

Judges

Who, When, Where

Written by Samuel. Samuel was dedicated to God by his mother just after he was born and grew up to become the main prophet in Israel towards the end of the time of the Judges, around 1100BC. He appointed Saul and passed away during Saul's 40 year reign. This book covers about 230 years of Israel's history from about 1375BC just after Joshua passed away. So they have been in the promised land now for about 30 years. Joshua and Caleb, the two "originals" who were alive back in Egypt have just passed away. All the adult males alive at this time were born in the wilderness, or shortly after they entered the land, during the time of the wars. All over Israel.

Summary

Unlike Moses, Joshua didn't train up a successor. So when he died, Israel was left leaderless from a human point of view. Yahweh was their leader. He wanted to be their king. But as you probably know, they wanted a human king. But more of that later... in this period of the Judges, they kind of wandered aimlessly through life as a nation, and each time they got into trouble Yahweh raised up a champion, a sort of short term leader, (called a judge), to get them through that one. These are the stories of those judges.

The most famous were Gideon and Samson. And their stories are covered in the most detail. But there were many others over that 250 year period as Yahweh dealt with the pattern of Jewish behaviour.

Before You Read

How do you think our society would go if we didn't have government? Or laws. How would it be if everyone just did the right thing? But of course, "the right thing" would be up to each individual, (since we have no government or laws). So how would it be if everyone did what they thought was the right thing?

Leadership in the Bible is pretty much male dominated. (Which by the way, doesn't mean men are more important, only that they usually have different roles). Do you think a woman could be a judge of Israel? A champion who saves them from their enemies?

You might remember some of these stories if you went to Sunday School as a kid. Some of them are awesome. But as you read, step back from those cool stories and imagine how Yahweh feels. I imagine it was kind of like bailing out your rebellious druggie teenager over and over again.

Key Verses

Judges 2:11

After all that generation were gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them, who didn't know Yahweh, nor the work which he had done for Israel. The children of Israel did that which was evil in Yahweh's sight, and served the Baals.

So much for Deuteronomy 4. For talking about God as you walk along, as you lie down, as you wake up... It only took one generation for the Israelites to forget that God had miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt and driven out their enemies in this promised land. The power of peer pressure is amazing. There is something in us which wants to conform to those around us. And they did, in a single generation. What has your generation forgotten that the previous generation knew well? What has the up and coming generation forgotten that your generation knows about God? What can you do about that? Or is it too late already?

Judges 2:1-3

Yahweh's angel came up from Gilgal to Bochim. He said, "I brought you out of Egypt, and have brought you to the land which I swore to give your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. 2 You shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall break down their altars.' But you have not listened to my voice. Why have you done this? 3 Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be in your sides, and their gods will be a snare to you.'"

Yahweh promised to never break his covenant with them. He miraculously delivered them from Egypt, kept them alive 40 years in the wilderness, and again miraculously defeated their enemies as they conquered the land. All he was asking is that they don't do any deals with the people already here, and that when they defeat them they wipe them out completely. Why? Because he knows that we are so easily led astray by the world and it's thinking. We cannot avoid being in the world, but we must avoid being of the world. So. Because they didn't obey him, Yahweh didn't drive them out, and they were left with the ongoing thorn in their side. For hundreds of years. Is there anything where you are avoiding obeying God and being ruthless to remove things from your life? How that ends is up to you.

Judges 3:15

Yahweh raised up a saviour for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

A lefty. Why would the bible take time out to even mention that? Oh, if you read the story, because he was a lefty his sword was on the other side and so it escaped detection and he was able to kill the evil king! The king was so fat he lost his sword! But the thing is... God raises up exactly the right person for the job. Only a lefty could have done this job. So is there something about you that makes you different? Maybe even something that other people think makes you a bit weird? Is it possible that God has raised you up for something special. Even if you're not weird. God made you like you because he already had enough people like me. He made you because he needs someone exactly like you are to do the work he has prepared for you. Go do it.

Judges 8:23

Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you."

Gideon was a man of great faith in Yahweh. He defeated more than 10,000 soldiers with 300 men. He knew that having a king like the nations around you, makes you like the nations around you. But Israel should have Yahweh as their king. Unfortunately we see that now in the church. So many churches have a CEO like the businesses around them. But churches should have Yeshua as their ruler. The Bible model is for a group of elders. So now, churches are run like businesses and they are losing touch with Yeshua. What will happen in one more generation? Maybe it's already happening.

Judges 11:30

Jephthah vowed a vow to Yahweh, and said, iIf you will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be, that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be Yahweh's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Such a rash vow. He vowed something he had no control over. And the first thing to come out? His own daughter. He was regretting his vow then. But once you vow to Yahweh you must keep it. So he did... Do you think that was a second stupid choice? Do you think it was selfish? Should he have accepted the punishment for not keeping the vow and let his daughter live?

Judges 21:18

However we may not give them wives of our daughters, for the children of Israel had sworn, saying, 'Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.'

Once you say something it is very important that you keep it. Words are incredibly powerful. If you say this, then you give your daughter to a Benjamin, then you are cursed. So what can you do? The solution they came up with sort of got them out of it, but only by being very literal about what they had vowed. They did not keep the spirit of their vow, only the legalistic letter of it. Do you think that means they actually broke it? or kept it?

How about you? Do you take it seriously when you say something? Do you make promises to your kids that you have no intention of keeping? Or did you mean to keep them, you just found it difficult. If your vow didn't say, "unless it gets difficult", then you are still obligated. What about your wedding vows? Just words at a party? Or do you take them seriously? God does.

After You Read

What verses really stood out to you?

How would you summarize this book in a sentence or two? What is it about? What is God trying to say to us?

The recurring phrase of Judges is "the children did that which was evil in Yahweh's sight". We find that hard to comprehend after all they had seen right? But remember this is over a few hundred years. Generations come and go.

They seemed to be stuck in this cycle:
1. Everyone does evil in the eyes of Yahweh
2. Enemies attack and so they cry out to Yahweh
3. Yahweh raises up a champion and empowers them with his spirit
4. The enemy is defeated and peace returns
5. Wait a while and then repeat from step 1.

Is that your life too? Following God when he does something great for you, but then gradually forgetting him and being influenced more by the world around you? And then repenting and turning back to God for help when things go wrong. Then being devoted to him for a while again when he bails you out. And repeat, and repeat, and repeat? Don't you want more than that?

Have you ever made a deal with God? "Get me out of this and I'll serve you forever." That kind of deal. Did you keep your side of the bargain? For a while? If the Israelites are typical humans, then I would expect that you did the same as them. Keep close to God for a while. But gradually drift away, until you're so far away you forgot your way back. Get desperate when things go bad. Turn back when he bails you out again... Just like them.

There are a couple of rather extreme vows and some unexpected outcomes in this book. Just a reminder that we should give careful thought to any vow we make because we do not know what our future holds. Your words are very important. Consider them carefully.

God used some interesting people to deliver Israel from their enemies. People who wouldn't normally be accepted as leaders. A lefty, a woman, a gang leader, ... He could probably find a role on his team for someone like you! Ask him.