

# JUDGES

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## BACKGROUND

Now that the Israelites were settled in the Promised Land, they began to experience the twin problems of compromise and apostasy: As they compromised on their mandate to completely eradicate the depraved Canaanites, they repeatedly fell into the idolatry and immorality of those nations. This would lead to a series of military defeats, followed by deliverance by a series of "judges." These judges were not legal administrators but strong leaders who helped the nation deal with each successive crisis.

Judges records a repeated cycle:

- sin (Israel "did what was evil in the LORD's sight": [Judges 2:11](#); [Judges 3:7, 12](#); [Judges 4:1](#); [Judges 6:1](#); [Judges 10:6](#); [Judges 13:1](#))
- servitude to pagan nations
- supplication to God
- salvation (deliverance)

Israel's moral condition grew progressively worse as the downward cycle was repeated. Each time a judge died, "the people returned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them" ([Judges 2:19](#)).

The Hebrew word translated "judge" comes from a word meaning "to exercise authority." The judges were people who used their authority to save or "deliver" Israel from oppression. Various forms of *judge* occur 20 times in the book of Judges; various forms of *deliver* occur 48 times.

## AUTHOR

Unknown. Some have suggested that Samuel, considered by some to have been Israel's last judge (see [1 Samuel 7:6, 15-17](#); [Acts 13:20](#)), may have compiled the records of his predecessors.

## DATE

The events described in Judges, from just after the death of Joshua to the beginning of the monarchy, span 335 years (1380-1045 B.C.). The recurring observation that "in those days Israel had no king" ([Judges 17:6](#); [Judges 18:1](#); [Judges 19:1](#); [Judges 21:25](#)) suggests that Judges was written during the monarchy, perhaps c. 1020. This means that Samuel, who lived about 30 to 40 years into the reign of Saul, could have been its author. Concerning the NT suggestion that the period of the judges lasted some 450 years ([Acts 13:20](#), KJV), see the NLT or NIV for that verse.

» See also: [Illustration: Time of the Judges, The](#)

## PURPOSE

- To show that the external threat of defeat by other nations is not as serious as the internal threat of moral depravity and idolatry; indeed, external threats always result from internal problems.
- To show Israel why human kingship became necessary for their nation: The Lord was to be their king, as Gideon acknowledged ([Judges 8:23](#)), but they were so wicked that human kingship became necessary. The writer sees a causal relationship between the fact that there was no king in Israel and the fact that "people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" ([Judges 17:6](#); [Judges 21:25](#)).

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

### *Joshua:*

- In Joshua there is strong, sustained leadership, and unity among the tribes; in Judges there is no sustained leader, and disunity among the tribes.
- In Joshua Israel takes land from the Canaanites; in Judges the Canaanites take land from Israel.
- Joshua emphasizes obedience, victory, and freedom; Judges shows disobedience, defeat, and slavery.

## OUTLINE

### 1. ISRAEL'S SUBJECTION ([Judges 1:1-3:8](#))

1. The conquest of Canaan continues ([Judges 1:1-26](#))
2. Six tribes fail to conquer their land ([Judges 1:27-36](#))
- C. Disobedience and its consequences ([Judges 2:1-3:7](#))

### II. ISRAEL'S SOLDIERS ([Judges 3:8-16:31](#))

- A. Othniel ([Judges 3:8-11](#))
- B. Ehud and Shamgar ([Judges 3:12-31](#))
- C. Deborah and Barak ([Judges 4-5](#))
- D. Gideon ([Judges 6-8](#))
  1. Gideon prepared to lead ([Judges 6:11-7:15](#))
  2. Gideon's first victory over the Midianites ([Judges 7:16-25](#))
  3. Gideon's final victory over the Midianites ([Judges 8:1-21](#))
  4. Gideon rules over Israel ([Judges 8:22-35](#))
- E. Abimelech's murderous reign ([Judges 9](#))

- F. Tola and Jair ([Judges 10:1-5](#))
- G. The Ammonites oppress Israel ([Judges 10:6-18](#))
- H. Jephthah's triumph and tragedy ([Judges 11:1-12:7](#))
- I. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon ([Judges 12:8-15](#))
- X. Samson ([Judges 13-16](#))
  - 1. Birth of Samson ([Judges 13](#))
  - 2. Samson marries a Philistine ([Judges 14](#))
  - 3. Samson's exploits against the Philistines ([Judges 15](#))
  - 4. Samson and Delilah ([Judges 16:1-22](#))
  - 5. Death of Samson ([Judges 16:23-31](#))

### III. ISRAEL'S SHAME ([Judges 17-21](#))

- A. Micah's idolatry ([Judges 17](#))
- B. The Danites' idolatry and relocation ([Judges 18](#))
- C. The Benjamites' outrageous crime ([Judges 19](#))
- D. The civil war against Benjamin ([Judges 20](#))
- E. Reconciliation; wives for the Benjamites ([Judges 21](#))

### TIMELINE

1446 B.C.:	The Exodus
1406 B.C.:	Israel enters Canaan
1377 B.C.:	Othniel, 1st judge
1093 B.C.:	Call of Samuel
1075 B.C.:	Samson, last judge
1051 B.C.:	Saul, 1st king

**Judges 1:1-26** *The conquest of Canaan continues.* The book of Judges continues the story of Israel's conquest of Canaan. Several incidents recorded in 1-2 repeat the record of Joshua.

After the death of Joshua, there was still land to be taken from the Canaanites. Judah and Simeon defeated the city of Bezek and took its king, Adoni-bezek. He was made to suffer the same torture he had inflicted on others—loss of his thumbs and big toes.

Judges 1:12-15 repeats Joshua 15:13-19, about Othniel winning the daughter of his Uncle Caleb (Judges 3:8-11).

Judah was able to conquer the major cities and mountainous region of Philistia, but the people in the valleys proved too formidable because of their iron chariots (Judges 1:16-19).

Although Judah initially took Jerusalem (Judges 1:8), it evidently regained its freedom (Judges 1:21) and remained under Jebusite control until the time of David (2 Samuel 5:6-9).

Ephraim and Manasseh were able to capture Bethel (Judges 1:22-26), an important city in patriarchal history (Genesis 28:10-19).

**Judges 1:27-36** *Six tribes fail to conquer their land.* Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali were unable to conquer important Canaanite cities. Even when they grew stronger, they didn't drive out the Canaanites but put them to forced labor instead. Dan would later choose to relocate rather than fight to claim its land (Judges 18:1-31).

**Judges 2:1-6** *Warnings and weeping at Bokim.* The angel of the Lord (see exposition on <sup>s</sup>Genesis 16:1-16) declared that Israel's inability to drive out all of the Canaanites was a result of its disobedience and compromise with those pagan nations. The people responded with a public display of sorrow and named the place Bokim ("weeping") to commemorate the occasion.

**Judges 2:7-19** *A preview of apostasy.* The author gives a "flash-forward" summary of Israel's apostasy during the time of the judges: Although Israel obeyed the Lord while Joshua lived, after his death the new generation would serve the deities of Canaan and, as a result, would fall under Canaanite rule. Even when God sent judges to deliver Israel from oppression, they would not serve him. Instead, each generation would become increasingly more sinful (Judges 2:19).

**Judges 2:20-3:7** *Intermarriage and idolatry.* God had permitted the Canaanites to remain among Israel as a test of his people's loyalty to him. Israel's association with these remaining Canaanites led to intermarriage, and intermarriage led to idolatry (Judges 3:6)—precisely what both Moses and Joshua had warned of (Deut. 7:3-4; Joshua 23:6-13).

**Judges 3:8-11** *Othniel.* Because of Israel's sin, God allowed them to be oppressed by a Mesopotamian king for eight years. Then he raised up Othniel, Caleb's nephew and son-in-law (Judges 1:12-15), who delivered Israel. The land then enjoyed 40 years of peace.

"The Spirit of the LORD came upon" Othniel (Judges 3:10). This is also said of Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (Judges 11:29), and four times concerning Samson (Judges 13:25; Judges 14:6, 19; Judges 15:14; see exposition on <sup>s</sup>1 Samuel 9:27-10:8.)

**Judges 3:12-30** *Ehud leads with his left.* When Israel again "did what was evil," God allowed them to be oppressed for 18 years by Eglon, king of Moab. God then "raised up a man to rescue them," a Benjamite named Ehud. Entrusted to carry tribute to Eglon, Ehud used his left-handedness to conceal a

dagger, with which he killed the king. He then led the Israelites in a successful battle against Moab, ushering in 80 years of peace ([Judges 3:30](#)).

**[Judges 3:31](#)** *Shamgar*. Shamgar, another deliverer of Israel, killed 600 Philistines with a cattle prod.

**[Judges 4:1-3](#)** *Jabin and his 900 "tanks."* The Lord "sold" Israel into the hands of the Canaanite king Jabin, who with his 900 chariots led by Sisera had a decided advantage.

**[Judges 4:4-16](#)** *Deborah and Barak*. Deborah, already recognized in Israel as a prophetess, now became its judge. Barak evidently had ignored God's mandate to lead an army against the oppressing Canaanites. When Deborah reminded him of this, he agreed to go only if she would accompany him. Deborah advised Barak concerning when to fight ([Judges 4:14](#)), and the Lord caused a rout of the Canaanite army.

While Barak was somewhat overshadowed by Deborah, he is elsewhere called a deliverer of Israel ([1 Samuel 12:11](#)) and a man of faith ([Hebrews 11:32](#)).

**[Judges 4:17-24](#)** *Sisera seeks refuge in the wrong tent*. Sensing defeat, Sisera fled on foot and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, assuming she was a friend. Jael, however, was loyal to Israel, and while Sisera was asleep she drove a tent peg through his skull and killed him—fulfilling Deborah's prediction ([Judges 4:9](#)).

**[Judges 5:1-31](#)** *Deborah and Barak sing a victory song*. After their victory, Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise to the Lord for those who had volunteered for the battle. The song called upon neighboring kings to take notice of the mighty works of God. It acknowledged Israel's hardship under Canaanite oppression and gave God all credit for the victory.

While specifically praising the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali for their sacrificial participation ([Judges 5:18](#)), the song specifically denounced other tribes—Reuben, Dan, Asher, and "Gilead"—for not participating ([Judges 5:15-17](#)). "Gilead" probably refers to the eastern tribes of Gad and half of Manasseh.

The song acknowledged God's intervening on Israel's behalf, probably by sending a torrential rainstorm that made the battlefield too muddy and slippery for the enemies' chariots ([Judges 5:20-22](#); see [Judges 4:7, 15](#)).

Jael was praised (in graphic detail!) for her bravery in dealing the deathblow to Sisera ([Judges 5:24-27](#)). The song closes by imagining the emotions of Sisera's mother as she waits in vain for his return ([Judges 5:28-30](#)).

**[Judges 6:1-6](#)** *Midian oppresses Israel*. Israel's continued disobedience brought an invasion by hordes of Midianites and Amalekites. For seven years they destroyed Israel's harvests. So bad was the oppression that some Israelites hid in caves ([Judges 6:2](#)).

**[Judges 6:7-10](#)** *"Sin brings sorrow; it's that simple."* When Israel cried out in distress to the Lord, he sent an unidentified prophet, who reminded them of God's past deliverances. God had often warned them not to worship foreign deities, but they had not obeyed. Now they were paying for their disobedience.

**Judges 6:11-24** *Gideon: An unlikely leader?* The angel of the Lord confronted Gideon, a Manassehite, as he tried to salvage a little grain from the invaders by threshing in an unconventional and secret place—a winepress. To Gideon's surprise, the angel called him a "mighty hero" and instructed him to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Protesting that he was the "the least in my entire family!" ([Judges 6:15](#)), Gideon asked for a sign as reassurance of his call. When he brought an offering to the angel, the angel touched it with his staff and the offering was consumed by fire.

**Judges 6:25-32** *"Let Baal defend himself."* The Lord told Gideon to tear down the pagan fertility altars belonging to his father, Joash, and build in their place an altar to the Lord. When Gideon did this, his neighbors were enraged and asked Joash to turn his son over for execution. Joash retorted that if Baal was indeed a god, they should let him defend himself. In honor of this occasion, Joash gave Gideon the name Jerubbaal ([Judges 6:32](#); [Judges 7:1](#); [Judges 8:29](#)).

**Judges 6:33-35** *Gideon blows a trumpet and gathers an army.* As the armies of Midian and Amalek gathered against Israel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. He blew a trumpet to muster an army, and his father's family responded. Messengers went to neighboring tribes to recruit additional men ([Judges 6:33-35](#)).

**Judges 6:36-40** *The sign: Wet one morning, dry the next.* Through two more signs, involving a fleece, God again assured Gideon that he would deliver Israel through him.

**Judges 7:1-8** *God orders some military cutbacks.* Through a series of tests, God reduced Gideon's volunteer army from 32,000 to just 300 men—ridiculously small compared to the 135,000 Midianites.

**Judges 7:9-15** *His morale is boosted by a loaf of bread!* Gideon received a final assurance before battle as he overheard one Midianite warrior recounting a strange dream about a loaf of bread, and another interpreting it to mean that Gideon would destroy them.

**Judges 7:16-25** *Blazing torches, blowing trumpets.* Gideon armed his men with trumpets and jars containing torches. In the middle of the night, on signal, they all broke their jars—exposing the flaming torches—and blew the trumpets. The startling combination of sight and sound caused mass confusion among the Midianites, and many of them turned their swords on each other, while others tried to flee.

**Judges 8:1-3** *Gideon the diplomat.* The men of Ephraim were apparently jealous of Gideon's initial victory, and they angrily criticized him for not having called them sooner to help him. Gideon's diplomacy appeased them (see exposition on [§Judges 12:1-7](#)).

**Judges 8:4-9** *"I'll be back!"* As Gideon pursued the Midianites over the Jordan, he sought food for his exhausted men at two Transjordanian Israelite cities. Fearing reprisal from the Midianites should Gideon not completely defeat them, these cities refused to help Gideon. Gideon threatened to return and punish them when his mission was accomplished.

**Judges 8:10-21** *Victory and vengeance.* Most of the Midianites had already been killed; only 15,000 remained for Gideon to fight in the eastern desert. Having defeated them, he returned and took vengeance on the cities that had refused to help him.

**Judges 8:22-35** *He refuses the crown, but can't resist the gold.* The Israelites wanted to make Gideon their king. He wisely rejected the offer, declaring that only God should reign over Israel. He did, however, request in return for his victory the gold earrings taken in plunder. With the gold he made some sort of image, which the people made into an object of worship. Despite this idolatry, Israel enjoyed peace for 40 years. Gideon had many wives and 70 sons.

After Gideon's death ([Judges 8:32-35](#)), Israel quickly forgot the Lord's deliverance and returned to the worship of Baal.

**Judges 9:1-57** *The murderous reign of Gideon's son.* Abimelech, Gideon's son by his Shechemite concubine, aspired to be a king. Persuading his mother's relatives to support him, he hired assassins to murder his 70 half brothers, eliminating any potential competition. The murderous scheme was successful; only one of the 70 escaped. The people of Shechem declared Abimelech their king.

Jotham, the surviving half brother, told a parable that portrayed Abimelech as unfit to be king ([Judges 9:7-15](#)), and pronounced a curse on Shechem, predicting that Abimelech and the Shechemites would end up killing each other.

After Abimelech had reigned three years, there was a falling out between him and the people of Shechem. [Judges 9:24](#) states that God's hand was in this falling out, so that both Abimelech and the people of Shechem would pay for their crime against the 70 sons of Gideon. [Judges 9:25-57](#) shows God's providence at work as, true to Jotham's prediction, Abimelech and the Shechemites end up killing each other.

**Judges 10:1-5** *Tola and Jair.* Tola, from the tribe of Issachar, judged Israel in some undefined capacity for 23 years. Jair, a Gileadite with 30 sons, judged for 22 years.

**Judges 10:6-9** *Will they never learn? Sin brings suffering!* In spite of all their past difficulties, Israel continued to serve more and more foreign deities, and the Lord began subjecting them to oppression on two fronts—the Philistines from the west and the Ammonites from the east.

**Judges 10:10-18** *"This time, you're on your own."* For the first time during the period of the judges, Israel admitted they had sinned. But God apparently knew that their repentance was not genuine, for he declared that he would no longer deliver them ([Judges 10:13](#)). He would grieve in compassion at their misery ([Judges 10:16](#)), but he would not raise up a new judge. This time Israel would have to find its own deliverer.

**Judges 11:1-11** *Jephthah's testing.* Jephthah, a Manassehite, was rejected by his half brothers because his mother was a prostitute. After being driven from his home and community, however, Jephthah proved to be a capable leader. When the Ammonites threatened to attack, Jephthah's people requested that he return home to lead them.

**Judges 11:12-33** *Jephthah's triumph.* After trying to negotiate with the Ammonites, Jephthah prepared for battle. Before going into battle, he made a rash vow that if the Lord would give him victory over the Ammonites, he would offer as a burnt offering "the first thing coming out of my house to greet me when I return in triumph" ([Judges 11:30-31](#)). Little is told concerning the battle except that Jephthah was victorious.



**Judges 11:34-40** *Jephthah's tragedy.* To Jephthah's horror, when he returned home his only daughter was the first one to come out to greet him. Both he and his daughter agreed that he was obligated to fulfill his vow. After spending two months with her friends, she returned to her father, and he fulfilled his vow by killing her. Jephthah's actions were based on pagan traditions and would not have had God's approval.

**Judges 12:1-7** *Shibboleth: Mispronounce it and you die!* As they had been with the Manassehite Gideon, the Ephraimites were jealous of the success of the Manassehite Jephthah. They accused him of not calling them to assist him when he fought the Ammonites ([Judges 12:1](#)). Jephthah was not diplomatic as Gideon had been, but bitterly scolded the Ephraimites for not coming when he *did* call them ([Judges 12:2-3](#)). Jephthah's men turned on the Ephraimites, who tried to escape across the Jordan. Those who were caught trying to cross the river were compelled to say "shibboleth" (which probably means "flowing stream"). All who pronounced it "sibboleth," using the *s* instead of the *sh* sound, were assumed to be escaping Ephraimites and were killed. *Shibboleth* has been preserved in modern times as a synonym for "password" or "test of faith."

**Judges 12:8-15** *Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.* Ibzan, a Bethlehemite with 30 sons and 30 daughters, judged Israel for seven years. Elon, from the tribe of Zebulun, judged Israel for 10 years. Abdon, from the tribe of Ephraim, judged Israel for eight years. He too had a large family—40 sons and 30 grandsons.

**Judges 13:1-25** *The birth of Samson.* The angel of the Lord appeared to the barren wife of Manoah and announced that she would bear a son. She was to avoid strong drink because her son would be a Nazirite from birth (see exposition on [Numbers 6:1-21](#)), with the special mission of "beginning" to deliver Israel from the Philistines ([Judges 13:5](#), KJV, NASB, NIV). Israel would not decisively defeat the Philistines until the time of David.

A further angelic visit assured Manoah and his wife of God's supernatural involvement in their son's birth. The child Samson was born, and as he grew "the LORD blessed him" and "the Spirit of the LORD began to take hold of him" ([Judges 13:24-25](#)).

**Judges 14:1-4** *His pagan wife is part of God's plan.* Samson saw a Philistine girl and wanted to marry her. His concerned parents wondered why he couldn't find an Israelite girl to marry. Samson's retort depicted the spiritual attitude of his day: "Get her for me. She is the one I want" ([Judges 14:3](#)). None of them knew, however, that this marriage was a part of God's plan to use Samson to fight the Philistines ([Judges 14:4](#); see [Judges 13:5](#)).

**Judges 14:5-18** *The honey, the riddle, and the betrayal.* On his way to the Philistine girl's home to make wedding arrangements, Samson encountered a lion. The Spirit of the Lord empowered him to kill it. Later, when he returned that way for his wedding, he found that bees had built a honeycomb in the lion's carcass. At his wedding feast, Samson told a riddle having to do with the honeycomb, and wagered that none of the guests could solve it. (Only someone who had seen him find the honey could have solved the riddle).

The stumped Philistines threatened to burn the bride's father's house if she could not learn the answer to the riddle. After several days of tearful appeals to Samson, she learned the secret and informed the Philistine guests, who then told Samson the answer.



**Judges 14:19-20** *30 die to pay his debt.* Angered by the betrayal, Samson went to another Philistine city, killed 30 men, and stripped the corpses of their clothes to pay off his riddle wager. Though Samson's actions may seem anything but spiritually motivated, "the Spirit of the LORD" ([Judges 14:19](#)) was using him "to disrupt the Philistines" ([Judges 14:4](#)).

**Judges 15:1-8** *Meanwhile, his best man steals his bride!* When Samson returned to claim his wife, he was forbidden to see her. Assuming Samson had abandoned her, her father had given her in marriage to Samson's best man ([Judges 14:20](#); [Judges 15:2](#))! An angry Samson, using a very unusual method, burned the ripened harvest fields and vineyards of the Philistines. When the Philistines retaliated by burning Samson's wife and her father, an even angrier Samson took revenge again, killing more Philistines.

**Judges 15:9-20** *Bound by 3,000, he kills 1,000.* Some men of Judah, fearful of reprisal, persuaded Samson to let them bind him and turn him over to the Philistines. As soon as he had been turned over, however, the Spirit of the Lord enabled him to break free and he killed 1,000 more Philistines.

**Judges 16:1-3** *Gaza's gates are useless against him.* A bold but careless Samson entered Gaza to visit a harlot. The Gazites tried to capture him by locking the city gates, but Samson ripped up the entire gate structure and carried it to a hill 38 miles away.

**Judges 16:4-22** *But Delilah's determination does him in.* The rulers of the five main Philistine cities each promised to pay 1,100 shekels of silver to Samson's lover, Delilah, if she could find the secret to his great strength. Delilah asked Samson what his secret was. He strung her along with false answers, then, wearied by her persistence ([Judges 16:16](#)), divulged the truth: He was a Nazirite and his hair, the symbol of his separation, had never been cut.

Delilah used the information, cut his hair, and turned over a weakened Samson to the Philistines. They put out his eyes, imprisoned him, and compelled him to do hard work. There was a note of hope, however: While he was in prison, his hair began to grow again.

**Judges 16:23-31** *Samson prays and pulls the house down.* When the Philistines gathered to honor their god, Dagon, they brought out the blinded Samson to entertain them. Positioning himself between two supporting pillars, he prayed for one last demonstration of strength and pulled the building down upon himself and all who were present. As Samson died, he killed even more Philistines than in all his other amazing exploits combined. Though Samson did not totally defeat the Philistines (see exposition on [§Judges 13:1-25](#)), he had fulfilled God's destiny for his life ([Judges 14:4](#)).

**Judges 17:1-13** *A silver idol, a personal priest.* A man named Micah stole some silver from his own mother. When he returned the stolen silver, she told him she had dedicated it to the Lord and wanted him to make an idol from it. He made the image and added it to his private religious shrine, where his own son served as his personal priest.

The author of Judges interrupts this bizarre episode to note that "in those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" ([Judges 17:6](#)). He will repeat the statement verbatim as a final summary of the entire book ([Judges 21:25](#)).

An unemployed Levite wandered through Micah's region, and Micah hired him to be his personal priest in place of his son ([Judges 17:7-13](#)).

**Judges 18:1-31** *"What's a nice priest like you doing in a place like this?"* Meanwhile the tribe of Dan, still unable to claim its land, decided to relocate. As they searched for a new location, they happened to encounter Micah and his personal priest. When the Danites decided to move to the northernmost region of Israel, they invited Micah's priest to accompany them ([Judges 18:7-26](#)). The Danites conquered the peaceful city of Laish and renamed it Dan after their ancestor. The city became infamous for its idolatry ([Judges 18:27, 30-31](#)).

**Judges 19:1-30** *The Benjamite atrocity: "The worst crime since Egypt."* A Levite traveling with his concubine stopped in the Benjamite town of Gibeah to spend the night. When the men of the city tried to sexually assault the Levite, he gave them his concubine instead. After an entire night of brutal sexual assaults, she returned to the house where the Levite was staying and died on the doorstep. To let his fellow Israelites know of this horrendous crime, the Levite cut the woman's corpse into 12 pieces and sent them to each of the 12 tribes. All who heard of the crime agreed it was the worst they had heard of since their days in Egypt ([Judges 19:30](#)).

**Judges 20:1-48** *The civil war against Benjamin.* 400,000 men from all the tribes gathered to learn the details of what the Benjamites had done to the woman. Hearing the Levite's account (which omitted his own role in surrendering her to the mob), they were unified in their resolve to punish the offenders. They demanded that Benjamin turn over the guilty men of Gibeah ([Judges 20:8-13](#)). When the Benjamites refused to do so, the 11 other tribes declared war against them.

Apparently the other 11 tribes were no more righteous than Benjamin, for Benjamin won the first two battles ([Judges 20:19-25](#)). The 11 tribes then gathered at Bethel before the Ark of the Covenant. Led by Phinehas the high priest, they wept, fasted, and offered sacrifices, and God promised victory. On the third day of battle the Benjamites were defeated, with 25,100 killed. In their zeal to win and punish, the 11 tribes turned on the Benjamite women and children as well. When the fighting ended, the only Benjamites left alive were 600 warriors who had escaped the battle.

**Judges 21:1-24** *Reconciliation, wives for the Benjamites.* The 11 tribes now faced a troubling situation: They had almost destroyed an entire fellow tribe; and having vowed never to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite, they saw no way to save the tribe from extinction.

When it was discovered that the city of Jabesh-gilead had not joined in the war against Benjamin, the 11 tribes killed everyone in that city except for 400 virgin females, who were given as wives to 400 of the 600 surviving Benjamite warriors.

The 200 still unmarried Benjamites were granted another means of finding wives: While the men of the other tribes still would not directly give them their daughters, they were permitted to kidnap and claim as a wife any young woman who was on her way to a certain feast at Shiloh ([Judges 21:16-24](#)).

**Judges 21:25** *A sad but fitting summary.* The sordid stories of Judges, which seem to grow worse as the book progresses (see [Judges 2:19](#)), make the book's final verse a grand understatement: "In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."

## People to remember from Judges

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- [Deborah](#)
- [Ehud](#)
- [Gideon](#)
- [Jephthah](#)
- [Phinehas](#)
- [Samson](#)

### DEBORAH

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Facts:** Judge, helped Barak defeat Canaanites ([Judges 4-5](#))

**Husband:** Lappidoth ([Judges 4:4](#))

**Occupation:** Prophetess, judge ([Judges 4:4](#))

**Total Bible References:** 9

**Key References:** [Judges 4-5](#)

#### *Deborah Speaks*

I often think of her, that other Deborah, whose name was given to this very palm tree under which I hold court. Perhaps I was named after her. She was a nurse; I am a prophetess. She ministered to Rebekah and Isaac; I have been called to help Barak. ([Judges 4:4](#), [6](#); [Genesis 24:59](#); [Genesis 35:8](#))

What a sight that was, watching Barak charge down the slopes of Mount Tabor with his 10,000 troops, utterly crushing the enemy. I found myself asking, *Is this the same timid man who only a day or so ago flatly declared he would lead no army unless I went with him?* In fact I asked him, "What in the world has transformed you?" And he smiled and said, "I assumed you would know. It had nothing to do with this world. It's called faith!" ([Judges 4:8](#), [14-15](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#))

I think we both felt bad about my prophecy at first, but that was before we met Jael. What a woman! Probably the words in our song of celebration said it best: "Most blessed is Jael." ([Judges 4:9](#); [Judges 5:24](#))

#### *Spiritual Lessons from Deborah*

- Don't undervalue your occupation or position in life. God called an Israelite wife and mother to serve as a prophetess and to spearhead one of Israel's great military attacks ([Judges 4:4-15](#)).
- Though Deborah was right in helping Barak, we should not need another person's help to obey the clearly revealed will of God. Barak's partial obedience resulted in partial rewards ([Judges 4:4-9](#)).

#### *Key Verses*

"Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who had become a judge in Israel. She would hold court under the Palm of Deborah, which stood between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to settle their disputes. One day she sent for Barak son of

Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, commands you' " ([Judges 4:4-6](#)).

## EHUD

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Facts:** Judge, killed Eglon, brought peace to Israel ([Judges 3:21-30](#))

**Father:** Gera ([Judges 3:15](#))

**Total Bible References:** 8

**Key References:** [Judges 3:15-4:1](#)

### *Ehud Speaks*

Remember what Moses said about God's right hand saving our nation at the Red Sea—"Your right hand, O LORD, is glorious in power. Your right hand, O LORD, dashes the enemy to pieces"? ([Exodus 15:6](#))

Well, thank God for his right hand, but I want equal time—because in our day you've seen a left-handed man save Israel! Think of it—for 18 years that fat, greedy Eglon ruled over us with a heavy hand. The nerve of some people! But no more. By God's grace and a little help from a knife and a trumpet, neither Eglon nor his 10,000 warriors will ever threaten Israel again. You should have seen his surprised look when I drew my knife with my left hand! And I wish I could have seen the look on the guards' faces when they found their king dead. They thought they had frisked me so well. Of course, by the time they found him I was long gone! I wish all those kids who used to tease me could see me now—I've still got my fast legs and my strong left arm! ([Judges 3:12-30](#))

### *Spiritual Lessons from Ehud*

- Ehud felt it necessary to kill Eglon for the deliverance of Israel. Christians do not live in a theocracy as the Israelites did, and Ehud's extreme solution is seldom called for, but some evils in society demand a radical response from godly people ([Judges 3:21](#)).
- God delights in choosing and using all kinds and people—male, female, black, white, young, old; despite a prejudice common in primitive cultures, God used this left-handed man for a great cause ([Judges 3:15](#)).

### *Key Verse*

"When Israel cried out to the LORD for help, the LORD raised up a man to rescue them. His name was Ehud son of Gera, of the tribe of Benjamin, who was left-handed" ([Judges 3:15](#)).

## GIDEON

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Facts:** Judge, defeated the Midianites ([Judges 7:22](#); [Judges 8:10-12](#))

**Father:** Joash ([Judges 6:11](#))

**Sons:** Abimelech, Jotham, and 68 unnamed ([Judges 8:30](#); [Judges 9:1](#), [5](#))

**Total Bible References:** 40

**Key References:** [Judges 6-8](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#)

### *Gideon Speaks*

Seven bitter years of oppression because of our sin, followed by 40 blessed years of peace because of his faithfulness—what a wonderful God we serve! How little did I know about Jehovah-shalom back then. But at his command I built an altar *to* him and tore down another *for* him. ([Judges 6:1](#), [24-25](#); [Judges 8:28](#))

300 ill-armed men pitted against 135,000 well-armed men—outnumbered 450 to one! What an uneven and unfair contest it appeared to be—and, indeed, *turned out to be . . .* for the 135,000! Courage, obedience, and faith, accompanied by trumpets, jars, torches, and shouts brought our victory. ([Judges 7:6-7](#), [16-22](#); [Judges 8:10](#), [28](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#))

Dear God, please don't let the problems of the present overshadow those glories of the past. I was doing so well—proclaiming you our king, and refusing the crown. And then I started remembering all that gold, and human nature just got the best of me. That seemingly harmless gold image has become a snare and an idol for our whole nation. Merciful Lord, as you once saved us from our enemies, please now save us from ourselves! ([Judges 8:22-27](#))

### *Spiritual Lessons from Gideon*

- God often calls the least likely person to perform mighty acts for him ([Judges 6:11-15](#)).
- It is never wise to second-guess God's will after it has been clearly revealed ([Judges 6:14-23](#), [36-40](#)).
- The outcome of our spiritual battles is often dependent upon the overthrow of the "Baals" (false gods) in our lives ([Judges 6:25-27](#)).
- Even when we're outnumbered 450 to one, God can give us the victory ([Judges 7:7](#); [Judges 8:10](#))!
- We should be careful of what we allow into our life, lest it become a snare to ourselves and others ([Judges 8:24-27](#); [1 Cor. 8:9](#); [1 Cor. 10:23-24](#), [31-33](#)).

### *Key Verses*

" 'But Lord,' Gideon replied, 'how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!' The LORD said to him, 'I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man' " ([Judges 6:15-16](#)).

## JEPHTHAH

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Facts:** Judge, defeated the Ammonites, made rash vow that he later regretted ([Judges 11:30-40](#); [Judges 12:7](#))

**Mother:** Unnamed prostitute ([Judges 11:1](#))

**Daughter:** Unnamed ([Judges 11:34](#), [37](#))

**Total Bible References:** 28

**Key References:** [Judges 11:1-12:7](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#)

### *Jephthah Speaks*

What on earth could I have been thinking! To utter those reckless words on any occasion would be serious, but to say them on the eve of battle was sheer insanity! As if the Holy One of Israel could be bribed by a mere sacrifice. Even my wretched background is no excuse for this pitiful action. What a beautiful sight it was to watch her running to meet me, dancing joyfully to the sound of tambourines. And then it struck me like the wheel of an enemy chariot: This is my only child, my daughter—and now I must offer her up. The next two months were the most depressing and difficult of my entire life. She then returned to me, and I did to her according to my vow. O merciful God! I tearfully sought her forgiveness. Now I seek yours. ([Judges 11:1-3](#), [29-39](#))

#### *Spiritual Lessons from Jephthah*

- A person's background does not in the least prevent God from working greatly in his or her life ([Judges 11:1-3](#), [32-33](#); [1 Cor. 1:26-29](#)).
- Be careful about the promises you make; be prepared to produce what you promise ([Judges 11:30-40](#); [Psalm 76:11](#); [Eccles. 5:4-5](#)).

#### *Key Verses*

"Jephthah made a vow to the LORD. He said, 'If you give me victory over the Ammonites, I will give to the LORD the first thing coming out of my house to greet me when I return in triumph. I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering' " ([Judges 11:30-31](#)).

## PHINEHAS

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Fact:** Israel's third high priest ([Exodus 28:1](#); [Numbers 20:25-26](#); [Joshua 22:30-32](#))

**Father:** Eleazar ([Exodus 6:25](#))

**Son:** Abishua ([1 Chron. 6:4](#))

**Total Bible References:** 14

**Key References:** [Judges 20:28](#); [Exodus 6:25](#); [Numbers 25:6-13](#); [Numbers 31:6](#); [Joshua 22:13-32](#); [Joshua 24:33](#); [Psalm 106:30](#)

#### *Phinehas Speaks*

I can still see them: Zimri, a son of the covenant, escorting his pagan female friend, Cozbi, into the tent for sexual purposes, both of them utterly unashamed and defiant. I stood outside for a moment, gathering my thoughts concerning this incredible sight. Then I exploded with righteous indignation. Who did they think they were, snubbing their brazen noses at both God and Moses! I knew, of course, what had to be done. God's command must be obeyed: Death to all whoremongers in our camp—Israelite and pagan alike. In a moment they were dead, and the plague was over. ([Numbers 25:6-15](#))

I was also able to prevent a civil war in the days of Joshua, but not on this sad occasion. What a bloodbath! 11 tribes against Benjamin; multiplied thousands slaughtered on both sides. In fact, I'm told the tribe of Benjamin has been reduced to a mere 600 soldiers! Sin has tragically reversed the divine promise that one of us could defeat 1,000 of the enemy. Instead, we kill each other by the thousands. Forgive us, O God, for killing our own. Empower us to conquer our enemies. ([Judges 20:18-48](#); [Joshua 22:30-34](#); [Joshua 23:10](#))

#### *Spiritual Lessons from Phinehas*

- Drastic situations often require drastic action. By his swift and severe judgment upon a God-defying couple, Phinehas stopped a divine plague that had already killed 24,000 people ([Numbers 25:6-9](#)).
- "God blesses those who work for peace," Christ taught ([Matthew 5:9](#)). Phinehas was later a peacemaker, as his wise advice prevented a terrible intertribal war ([Joshua 22:10-34](#)).
- Sometimes, however, even the most capable and respected leaders cannot save their followers from calamity ([Judges 20](#)).

### *Key Verses*

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Phinehas son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the priest has turned my anger away from the Israelites by displaying passionate zeal among them on my behalf. So I have stopped destroying all Israel as I had intended to do in my anger. So tell him that I am making my special covenant of peace with him. In this covenant, he and his descendants will be priests for all time, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel' " ([Numbers 25:10-13](#)).

## SAMSON

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM JUDGES)

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**Key Facts:** Judge, known for great strength and memorable exploits in battle ([Judges 14:6, 19](#); [Judges 15:14, 20](#))

**Birth:** Recorded in [Judges 13:2-24](#)

**Father:** Manoah ([Judges 13:2](#))

**Wife:** Unnamed ([Judges 14:10-18](#))

**Death:** Recorded in [Judges 16:21-30](#)

**Total Bible References:** 36

**Key References:** [Judges 13-16](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#)

### *Samson Speaks*

I wonder how many people are out there. By the volume of laughter there must be thousands. What a pathetic sight I must be, a half-dressed, dirty, totally blinded enemy soldier playing court jester! ([Judges 16:21-25](#))

Obviously I didn't intend it to end this way. But then, of course, a life of sin does not exactly produce a glorious rainbow at the end of the trail. I'm sure it all began with uncontrolled lust. Not even my Nazirite vow or his mighty power on me could save me from myself. Neither Delilah nor the combined Philistine army could have conquered me from without had not the enemy from within opened the doors. Is this all I have to show after 20 years of working for Israel? ([Judges 13:7, 25](#); [Judges 14:3, 6, 19](#); [Judges 15:14](#); [Judges 16:1](#))

But this is no time for remorse: The final plan is now in place, thanks to the help of this young lad. Lord God, strengthen me just this once, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for



my two eyes. Let me die with them! . . . Yes, it's working. I can feel the central pillars give way. And I hear screams instead of laughter. ([Judges 15:20](#); [Judges 16:26-30](#))

*Spiritual Lessons from Samson*

- When should parents begin praying for their children? Long before they are born! ([Judges 13:12-14](#)).
- The Spirit of God can use us mightily in spite of our human failings ([Judges 14:1-4](#); [Judges 16:1-3](#)). That doesn't mean, however, that we will escape the consequences of our wrong choices ([Judges 16:30](#)).
- Casting the pearls of our faith before godless people can lead to our own spiritual blindness and slavery ([Judges 16:4-21](#); see [Matthew 7:6](#)).
- The writer of Hebrews recalled Samson's faith ([Hebrews 11:32](#)) but made no mention of his many sins—a classic example of amazing grace ([Psalm 103:10-14](#)).

*Key Verse*

"You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will rescue Israel from the Philistines" ([Judges 13:5](#)).