



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 087: Judges

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Read Judges 2:7-18.

Introduction. Judges are so called because their primary function was to administer justice to the people of Israel in the period following the passing of Joshua and before the appointment of kings. However, as will be seen from the key passage you have just read, they played a leading role in delivering the people from their neighbouring enemies. Indeed, military exploits are recorded of seven of the twelve judges and some are not recorded as having fulfilled any judicial role at all.

1. The Times. The Book of Judges follows a period of between 325-400 years, between the death of Joshua and the appointment of Saul as king, from about 1300 BC to 1050 BC, (during the Iron Age). The people of Israel had settled into the Promised Land, but they had no settled leadership to unite the tribes and clans (their unity lay, or should have laid, in their adherence to God 1 Sam 8:7). The charismatic characters known as judges exercised a measure of leadership, but this was mostly regional rather than nationwide. They incurred frequent harassment from Neighbouring communities and sometimes between the tribes.

2. The Recurring Cycles. When reading through the Book of Judges, a recurring pattern emerges over the generations. Read the following and see if you can identify the pattern: Judges 2:18-19; 3:7-9; 3:11-15; 4:1-3; 6:1,6-8; 10:9-10,15-16. Note the following:

- i. When did the people have trouble?
- ii. What did their trouble drive them to do?
- iii. What was God's response?
- iv. Why did their subsequent peace cease?

3. The variety of Judges. Each one was a unique (and often unusual!) character. What, for example, was Ehud's unusual characteristic and how did he use it (Jud 3:15-21)? (Look away if you are squeamish!) Were those God appointed as Judges all confident to serve? (see Gideon, 6:15 and Barak 4:8*). Some made foolish decisions (for example Jephthah, Jud 11:30-35). Not all displayed godly characteristics (for example Samson, Jud 15:7). What does all this tell us about who can be used by God?

4. The last Judge. This was Samuel, the prophet cum judge (1 Sam 7:6). With the appointment of Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam 11:15) and the death of Samuel, the office of Judge became redundant, as the kings became responsible for the judicial and military functions.

To Think About: From what I have learned about individual judges, which one would I most like to be like?

To Dig Deeper: With the aid of a commentary, read about the exploits of one or more of the following Judges: Deborah (along with Barak), Gideon, Jephthah, Samson.

* Barak was not one of the Judges, but he served one who was - Deborah