

Lesson 9

JUDGES

GOD STATEMENT FOR JUDGES: THE GOD WHO _____(a) & _____(b)

Judges opens with the phrase “After the death of Joshua.” This links the books of Joshua and Judges. Think of Judges, then, as a _____(c) to Joshua. Make that, think of Judges as a _____(d) sequel because the _____(e) people who enjoyed victory in Joshua gives way to _____(f), _____(g) people who suffer recurring _____(h) and oppression.

The name “Judges” comes from a word used to describe twelve different leaders (Jud 2:16-18; Acts 13:20) whom God raised up at different times to lead Israel to _____(i) after He had handed them over to oppressing nations because of their _____(j) (Jud 2:11-15).

So, what exactly was a “judge” in the book of Judges? If you’re not familiar with the book, it’s probably not what you think. To us, the word “judge” suggests a _____(k) function; a person who renders legal judgments. In the book of Judges, however, judges primarily had a _____(l) function. As I said a minute ago, God raised up these people to deliver Israel from foreign oppression.

When most people think about the book of Judges, they think about the individual stories of some of the judges, particularly Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. These gripping stories of fascinating people can create the impression that the book of Judges is primarily a book about Israelite folk heroes that rode to Israel’s rescue when the country was facing dire situations.

The focus of Judges, though, isn’t really on folk heroes. The focus is on two other things: (1) the _____(m) of God’s people, and (2) the _____(n) of God. With that said, the content of the book can be divided into three parts: the military failure of Israel, the rescue of Israel by the judges, and the moral failure of Israel.

THE MILITARY FAILURE OF ISRAEL (Chaps 1-3:6)

God sent Israel into the Promised Land with instructions to destroy the inhabitants completely. But, left without strong leadership (after Joshua

died) and confronted with powerful enemies, Israel's faith _____ (o), and they don't follow God's _____ (p). Instead of removing the godless inhabitants from the land, the tribes of Israel compromise. They captured the _____ (q) and _____ (r), but they allowed many of Canaanites to remain living in the _____ (s) (Jud 1:19-36).

Before long the Canaanites were living among the Israelites, and Israel just couldn't resist the temptation of their wicked neighbors. So, soon they were _____ (t) Canaanites, they were _____ (u) Canaanite gods, and they were behaving _____ (v) like Canaanites. As a result, God announces judgment on Israel and allows the godless nations to remain in the land to _____ (w) Israel (Jud 2:20-22).

That test was to see if God means more to Israel than living in the land. Do they want God or just the land? It's like when God tested Abraham to see if God or Isaac meant more to him (Gen 22:1-2). Abraham passed the test. Israel fails the test miserably (Jud 3:1-6).

THE RESCUE OF ISRAEL BY THE JUDGES (Chaps 3-16)

This section makes up the bulk of the book, and it's in this section that we encounter the lives of the judges themselves. In this section, the people of Israel go through a series of seven cycles of drifting away from God, and those seven cycles repeat the same pattern. There are four parts to each cycle:

- _____ (x). The people of Israel turn their back on God. Faith and obedience mean nothing to them, so they abandon God and take up paganism and all of the unrestrained wickedness that comes with it. In these accounts you'll see a shocking array of covenant violations as the people totally immerse themselves in the Canaanite worldview.
- _____ (y). God's response to their rejection of Him is truly amazing. He remains committed to Israel even though they're no longer committed to Him. They may have given up on Him, but He hasn't given up on them. So, in an effort to bring Israel to her senses, God permits godless nations—like Midianites and Philistines—to defeat and oppress them.
- _____ (z). When the oppression becomes unbearable, the people begin moving back to God, and cry for deliverance.
- _____ (aa). In response to their pleas, God would raise up a warrior-leader who would lead them liberation by leading them to victory over their oppressors. These "judges" are the instruments that God uses to remain faithful to His own

character (He always keeps His promises) and to the Israelites.

We don't know much about some of the judges because they just aren't given much space in the biblical record. Their exploits are preserved by the Holy Spirit in a paragraph or less. A few of the judges, though, are given quite a bit of time and space, and their stories are familiar and fascinating. Let's take a quick look at three of the most familiar judges:

- _____(bb) (Judges 4-5) is the only woman to serve as a judge, and she was also a prophet. She told _____(cc) that God wanted him to attack Jabin, a Canaanite king, and Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army. Barak balked, telling Deborah that he would only go if she went with him. She agreed to go with him into battle but warned him that the honor of victory would be given to a woman. Deborah not only led Israel to a great victory, but she also immortalized that victory in a song.
- _____(dd) (Judges 6-8) is called a "valiant warrior" by God when He calls him to lead Israel against the Midianites. God obviously knew what Gideon would ultimately become, because he's anything but "valiant" when God first calls him. Gideon is full of doubt and fear, and, like Moses, he's a reluctant participant in God's plan. Gideon ultimately learns that it is by God's _____(ee) that battles are won.
- _____(ff) (Judges 7-16) doesn't lead an army like Deborah and Gideon. Using his Spirit-endowed superhuman strength, God uses him as a one-man wrecking crew to harass and punish the Philistines. Unfortunately, for most of his life, he represents the spiritual state of the people as a whole—he was a spiritually weak man who just couldn't commit himself fully to God . . . until the very end of his life when, as a captive of the Philistines, he pulled down one of their temples, killing thousands of Philistines and himself in the process.

THE MORAL FAILURE OF ISRAEL (Chaps 17-21)

The key to understanding this period of Israel's history is the last verse of the book of Judges: "In those days, there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was _____(gg) in his _____(hh) eyes" (Jud 21:25). There is no doubt that the people of Israel have become so totally immersed in Canaanite culture that idolatry and moral depravity has become the shocking norm. To emphasize how shocking the religious _____(ii) and moral _____(jj) had become, the book of Judges ends with a couple of bizarre stories.

In both stories the central character is a _____ (kk). The point of these stories is that, if Israel's spiritual leaders were like these men, it's no wonder that the people are religiously and morally in shambles.

In the first story (Jud 17-18) a Levite is willing to be a private priest over the worship of an _____ (ll) for the right price. The nation has so corrupted its worship that it can no longer tell the difference between _____ (mm) covenant and _____ (nn) religion.

The second story is even more shocking (Jud 19-21). When another Levite and his concubine (slave-wife) stay overnight in a city while traveling, the men of that city, in a scene reminiscent of _____ (oo) (Gen 19:1-11), demand to have sex with the Levite. To appease the perverted mob, the Levite hands over his concubine to be gang-raped through the night. The next morning she's lying dead on the doorstep of the home where the Levite was staying.

It's a depressing end to the book of Judges.

THE LESSONS OF JUDGES

- God's promises are not _____ (pp). The people have God's promises to bless them, but they certainly are not unconditional in the sense that they may act however they wish and still have the good things that God wants to bestow on them.
- The condition for receiving God's promised blessings is faith and _____ (qq). God demands His covenant partners to be faithful to the terms of the covenant. That means *obedient*.
- God's _____ (rr) is mind-blowing. If there is any good news at all in the book it's God. It's God's patience. It's His willingness to give His people chance after chance after chance. He is there and He will respond to a penitent cry.
- God _____ (ss) His people. That doesn't mean He tempts His people to sin. He can't do that because that would not be true to His nature and character (Jam 1:13-15). God tests us to see if we want Him more than anything. He tests us for our benefit. We need to know just how committed to following God we are.

- Rebellion against God's _____(tt) will lead to a society in shambles. If we don't respect God's order, He will leave us to our own devices; and that will inevitably lead to greater and more depraved acts.
- Unsound _____(uu) will prove destructive for God's people. Moses set the standard for leadership. God's people need leaders who will keep the covenant before the minds of His people. No such leadership arose in the era of the judges.
- The judges are no permanent _____(vv) to the sin problem or Israel's leadership crisis. If God is going to accomplish His mission, He's making it clear that there must be another solution and another leader—that would ultimately be _____(ww).
- God _____(xx) those He loves. God repeatedly spanks His people, and it's because He's crazy about them. He's loves them too much to sit quietly by as they destroy themselves. He will do all He can to bring them to their senses and persuade them that obeying Him will lead to a wonderful life.

KEY PASSAGES IN JUDGES

- Judges 2:6-10
- Judges 2:16-19
- Judges 3:1-4
- Judges 6:11-16
- Judges 21:25

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY:

- [a] DISCIPLINES
- [b] DELIVERS
- [c] sequel
- [d] tragic
- [e] obedient
- [f] disobedient
- [g] idolatrous
- [h] defeat
- [i] freedom
- [j] disobedience

[k] legal
[l] military
[m] faithlessness
[n] faithfulness
[o] fails
[p] commands
[q] hills
[r] mountains
[s] valleys
[t] marrying
[u] worshiping
[v] morally
[w] test
[x] REBEL
[y] REAP
[z] REPENT
[aa] RESTORE
[bb] Deborah
[cc] Barak
[dd] Gideon
[ee] power
[ff] Samson
[gg] right
[hh] eyes
[ii] apostasy
[jj] depravity
[kk] priest
[ll] idol
[mm] God's
[nn] Canaanite
[oo] Sodom
[pp] unconditional
[qq] obedience
[rr] patience
[ss] tests
[tt] order
[uu] leadership
[vv] solution
[ww] Jesus
[xx] disciplines