

Judges

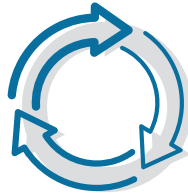


THRUthe**BIBLE**

NOTES & OUTLINES WITH

J. Vernon McGee

HISTORY



Judges

A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. (Proverbs 14:34)

WRITER: Unknown. This book comes from the period of the monarchy, judging by the phrase which occurs four times, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Probably written by Samuel.

KEY VERSE: Judges 21:25 (last verse in the book)

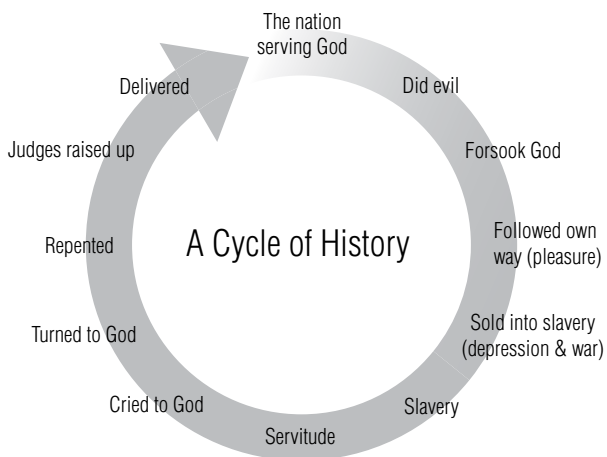
THEME: Backsliding—and the amazing grace of God in recovering and restoring.

PURPOSE: The book of Judges serves a twofold purpose:

- 1 Historically it records the history of the nation from the death of Joshua to Samuel, the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. It bridges the gap between Joshua and the rise of the monarchy. There was no leader to take Joshua’s place in the way he had taken Moses’ place. This was the trial period of the theocracy after they entered the land.
- 2 Morally it is the time of the deep declension of the people as they turned from the Unseen Leader and descended to the low level of “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes”

(Judges 17:6; also compare Judges 1:1 with 20:18). This should have been an era of glowing progress, but it was a dark day of repeated failure.

This course can be plotted like a hoop rolling down the hill of time. The steps of a nation's downfall are outlined in the last division of the book (see outline). Isaiah, chapter 1, presents these same fatal steps downward that eventually led to the final captivity of the nation.



COMMENT: The *New Scofield Reference Bible* gives as the theme of the book of Judges “Defeat and Deliverance.” This is unusually appropriate. There is, however, another aspect which this book emphasizes—disappointment.

The children of Israel entered the Land of Promise with high hopes and exuberant expectation. You would expect these people—who were delivered out of Egypt, led through the wilderness, and brought into the land with such demonstration of God’s power and direction—to attain a high level of living and victory in the land. Such was not the case. They failed ignobly and suffered miserable defeat after defeat.

God raised up judges to deliver His people when they apostatized and cried to Him in their misery. The book takes its name from these men whom God raised up. The judges exercised their ministry for the most part in a local and restricted area.

All the judges were themselves limited in their capabilities. In fact, each one seemed to have some defect and handicap which was not a hindrance but became a positive asset under the sovereign direction of God. None of them were national leaders who appealed to the total nation as were Moses and Joshua. The record is not continuous but rather a spotty account of local judges in limited sections of the nation.

I. Introduction to era of the judges, Chapters 1, 2

CHAPTER 1—Mentioned are nine of the 12 tribes in their failure to win a total victory in driving out the enemy. The three not mentioned are Reuben, Issachar, and Gad. It must be assumed that they likewise failed. Each tribe faced a particular enemy. At no time was the entire nation engaged in a warfare against any particular enemy. The weakness of the tribes is revealed in verse 3 where Judah called upon Simeon for help in his local situation.

CHAPTER 2—A report on the sad condition of the people, that eventually required judges to be raised up to deliver them. This chapter outlines the entire book and God’s philosophy of human history. The words for “judge,” “judgment,” and “judged” are used 22 times. The word “evil” occurs 14 times. The people did evil and God raised up judges (vv. 11, 16). The people did evil because they did not obey God (vv. 2, 17). They did not obey because they did

not believe God (v. 20). The cycle of history that they followed is given in verses 11 through 16.

II. Era of the judges, Chapters 3–16

CHAPTER 3—The children of Israel intermarried with Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites among whom they lived. Israel did evil, forgot God, and served Baalim. God delivered them into slavery.

Othniel, the first judge, was raised up to deliver them. His only qualification seems to be that he was the nephew of Caleb and married his daughter.

Ehud, the second judge, was raised up to deliver Israel from the servitude of Eglon, king of Moab. His qualification was his being left-handed, which enabled him to gain the presence of the king without his concealed dagger being discovered.

Shamgar was the third judge, who was an expert with an ox goad. He used it as an instrument of war against the Philistines and delivered Israel.

All of the judges had some defect, odd characteristic or handicap that God used. The judges reveal that God can use any man or woman who is willing to be used.

CHAPTER 4—Deborah, the fourth judge, was a remarkable person and a great mother whom God raised up to deliver Israel from Jabin, king of Canaan. Deborah probably was the only judge, recorded in the book of Judges, to rule over all of Israel. (Eli, as well as Samuel, did rule over all of Israel as judges, see 1 Samuel 2:29—3:21.)

Because no man was willing to take the lead, Deborah did (v. 8). She pointed out to Barak (the fifth judge) that she would go but it would not be to his honor. Jael, a woman, slew Sisera, the captain of Canaan's forces.

CHAPTER 5—Contains the song of victory of Deborah and Barak. The lawlessness of the day caused Deborah to take the lead as a mother for the sake of her children (vv. 6, 7). There are remarkable features in this song (vv. 19, 20, 23).

CHAPTER 6—"Children of Israel did evil" (v. 1) is the reason for their being delivered into the hands of the Midianites. Gideon, the sixth judge, was raised up to deliver Israel. All the judges, as we have indicated, had some weakness, defect, or unusual characteristic

that God actually exploited in order to deliver His people. Gideon was a coward at heart. His threshing grain at the winepress, instead of on the threshing floor of a hilltop in sight of the Midianites, reveals this. Here is where the angel of the Lord, with a note of sarcasm, called him, “Thou mighty man of valor.” Gideon pleads his weakness and littleness as an excuse. God equips him and encourages him in his first exploit.

CHAPTER 7—Here is where the choosing of the 300 takes place. He had an original army of 32,000. This was reduced by ferreting out the fearful and indifferent. Gideon equipped the 300 with pitchers, lamps and trumpets. The tactics of Gideon produced a riot in the army of the Midianites. Victory was Gideon’s.

CHAPTER 8—Israel wanted to make Gideon king, which he refused. Gideon’s answer is notable (v. 23). Gideon died, after which Israel went again into base idolatry.

CHAPTER 9—In most records Abimelech, the wicked son of Gideon, is not rated a judge. James M. Gray wrote, “The usurped rule of Abimelech, the fratricide, is not usually counted.” He did rule three years after slaying 70 other sons of Gideon. He made himself king. His abortive reign reveals the truth of Daniel 4:17—“... the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men ... and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

“Like priest, like people” is the principle here, and God judged not only Abimelech but also the men of Shechem for making him king (vv. 56, 57).

CHAPTER 10—Tola, the seventh judge, did nothing worthy to record during his tenure in office of 23 years. Jair, the eighth judge, provided 30 donkeys for his 30 sons to ride upon. If he had lived in our day they would have driven Jaguars.

CHAPTER 11—Jephthah, the ninth judge, was an illegitimate son of a harlot. He was an outcast until Israel was at war with Ammon and needed a military leader. Jephthah had become a leader of a band of desperados. He was a sort of Robin Hood (v. 3). God used him to deliver and rule over Israel in order to humble them.

The problem in this chapter is one of human sacrifice. Did Jephthah offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? Jephthah made a rash and unnecessary vow—his cause was just (v. 27).

God had called him, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (v. 29). However, Scripture never finds fault with him (Hebrews 11:32). Abraham was not permitted to offer Isaac, and God would have prevented Jephthah from murder if his intentions were to slay his daughter. Verse 31 offers the solution. The better translation of the last part of the verse should be “shall surely be the Lord’s or I will offer a burnt offering.” His vow was that she should never marry, which was worse than death for a Hebrew woman. With this in mind read vv. 37, 39 and 40.

CHAPTER 12—Ibzan, the tenth judge, spent his seven years as judge making marriages for his 30 sons and 30 daughters.

Elon, the 11th judge, did nothing worthy to record in his tenure of ten years.

Abdon, the 12th judge, got 70 donkeys for his 40 sons and 30 nephews during his eight years as judge.

CHAPTERS 13–16—The monotonous repetition of “And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD” opens chapter 13, and this is the last time it occurs.

The birth of Samson was miraculous (vv. 2-5). Samson had a golden opportunity to deliver Israel. He never did. He is one of the two most colossal failures in Scripture (Solomon is the other one). He was a Nazarite, and long hair was the badge of his office. There was no strength in him. He was anemic, a weakling both physically and morally, a mama’s boy, a regular sissy, a midget in mind and muscle. Three significant verses tell his story:

1 SECRET OF SAMSON’S SUCCESS

For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazirite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. (Judges 13:5)

2 SECRET OF SAMSON’S STRENGTH

And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. (Judges 13:25)

3 SECRET OF SAMSON'S FAILURE

And she said, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he [knew] not that the LORD was departed from him. (Judges 16:20)

NOTE THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE LIFE OF SAMSON AND THAT OF JESUS CHRIST:

COMPARISON:	1 – Both births were foretold by an angel.
	2 – Both were separated to God from the womb.
	3 – Both were Nazarites.
	4 – Both went in the power of the Holy Spirit.
	5 – Both were rejected by their people.
	6 – Both destroyed (or will destroy) their enemies.
CONTRAST:	1 – Samson lived a life of sin; Jesus' life was sinless.
	2 – Samson at the time of death prayed, "... O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28). Jesus prayed, "... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).
	3 – In death Samson's arms were outstretched in wrath; in death Jesus' arms were outstretched in love.
	4 – Samson died; Jesus Christ lives!

III. Results of era of the judges, Chapters 17–21

Some label this section an appendix to the book of Judges. We prefer to see here God's philosophy of history (see outline).

The period of the judges is characterized by:

- compromise
- corruption
- confusion

CHAPTERS 17, 18—This period of apostasy began in the tribe of Dan in their desire to enlarge their borders. It was another lapse into idolatry. It all can be traced to the home of Micah and his mother who spoiled him (17:2). The priest, hired by Micah to tend his idols, advised Dan to proceed with a selfish plan. This was the sweet talk of a hired preacher (18:6).

CHAPTERS 19–21—This period is similar to the former in that it reveals compromise, corruption and confusion. This episode centers about the tribe of Benjamin. This tribe engaged in gross immorality which led to civil war. It began with the men of Benjamin abusing and finally murdering a Levite's wife. The other tribes try to exterminate the tribe of Benjamin. This period ends in total national corruption and confusion, and with this the book of Judges concludes:

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

OUTLINE:

I. Introduction to era of the judges, Chapters 1, 2

- A. Condition of nation after death of Joshua (revealed in limited victories of tribes of Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, Dan), Chapter 1
- B. God feeds into computer of history Israel's cycle in period of the judges, Chapter 2

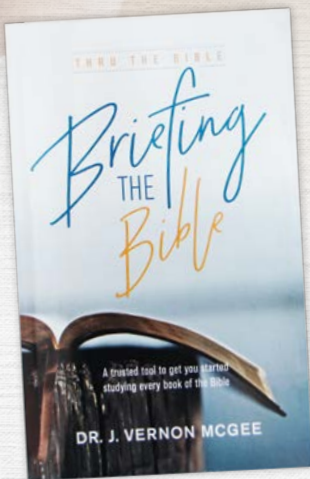
II. Era of the judges, Chapters 3–16

- A. First Apostasy; conquered by Mesopotamia; delivered through Othniel, the judge, Chapter 3:1-11
- B. Second Apostasy; conquered by Moabites and Philistines; delivered through Ehud and Shamgar, the judges, Chapter 3:12-31
- C. Third Apostasy; conquered by Jabin, king of Canaan; delivered through Deborah and Barak, the judges, Chapters 4:1–5:31
- D. Fourth Apostasy; conquered by Midian; delivered through Gideon, the judge, Chapters 6:1–8:32
- E. Fifth Apostasy; civil war; delivered through Abimelech, Tola, Jair, the judges, Chapters 8:33–10:5
- F. Sixth Apostasy; conquered by Philistines and Ammonites; delivered through Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, the judges, Chapters 10:6–12:15
- G. Seventh Apostasy; conquered by Philistines; delivered partially through Samson, the judge, Chapters 13–16

III. Results of era of the judges (confusion), Chapters 17–21

- A. Religious apostasy (the temple), Chapters 17, 18
- B. Moral awfulness (the home), Chapter 19
- C. Political anarchy (the state), Chapters 20, 21

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