



How To Break The Cycle

Resource Guide

The Bridge Church

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Teaching Series :: **Book Overview**

There's a section of the Bible in the Old Testament called, "Judges." It's the story of God's people—the nation of Israel—initially acquiring, possessing, and figuring out how to live in the "Promised Land," God's new home for his people and his kingdom. Unfortunately, the story of Judges recounts the tragic tale of the total failure of God's people to do this well. It's perhaps one of the darkest and most disturbing moments in Israel's history, though there were many.

Rather than trust God, God's people chose to live the way they wanted to live and chose to do whatever they wanted to do. The book repeats the phrase—"In those days, there was no king in the land, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes." The disastrous result of this lifestyle was the corruption and devastation of the people of God. Rather than be a light to the nations, they wanted to become like the nations. Rather than embody the kingdom of God, they embodied the kingdom of the world. Rather than follow the way of God, they followed the way of man. Rather than cherish God as enough, they had to have more.

And because they ran after the blessings of the world, they forfeited the blessings of God. The ultimate result was cycles. Each time God's people failed, they would turn to God and receive a new "judge" to lead them back to peace and prosperity. These judges weren't like modern-day courtroom judges, they were more like regional, political generals who intervened and brought deliverance and peace to God's people. But soon after, the people would fall right back into the same old habits that got them there in the first place...what seemed to be a never-ending cycle.

Here's what's amazing about the story. Even through all their faults and failures, God still accomplished his purposes for his people through his people. And because of his covenant faithfulness, even when the people abandoned God, he didn't abandon them. Even when they didn't deserve it, he remained faithful. This is the gospel thread through the book of Judges.

By the end of this violent and tragic story, we see why God's people need a king. But they don't need just any kind of king. They need a king who is good and loving and holy and righteous and strong...someone who will save them from themselves. But it will be generations before they realize their true king is God himself.

Teaching Series Outline

Part 1, Cycles (Judges 1-2)

Part 2, Making Progress (Judges 3-5, Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah)

Part 3, We All Have Fears (Judges 6, Gideon)

Part 4, Wins and Losses (Judges 7-10, Gideon and Abimelech)

Part 5, Know Who You Are (Judges 11-12, Jephthah)

Part 6, Fighting Distraction (Judges 13-14, Samson)

Part 7, Winning The Battle Within (Judges 15-16, Samson)

Part 8, You Can't Do It On Your Own (Judges 17-21)

Digging Deeper :: **Equip Sessions**

Four sessions designed to help and equip our church. Every 2 weeks we will post an Equip Session online as a way to digging deeper into things that would be harder to get into during a sermon.

Session 1, How to Understand the Role of Women in Ministry - **February 15th**

Session 2, How to Understand Violence in the Bible - **March 1st**

Session 3, How to Follow Jesus in a Pluralistic Society - **March 15th**

Session 4, How to Understand Sexuality - **March 29th**

Outline of the Book of Judges¹

- I. **Introduction:** The Background to the Canaanization of Israel: Israel's Failure in the Holy War (1:1-3:6)
 - A. The Report of Israel's Performance (1:1-36)
 - B. The Theological Significance of Israel's Performance (2:1-23)
 - C. The Domestic Consequences of Israel's Performance (3:1-6)

- II. **Body:** Yahweh's Response to the Canaanization of Israel: The Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance (3:7-16:31)
 - A. The Aram-Naharaim and Othniel Cycle (3:7-11)
 - B. The Moab and Ehud Cycle (3:12-30)
 - C. Parenthesis 1: The Governorship of Shamgar (3:31)
 - D. The Canaanite and Barak Cycle (4:1-5:31)
 - E. The Midianite and Gideon Cycle (6:1-9:57)
 - F. Parenthesis 2: The Governorships of Tola and Jair (10:1-5)
 - G. The Ammonite and Jephthah Cycle (10:6-12:7)
 - H. Parenthesis 3: The Governorships of Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8-15)
 - I. The Philistine and Samson Cycle (13:1-16:31)

- III. **Climax:** The Depths of the Canaanization of Israel (17:1-21:25)
 - A. The Religious Degeneration of Israel (17:1-18:31)
 - B. The Moral Degeneration of Israel (19:1-21:25)

¹ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 73). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Theological Commentary and Themes

Israel in Crisis²

The Book of Judges describes a nation in transition and crisis. In spite of the Israelites' consciousness of ethnic and religious unity, the nation seemed determined to destroy itself. Having failed to deal decisively with the Canaanites at the beginning of the settlement period, her men hesitated to assume leadership even when it was thrust upon them. At the tribal level individual tribes and clans hesitated to get involved in national crises (5:17; 21:9). On the other hand, if they were not asked to participate, jealousy tended to precipitate self-destructive responses. When strong leadership did emerge, it patterned itself after the worst aspects of Canaanite city-state despotism, was preoccupied with personal advantage (11:8-11, Jephthah), or treated power as a private plaything, provoking the ire of the nation's enemies and alienating the ruler's countrymen (14:10-15:16, Samson). Israel's drive to self-destruct reached its climax (or nadir) at the end of the book, when the holy war that should have been waged against the Canaanites was directed at one of their own tribes.

Evil in the Sight of the Lord³

The narrator's evaluation of Israel's true spiritual condition is reflected in the sevenfold repetition of variations of the refrain, "The descendants of Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord and served the Baals and the Asherahs" (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).

Progressive Spiritual Degeneracy⁴

The symptoms of Israel's spiritual progressive degeneracy are recognizable on almost every page: (1) failure to fulfill the divine mandate to rout the Canaanites (1:18-36); (2) failure to transmit the memory of Yahweh's saving acts (2:10); (3) hesitancy/refusal to heed Yahweh's call to arms (5:16-17); (4) the construction of altars for Baal within Israelite villages, and then the villagers' defense of the altar instead of the one who destroyed it; (5) all Israel's harlotrous attention to the "ephod" made by Gideon (8:27); (6) Israel's formal replacement of their God Yahweh with Baal-berith (8:33); (7) the manufacture of sacred images and the establishment of private pagan cults in individuals' homes (17:1-13); (8) tribal sponsorship of pagan cults (18:14-31). This spiritual degeneracy is accompanied by increasingly depraved moral behavior as is evidenced especially by the final episode involving the violence toward the Levite's concubine (19:22-30), and the "daughters of Shiloh" (21:19-24).

² Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 37). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. ³ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 39). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. ⁴ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 39). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Lack of the Prophetic⁵

The involvement of the respective judges in the religious affairs of the nation is telling. Although they all served actively as Yahweh's agents of deliverance from foreign enemies, not one of them had the moral or spiritual constitution to launch a crusade against the enemy within, to denounce the idolatry of the nation, or to call the people back to Yahweh.

Decline of Worship⁶

The failure of the religious authorities to establish a permanent home for the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, combined with the necessity of Israelite worshipers to pass through enemy (Canaanite) territory to get to the central place of worship, undoubtedly resulted in a rapid declension in the significance of the central sanctuary in the life of the nation. Without the regular celebration of the tribes' common origin in Yahweh's saving and covenantal acts at the great annual festivals, the nation experienced increasing political and territorial fragmentation. Meanwhile, the worship of Yahweh at the individual sanctuaries degenerated into what H. Donner calls "poly-Yahwism": local differentiation of the Yahweh cult traditions and forms.

Purpose of Judges⁷

This is a prophetic book, not a political tractate. It represents a call to return to the God of the covenant, whom the people have abandoned in favor of the virile and exciting fertility gods of the land. The theme of the book is the Canaanization of Israelite society during the period of settlement. The author's goal in exposing this problem is to wake up his own generation. This is an appeal to the covenant people to abandon all forms of paganism and return to Yahweh. In so doing the narrator also offers his readers a profound commentary on the grace of God. Left to their own devices the Israelites would surely have destroyed themselves. Only by the repeated gracious intervention of God do they emerge from the dark premonarchic period as a separate people and nation. In this book God deals with his people only partially in accordance with the formula: obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings the curse. Israel's victories over her enemies say much less about the nation than about their God, who intervenes repeatedly presumably because his long-range goal of using Israel as a light to the nations depends upon the nation's survival of this dark period of her history.

No King in Israel⁸

The statement "Israel had no king" is quite ambiguous. A superficial reading suggests that the narrator has an earthly human king in mind. At another level, however, he may be hereby declaring Israel's rejection of the theocracy. Contrary to Gideon's empty confession in 8:23, no one, not even God, rules in Israel.

⁵ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, pp. 39-40). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers. ⁶ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 41). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 58). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁸ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 59). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Work of God Through Faith⁹

The author is convinced, and rightly so, that divine resources are applied to human needs by faith. The message is that if anything positive was accomplished during the dark days of the judges, it was the work of God. The human tools available within Israel were raw, and their characters reveal many flaws. But God's work had to be done; again and again the nation needed deliverance from external enemies. Despite defects of personality and lack of nerve, the deliverers stepped out against overwhelming odds. This was either the mark of folly or of faith. The author of Hebrews is correct in casting his vote with the latter. Empowered by the Spirit of God, the deliverers charged into battle. For the moment, if not for their entire lives, by faith they cast themselves on God, counting on him to fight for them as he had fought against the Egyptians, the Amalekites, Sihon and Og, Jericho, and the rest of the Canaanites, as recounted in the Book of Joshua.

Modern Relevance of Judges¹⁰

Earlier it was mentioned that the central theme of the Book of Judges is the Canaanization of Israel. Herein lies the key to the relevance of this ancient composition for North American Christianity, for...

- *Like the Israelites of the settlement period, we have largely forgotten the covenant Lord and have come to take for granted his gracious redemptive work on our behalf.*
- *Like the ancient Israelites we too are being squeezed into the mold of the pagan world around us. Evidences of the "Canaanization" of the church are everywhere:*
 - *our preoccupation with material prosperity, which turns Christianity into a fertility religion;*
 - *our syncretistic and aberrant forms of worship;*
 - *our refusal to obey the Lord's call to separation from the world;*
 - *our divisiveness and competitiveness;*
 - *our moral compromises, as a result of which Christians and non-Christians are often indistinguishable;*
 - *our [male] exploitation and abuse of women and children;*
 - *our reluctance to answer the Lord's call to service,*
 - *and when we finally go, our propensity to displace "Thy kingdom come" with "My kingdom come";*
 - *our eagerness to fight the Lord's battles with the world's resources and strategies;*
 - *our willingness to stand up and defend perpetrators of evil instead of justice.*

These and many other lessons will be drawn from the leaves of this fascinating book as we proceed.

⁹ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 70). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁰ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, p. 71). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Knowing God¹¹

But the book teaches important positive lessons as well, especially about God.

- **First**, God graciously calls his people to covenant relationship with himself. This relationship is the highest privilege imaginable, and when the recipients of grace hold their divine Benefactor in contempt, abandoning him for other allegiances, the God of grace is rightfully angry.
- **Second**, the impassioned God (ʿEl Qannāʾ) tolerates no rivals. The believer cannot serve him and other gods. To do so is to trample his grace underfoot.
- **Third**, God is gracious still, often treating his people not according to what they deserve but out of his boundlessly merciful heart.
- **Fourth**, if anything positive is ever accomplished in the church, it is the work of God. Human leaders have a profound propensity to disappoint and to exploit the church for their own purposes.
- **Fifth**, in the words of Jesus, God will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). The Book of Judges presents the picture of a nation called the people of Yahweh but seemingly determined to negate that appellation if not destroy itself. But the Lord will not let this happen. He has chosen them to be his agents of light and life to the world; he has rescued them from Egypt; he has entered into an eternal covenant with them; and he has delivered the land of Canaan into their hands as an eternal possession. In the final analysis, God cannot let his program abort. The mission of grace to the world depends upon the preservation of his people. So against all odds, and certainly against Israel's deserts, the nation survives the dark days of the judges. The true hero in the book is God and God alone.

¹¹ Block, D. I. (1999). Judges, Ruth (Vol. 6, pp. 71-72). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Recommended Resources

Judges For You

Timothy Keller

https://www.amazon.com/Judges-You-Reading-Feeding-Leading/dp/190876290X/ref=sr_1_7?dchild=1&keywords=the+book+of+judges&qid=1611946516&sr=8-7

Overview: Judges

The Bible Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfJ4>

The Book of Judges Overview | Devotional

Tony Evans

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq_b7GNeykk