



Judges

A narrative about the human cycle of sin and repentance; God's forgiveness and deliverance.

THE BIBLE

Judges 1-4, 6-8, 13-16, 21:25

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

Share about a time when you were disobedient, and your parents punished you. What did you do? What was the punishment? Was it fair or unfair? Was your rebellion worth it? Did you want to disobey again?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- New Commands – Moses & the 10 Commandments
- Promised Land – Spies explore the land
- Conquest – Joshua & Jericho

Hear the Story

Scene One: Cycle of Sin

After the death of Joshua, it was left to the tribes of Israel to drive out the people from the Promised Land. However, instead of following Joshua's lead, they forced their enemies into slavery, never completely driving them out.

The people of Israel did evil in God's sight. They deserted Yahweh, the God of their parents, who led them out of Egypt, and instead worshipped the gods of the people around them. This made God angry, and He allowed them to be plundered.

They were helpless before their enemies. Every time they walked out the door, God was with them – but for evil, just as He had sworn, He would do.

The people would then cry out to God, and He was moved to compassion when He heard their groaning. So, God raised up judges who saved them from their enemies and saved the people. But when the judge died, the people of Israel once again turned away from God, going back to their old ways, worshipping other gods, and so the cycle started again and again.

Scene Two: Judges and Judgements

It began because of their worship of the foreign gods, the Baals. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and His anger burned against them, so they were delivered into the hands of the King of Aram, who ruled over them for 80 years. But when they cried out to the LORD, He raised up a deliverer, Caleb's younger brother, Othniel, who saved them. God's Spirit was upon him, and he became Israel's judge and went to war. With God's Spirit, Othniel overpowered the King of Aram, and the land had peace for 40 years.

Eventually, the people turned away from God again. This time it was the leader of Moab, named Eglon, who oppressed Israel for a total of 18 years. They suffered until they cried out to God, who faithfully gave them another judge. His name was Ehud, and here is how he delivered them from the Moabites:

Ehud tricked King Eglon into a private meeting and killed him in a surprise attack with his sword. The king was so overweight that the sword handle was covered by his fat. With Eglon dead, Moab fell easily to Ehud's raiders. Then the Israelites had peace for another 80 years.

But again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so God delivered them into the hands of Jabin, King of Canaan. Jabin had a mighty commander of his army named Sisera. Everyone knew of Sisera and the 900 chariots that he commanded.

With Sisera in charge, the Israelites were oppressed for 20 years. Then they cried out to the LORD for help.

At this time, Deborah, a prophetess, was leading Israel. The people would come to her with disputes, and she would settle their arguments.

One day she sent for an Israelite named Barak, instructing him that God commanded him to take 10,000 men to fight against Sisera. He was skeptical of the command and told Deborah that he would only go if she went. Deborah told him that because he doubted God, the glory of victory over the Canaanites would now be claimed by a woman.

When the 10,000 Israelites met Sisera and his chariots, they overpowered them and killed everyone in the Canaanite army. It was a complete rout. The only one to escape was Sisera, who fled on foot. He fled to a neighboring allied territory, where he came upon a tent. A woman named Jael approached him and invited the famous commander to rest in the tent. She gave him water to drink and a blanket. He instructed her to watch the entrance of the tent so that he could rest. But Jael waited until the commander fell asleep and picked up a tent peg and a hammer. She went quietly near him and then drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died instantly.

Following this victory, the land experienced peace for 40 years, until once again, the people did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so for 7 years, he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.

Scene Three: Gideon

The power of Midian was so oppressive the people prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. In their hunger and weakness, they cried out to God. He heard their cry and told them that their problem wasn't a military problem but a spiritual one.

To prove His point God picked a new judge. This time he chose a farmer named Gideon. He was a man from the weakest clan in the weakest tribe. Like most new leaders, Gideon was uncertain if he could measure up. But God was looking for a faithful follower, not a decorated soldier. Gideon found it hard to believe that God wanted to use him for anything, let alone overthrowing the mighty Midianites.

Gideon struggled to trust God. He wanted to trust in the power of an army, but God proved who would really defeat Midian when he took Gideon's army from 32,000 men to 300. Gideon finally understood who was in charge, and he took these 300 men into battle.

God instructed them to blow their trumpets, and they did exactly that, and when they did, the LORD caused the Midianite army to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled, and the Israelites captured the leaders.

This is how God subdued Midian, and the Israelites enjoyed peace during Gideon's lifetime. For another 40 years, the Promised Land had peace. But as soon as Gideon died, the people went back to worshipping the Baals. Several leaders tried to keep the enemies at bay, but only with mixed results. No one had the success that Gideon had. Because of their unfaithfulness, God delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years.

Scene Four: Samson

During this time, an angel appeared to a man named Manoah and told him that his wife would become pregnant. This was a shock because she had been unable to have children. The angel said that this child would deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines, so they were warned not to eat anything unclean. Furthermore, they were instructed to make sure that a razor never touched his head because the child would be dedicated to God from birth.

Just as the angel said, the woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew, and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir in him. On one occasion, the Spirit of the LORD came on him in power when a lion tried to attack him. He grabbed the lion and tore it apart with his bare hands. On another occasion, the Spirit of the LORD came on him, and he singlehandedly killed 30 Philistines.

Samson's reputation spread, and in retaliation, the Philistines murdered Samson's wife and father-in-law. It was this that turned Samson's heart toward revenge, swearing to destroy the Philistines. Because of this, a war almost broke out, so the Israelites were compelled to hand over Samson to the Philistines to keep the peace. They brought him bound to their enemies, and then the Spirit of the LORD came on him in power, and he broke free from his ropes, killing 1,000 Philistines with a donkey bone.

But just like the Israelites, Samson strayed from what God had asked him to do. He became attracted to a woman named Delilah, who lied and tricked him into disobedience against God. He told her his secret to his strength, and in the middle of the night, she let the Philistines in to shave his head, and he became powerless.

The Philistines dragged him away as a slave to the temple of their god, Dagon. When they returned to the temple, they offered a great sacrifice and celebrated, saying, *“Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy into our hands, the one who ravaged our country, piling high the corpses among us.”* They cried out to have Samson brought out to “display” his strength as a joke, knowing that he no longer had any power.

So, they brought him out, and he rested himself against two central pillars of the temple. Samson prayed, asking God to remember him and give him strength. Then he cried out to God, saying, *“Let me die with the Philistines,”* as he began to push against the pillars with all his might. The temple came down, killing everyone in it. In all, over 3,000 people died. It was a devastating blow to the Philistines.

Scene Five: No King

After Samson, the Israelites continued their pattern of spiritual compromise during this very sad period of their history. It is said that in those days, Israel had no king, and everyone did whatever they felt like doing.

Retell the Story

- What happened after Joshua became the leader of the Israelites?
- What was God’s punishment for the disobedience of the people?
- Who were the Judges?
- What were some of their stories?
- What happened with Gideon?
- What happened to Samson?
- How did the people live during this time?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?

- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- What do you think was the first mistake the Israelites made after their conquest of the promised land?
- What did their initial disobedience lead to? Is this something that happens today?
- In this story God is both angry and compassionate. How does this change or explain how you understand and view God?
- Which of the Judges mentioned in this story stood out to you and why?
- Where do you think Samson's power and strength came from?
- What do you think it means when scripture says, "In those days Israel had no king, and everyone did whatever they felt like"?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

1) THE GROWING POWER OF SIN

One of the main themes of this story is the growing power of sin. The Israelites disobeyed God by intermingling with the pagan Canaanites. This led them to worship other gods. How does a sin like “a little white lie” grow into something more? In your experience, does sin ever just stay the same? What effect does sin have on our hearts?

2) THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

The phrase “The Spirit of God” is associated with power in this narrative. Multiple judges have moments when God’s Spirit comes on them and empowers them to do some amazing things. We know from the New Testament that God’s Spirit lives in us. What do you think that means for what God can accomplish through us? How have you experienced the Spirit’s power in your life?

3) IN THEIR OWN EYES

Imagine a world where everyone did whatever they felt like. What would you see in the world? What might you feel if you lived there? What are the headlines and the news stories about? What problems do you see with this? Are there other examples from Scripture or history where humans have lived like this?

Pray

God,

You are our Hope and Deliverer. Despite our foolishness and sinfulness, you listen to our prayers, and you work in ways that we do not understand. We are so thankful that you have not turned your back on us, although we have done the same to you many times before. Thank you for your unlimited patience and grace. We ask for your Spirit to guide us gently toward faithfulness in times of adversity and in times of ease.