed by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, after he had tried to hide in her tent.

Deborah's leadership in delivering Israel from oppression is commemorated in Judges 5, in what is called the Song of Deborah.

The land of Israel enjoyed peace for 40 years after the rout of Jabin's army.

Gideon – Gideon was the son of Joash the Abiezrite from the town of Ophrah. He was Israel's fifth Judge. During Gideon's time, a large army of Midianites and other nations had gathered against Israel. The Lord told Gideon that he would be made strong and that he was to save Israel from the Midianites. Explain the dew on the fleece, discuss the drinking of water by troops.

Gideon raised an army of 32,000, but after several tests by the Lord, the army was whittled down to 300 men. God did this so that the people of Israel would not boast to him that they saved themselves by their own strength. At night, Gideon and his 300 men lit torches, blew trumpets and shouted. Then they stood by and watched as the enemy panicked and began fighting and killing each other.

Samson – Samson, a member of the tribe of Dan, was one of the Judges of Israel. He Judged Israel for 20 years. Samson's mother received a visit from an angel, who told her she would give birth to an unusual son, a Nazirite, and not to cut his hair. Samson had great strength, he killed a lion with his bare hands, and later killed 1,000 Philistines with a jawbone of a donkey. He had romantic encounters with three Philistine women.

He fell in love with one of the women, Delilah. The five leaders of the Philistine nation went to Delilah, and demanded that she find out from Samson what made him so strong, so they could subdue him. She eventually found out it was because his hair had never been cut. While asleep, Samson's hair was cut off. Losing his strength, he was captured by the Philistines, who gouged out his eyes, and made him grind grain in prison. Later, the Philistines stood Samson in the center of a temple during a celebration, his hair had now grown back. Samson was placed between the two main pillars of the temple. He asked God to strengthen him one more time "so that I may pay back the Philistines for the loss of at least one of my eyes." Then Samson pushed against the pillars with all his might. "Let me die with the Philistines," he prayed

OUTLINE -

1. Spiritual and political snapshot of Israel's disobedience (Jgs 1:1–3:6)

2. Stories of the judges (Jgs 3:7–16:31)
 - Othniel (Jgs 3:7–11)
 - Ehud (Jgs 3:12–30)
 - Shamgar (Jgs 3:31)
 - Deborah and Barak (Jgs 4–5)
 - Gideon (Jgs 6–10)
 - Tola (Jgs 10:1–2)
 - Jair (Jgs 10:3–5)
 - Jephthah (Jgs 10:6–12:7)
 - Izban (Jgs 12:8–10)
 - Elon (Jgs 12:11–12)
 - Abdon (Jgs 12:13–15)
 - Samson (Jgs 13–16)

3. Appendices describing Israel's depravity (Jgs 17–21)
 - Dan's rejection of their inheritance and the Levitical priesthood (Jgs 17–18)
 - Benjamin's civil war against the other tribes (Jgs 19–21)