



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

JUDGES

LEADER'S GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION: GETTING INTO JUDGES

You might want to begin your first gathering by asking the group to share what they already know about the book of Judges and what parts, if any, have impacted them most. Ideally, you'll read through the introduction at this initial meeting. You'll want to set the stage for all these historical events you'll study in the weeks ahead by getting a firm grasp on where exactly Judges falls in biblical history. God's people are living in the land of Canaan, the promised land, but they aren't walking faithfully with the Lord. Be sure to talk about who the judges were and the role they played. Also touch on how the book of Judges is structured—how the stories don't necessarily appear in the order in which they actually happened. Surely you'll want to touch on the themes in Judges. The one to watch for most carefully is the people's need for a king.

WEEK 1: CARELESSNESS AND COMPROMISE

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

Your discussion this week should include God's command to annihilate the Canaanites. Discuss how we are meant to understand this command, and cover what it teaches about God and also how it points us to the gospel. There are so many characters in Week 1 that it's impossible to cover them all. You might want to touch on the premier place of Judah among the twelve tribes of Israel, important because this is the tribe from which the Lord Jesus descended. Be sure that the group participants have a handle on the downward spiral, the pattern of rebellion that begins here in Week 1 and occurs again and again as we proceed through the book. If time allows, talk about why partial obedience is actually disobedience.



WEEK 2: GOING DOWN

JUDGES 3:7-31

Begin by reviewing the downward cycle, the sin pattern of God's people, and how it plays out in this week's lesson. Be sure to touch on the Canaanite gods and goddesses, and then spend time discussing idols in general—their nature and the spiritual impact they make on people, including God's people. Talk about why the Canaanite idols were able to seduce Israel, and then bring the conversation around to idols in our day. Ask, what are some common idols today, and why and how do they get hold of our hearts? When you get to the story of King Eglon of Moab and Ehud the judge, talk about how each one is portrayed in the story (Eglon is a rather ridiculous figure, and Ehud gets the better of him). The author is communicating that the deliverers God raises up are always able to outwit and defeat the enemy, which points to Jesus's defeat of Satan at the cross.

WEEK 3: A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

JUDGES 4:1-5:31

Discuss how Deborah is portrayed in the story—the part she plays in the drama as well as the part she does not. Spend time discussing the attributes of God that Deborah sings about in her song. Talk also about Jael and what makes her such a provocative figure. Ask the group to share how they responded when they first read Jael's story. Surely we are shocked, but why? Is it the way the story is told? The matter-of-fact way we're told about how she commits murder? Be sure that everyone understands the connection in Jael's story to Genesis 3:15.



WEEK 4: WEAK PEOPLE, STRONG GOD

JUDGES 6:1-8:35

Although deliverance through Gideon is the primary theme this week, be sure to touch on the Midianites as well—their earlier problematic history with God’s people up through Gideon’s day. These whole-Bible connections are good to identify whenever they come up because it shows us how the Bible isn’t sixty-six separate books but one book, a unified story. When it comes to Gideon, be sure to talk about how his weaknesses and flaws point us away from him as an example for us to emulate but toward the Lord himself. The Lord is our deliverer, the one empowering every weak human he works through. If anyone in your group took time to compare the call of Moses to the call of Gideon, ask them to share what stood out most. Finally, be sure to talk about how we are to understand Gideon’s fleece.

WEEK 5: A VERY BAD MAN (AND TWO LITTLE-KNOWN JUDGES)

JUDGES 9:1-10:5

Abimelech was “made” king, but he was only a counterfeit king. His utter badness serves to show God’s people how much they need a ruler, but one very, very different from Abimelech. This is a primary way that the story of this evil man illustrates the Bible’s big story—the need for a gracious, holy, righteous king, the Lord Jesus. You’ll also want to bring in Genesis 3:15 again, showing how Abimelech’s death is another pointer along the way to the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis 3:15. A good place to end the discussion is on what the story shows us about God—how he judges unrepentant sin and triumphs over evil.



WEEK 6: FROM BAD TO WORSE

JUDGES 10:6–12:15

Most of your discussion this week is likely to center on Jephthah’s vow and what happened to his daughter. You’ll want to talk about how the author portrays Jephthah’s character, and be sure that your group realizes that Jephthah *did* have a biblical way out of keeping his rash vow (Leviticus 5:4–6). You’ll want to set this horrifying occurrence in the context of what was noted at the beginning of the week: God’s people have continued to abandon him, and the consequences are multiplying. The spiritual condition of Israel is being exposed. Save sufficient time at the end for the “Let’s Talk” questions, and if time allows, include some discussion about the link between root and fruit when it comes to our own spiritual lives.

WEEK 7: PHYSICALLY STRONG BUT MORALLY WEAK

JUDGES 13:1–16:31

You’ll want to talk about the different stages of Samson’s life, beginning with the story of his birth. Be sure that everyone in your group gets the link between Samson, Samuel, and John—how each was called to prepare the way for a king in Israel. This is one place in Judges that foreshadows the coming Savior, the ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ. Likely you’ll want to touch on Samson’s relationships with women. As you do, it would be good to focus on how these relationships serve as a mirror on his spiritual life. Also talk about Samson’s Nazarite vow in this same context—how his handling of it reflects his walk with God. Finally, talk about what the Samson story teaches us about how the Lord works out his purposes in both individual lives and big-picture redemptive history.



WEEK 8: NO KING

JUDGES 17:1-18:31

Micah's religious practices reveal a lot about Israel at this time. He went through the motions of worshiping God, but he did so in his own way, with little regard for the way in which God wanted to be worshiped in those days. This is significant, because it helps us understand the author's overarching theme, which he sets out in 17:6: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Danites also attempted to worship God in their own way, because they wanted religious practices that were easy and comfortable. You'll definitely want to include some ways we're tempted to prioritize ease and comfort in our worship practices today. Ask the group to share examples of God-honoring worship. Where do they see it, and what does it look like—and what about it is God-honoring?

WEEK 9: CRASH AND BURN

JUDGES 19:1-20:48

There's no need to focus on the goriness of this week's events, but it's important to point out the connection between these events and what happened back in Genesis 19. The author of Judges wants us to grasp the reality of how low God's people have sunk, how far from God their hearts have grown. When it comes to the treatment of the concubine, you'll want to point out the fact that such callous disregard of women is an aspect of a godless society. The contrast can be seen in how Jesus treated women in the Gospels, and in passages such as Ephesians 5:25-29. Misperceptions abound today in evangelical circles about how conservative Christianity treats women. In reality, the more the Scriptures are followed, the better women are treated. You might want to spend some time discussing this. Then, after all this heaviness, it would be good to end this week's discussion on the note of God's grace, so be sure to save sufficient time to cover the first Let's Talk question.



WEEK 10: ROCK BOTTOM

JUDGES 21:1-25

Identify the grace notes that permeate this final portion of Judges and what these notes show us about the heart of God. The big emphasis this week is on the whole point of Judges—the people need a king. Judges is meant to show us what happens to people—not just Israel—when they go their own way. If people will just come under the authority of a king, they will flourish. Because we know the end of the story, we can grasp that, in Judges, God’s grace is most powerfully at work in preparing the people to receive the king they need before they even want this kind of king. Talk about how the sin and destruction of Judges prepared God’s people to receive this king, first King David and much later, King Jesus. That’s where we find the gospel according to Judges.