

Judges

The Cycle that Needs an End

Lauren Hansen

Flourish Tuesday Bible Studies



Bible Study #1: Judges: The Neverending Cycle**Judges 2:6-3:6****Big Idea:**

The book of Judges introduces a cycle that God's people are trapped in of turning away from him, and him continuing to save them time after time. This is what we see play out in the book of Judges and which points to the need to break this cycle!

1. To start: When have you experienced déjà vu recently or felt trapped in a loop (like Groundhog Day)? How did this feel?
2. Have you ever read the Book of Judges, or do you know any of the stories from this book (Samson and Delilah, Gideon)? What is your impression of the book of Judges coming into this series?
3. Read Judges 2:6-3:6. What do we learn from vv.6-9 about where this book fits into the Bible?
4. Fill out the following table- What do we learn about the state of Israel when Joshua is leading them, after Joshua's death, and under the Judges?

	Under Joshua	After Joshua's death	Under the Judges
Relationship between God and the people			
Behaviour of the people			

5. What reasons does God give for no longer driving out the nations that are left in the promised land that the Israelites have entered?
6. Look back at the table you filled out. In what ways do the Israelites reject God and his ways, and what consequences for this do we see in this passage?

7. Where do we see God working in this passage?

8. What clues do we have from this passage that give away what we should expect from the rest of this book? (Based on what we read, do you think things will get better or worse?)

9. Throughout Judges we see God saving his people when they cry out to him (v.16-18)- but they always fall back into sin- even worse sin! Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. How does this provide an answer to the problem of this cycle in Judges, and how is God going to bring about this solution?

10. Australia and many Western countries are now what we would call 'post-Christian'. Some generations are still culturally Christian (they are familiar with many biblical morals and stories because they might have grown up in church)- but new generations are not! This is one of the warnings of the book of Judges- that if knowledge of God is not passed down, it is often lost. How do you see this in the world around you? What do (or could you do) to help pass this on to the next generations?

11. How might this atmosphere create opportunities and barriers to evangelism?

12. Israel forgets who God is and what he has done for them, and this leads them away from him. What are you reminded of about who God is from this passage, and how can you continue to remind yourself and each other of this?

Pray:

- Give thanks that we live in a very different world to the time of the Judges!
- Pray for us as we continue to read and explore this book of the Old Testament
- Pray that we would remember the importance of passing on the news of who God is to others

Talk #1: What's Good in Your Own Eyes:**Judges 2:1-3:11**

Setting the Scene: Judges:

1. The Promised Land: God's Faithfulness

2. The Covenant: Idols and Naivete

3. The Pattern: A Warning and a Need

The State of Israel: A spoiler alert and an uncomfortable truth

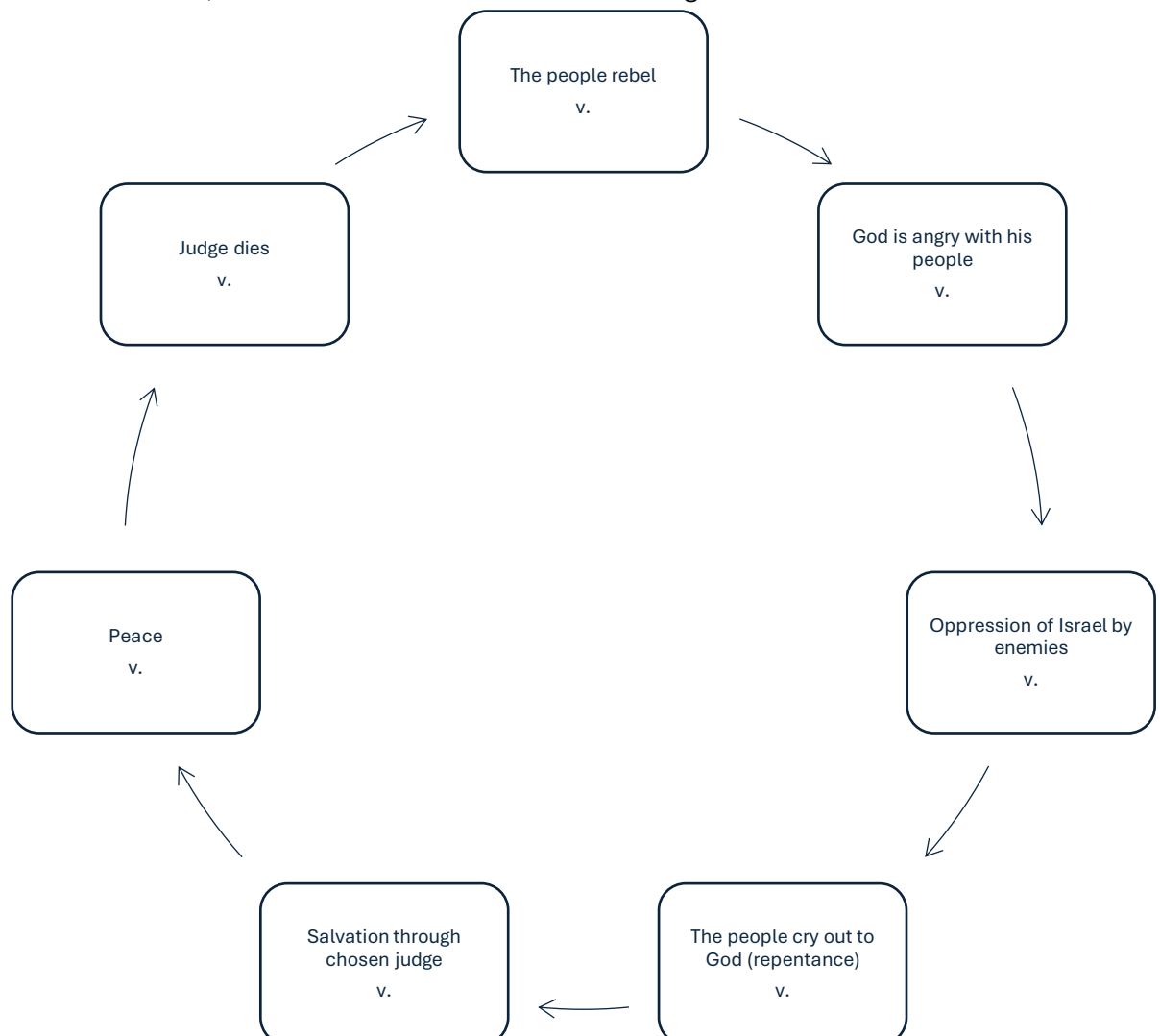
Bible Study #2: Expect the Unexpected

Judges 3:12-30

Big Idea:

Ehud is our second Judge in the book of Judges- and he is set up to be the unexpected hero that God uses to rescue his people again- using what others might have seen as weaknesses or overlooked to save his people from their enemies.

1. To start: What is the most unexpected thing that has happened to you in the last week?
2. For those who were here last week, summarise what we learned about the book of Judges and its structure.
3. Read Judges 3:12-30. What is most surprising about this story for you? (What stands out?)
4. Fill out our 'Judges' cycle diagram from this passage with notes on what happens, the main characters, and the verses that we learn these things:



5. What makes Ehud an unexpected deliverer, and how does this help him in this story?
6. Does the narrator present Ehud as a successful or unsuccessful Judge? Where can you see clues about this in the story?
7. Who does Ehud see as being actually responsible for saving Israel?
8. When reading OT narrative (especially one as strange as this!) it can be easy to get thrown or distracted by some of the stranger details, and miss the big point of the story. What is the main point or central theme of this story?
9. Ehud is the unexpected deliverer- people don't see him as a threat or as the type of person who could redeem Israel. (Note: some commentators including Tim Keller think that him being 'left-handed' might have actually been the result of an injury or disability because the original text literally translates as saying he was *unable* to use his right hand- this might have been why they didn't think he was a threat). How does this point us to how God will work in the future?
10. God is not mentioned often in this narrative- but he is clearly the one who is working in the background and saving Israel. What does this story remind us about God and about humanity? How does remembering these things shape how you relate to God and other people?
11. God uses an unexpected fact about Ehud to be the thing that makes it possible for him to deliver Israel. When have you seen God use something you thought was unimportant, or even a weakness, to work through you or someone else?
12. Ehud is wise in giving God the glory for saving Israel in this story. In what area of life do you find it hardest to give God the glory, wanting to take the glory for yourself?

Pray:

- Pray for God to use your weaknesses or quirks for his glory
- Pray for us to give God the glory always, not ourselves
- Pray for us to continue seeing God as the hero in the book of Judges

Talk #2: Who's in Charge Here?**Judges 4 + 5**

Setting the Scene: Deborah and Barak:

Violence in the Old Testament:

Obedience and trust:

Who is the deliverer here?

God's Faithfulness: He works despite us:

The State of Israel:

Bible Study #3: Is God Still There?**Judges 6:1-40****Big Idea:**

Gideon is the next judge in our story- but in this chapter we really start to see the cracks appearing in our Judges cycle- things are starting to really go downhill in Israel. Gideon himself struggles with trusting God's plan all the way through this story- but God still works through him.

1. To start: When do you find it hardest to trust God?
2. We are now just over halfway through our series on Judges- what has stood out to you so far from this book?
3. Read Judges 6:1-40. What consequences do we see Israel experiencing in this story because of their sin?
4. Fill out the table below: what do we learn about the character of Gideon from these different sources in this story? Where do these different perspectives agree or disagree?

Facts: (What the narrator tells us about Gideon)	Actions: (what does Gideon do in the story and what does that say about him?)	The Angel of the LORD: (How does God see him?)	Gideon's words: (How does Gideon see himself?)

5. Break up into three groups and each look at one of these sets of verses (vv.11-24, 25-35, 36-40). How does Gideon relate to the Angel of the LORD/The LORD in his different interactions, and how does this change over time?
6. What do we see in this story that 'breaks' our typical pattern in the book of Judges? (note: we don't get the full cycle here because the story of Gideon is a long one- but what can we see from the part of this story we just read?)

7. Where in this story do we see Gideon obeying God, and where do we get hints that he is finding it hard to trust God?
8. What do we learn about God in the way he interacts with Gideon in this passage? (note: the Angel of the LORD is a messenger also sent to represent God in this interaction)
9. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. How does this add to our understanding of how God worked and spoke to his people in the past and how he works and speaks now? Why is this important to remember?
10. God is incredibly patient and gracious towards Gideon, even with all the tests and signs Gideon sets and Gideon's doubt that God might have abandoned his people. It is easy for us to also let our circumstances impact what we think or feel about God. When do you find this hardest? What encourages you from this story for those times?
11. We can also, like Gideon, want assurance sometimes. Where can we look to when we struggle to trust God?
12. Gideon struggled in this story because he was also worried about the people around him and their gods- and how they might react to what God was asking him to do. When do you feel that pressure in everyday life? What could you do in those moments when you feel pressure to just fit in?

Pray:

- Pray for us to be bold in following Jesus
- Give thanks that we can look to God's Son to reveal who he is completely
- Pray for us to keep encouraging each other to persevere in trusting God, even when times are tough

Judges chapters 7-9 tells the rest of the story of Gideon, including the story of his son and the trouble his son causes Israel. Why not read this during the week and ask:

- What is surprising or confusing?
- Where can I see God working?

Talk #3: No More Heroes Anymore:**Judges 10 + 11**

Catching up: The end of the Gideon story:

Setting the scene: Jephthah:

Bargaining with God

The dangers of not knowing God's word

No-win situations and consequences

God's Faithfulness: How can God work through such a terrible story?

The State of Israel: The dangers of being vulnerable:

Bible Study #4: The Final Victory?**Judges 16:1-31****Big Idea:**

Samson is a very flawed, very human Judge who keeps making the same mistakes over and over- but the good news in this story is that God still uses him to deliver Israel and works through his flaws and mistakes.

1. To start: What is a mistake you've made that you didn't learn from and made again? (it can be as trivial as you want!)
2. Samson is the final Judge in the book of Judges. What or who has stood out to you from this book?
3. Take a look at the table in the Appendix at the back of your booklet. What patterns can you see? What clues can you see about the trajectory of the book of Judges overall? What do we learn about how Samson's story fits or breaks our pattern? (we won't read the whole story, just one of the more famous sections today!)
4. Read Judges 16:1-31. What are your initial reactions to this story and the characters? ¹
5. What do we learn about what the different characters in this story want (their motivations), and what do they do to get it?
6. Turn back in your Bibles and read Judges 14:1-4 and 15:1-3. What patterns can we see in Samson's behaviour? What might that show us about the state of Israel? (Note: the Judges were representative of that state of Israel more generally too, as Israel's leaders)

¹ Helpful info: Samson making a big deal about his hair is not just a vanity thing. Samson was not meant to cut his hair because he was living under a Nazirite vow to show he had been dedicated to God (an angel told his mother this before his birth- check out Judges 13:1-5 and Numbers 6:1-21 if you'd like more info). Over his whole story he breaks every single part of this Nazirite vow, and not cutting his hair is the final vow he was supposed to live by that he broke.

7. What challenges does Samson face in this story, and how are they overcome? What do you think is the greatest challenge he faces?
8. Is it surprising to see the way God works through Samson?
9. Is Samson a successful Judge? Why or why not? How does he point forward to the need for a better deliverer?
10. Read Acts 3:11-20. What can we learn from this passage about how God can use flawed and sinful people and their actions for his purposes? How does this help us understand the story of Samson and what we might see in the world around us?
11. In this story we see God work through a very flawed Judge, despite his problematic and impulsive behaviour (especially when it came to his treatment of women!). How do you feel about this? When have you seen God work through problematic people?
12. Samson showed a pattern of falling back into the same sin again and again. All of us will have some 'habitual sin' that we seem to constantly struggle with- reflect for a moment on what this might be for you, and how you might fight this. The good news is that God uses us too, despite our flaws! (Though this is not an excuse for sin). How does this prompt you to respond? (praise, thankfulness, confession).
13. The book of Judges keeps pointing us back to God as the faithful deliverer of his people the one who is ultimately saving them. How does this bring you comfort, and how could remembering this aspect of who God is shape the way you live now?

Pray:

- Pray for us as we remember that God is the one who saves us and depend on him
- Pray that we would be able to turn away from sin every day
- Give thanks for Jesus, our ultimate Saviour

Talk #4: The Descent into Darkness:**Judges 18-20**

Setting the Scene:

Complete religious failure (Judges 18)

Complete moral failure (Judges 19-21)

Applying this to us:

Our reaction to wrongdoing

When God's people go wrong

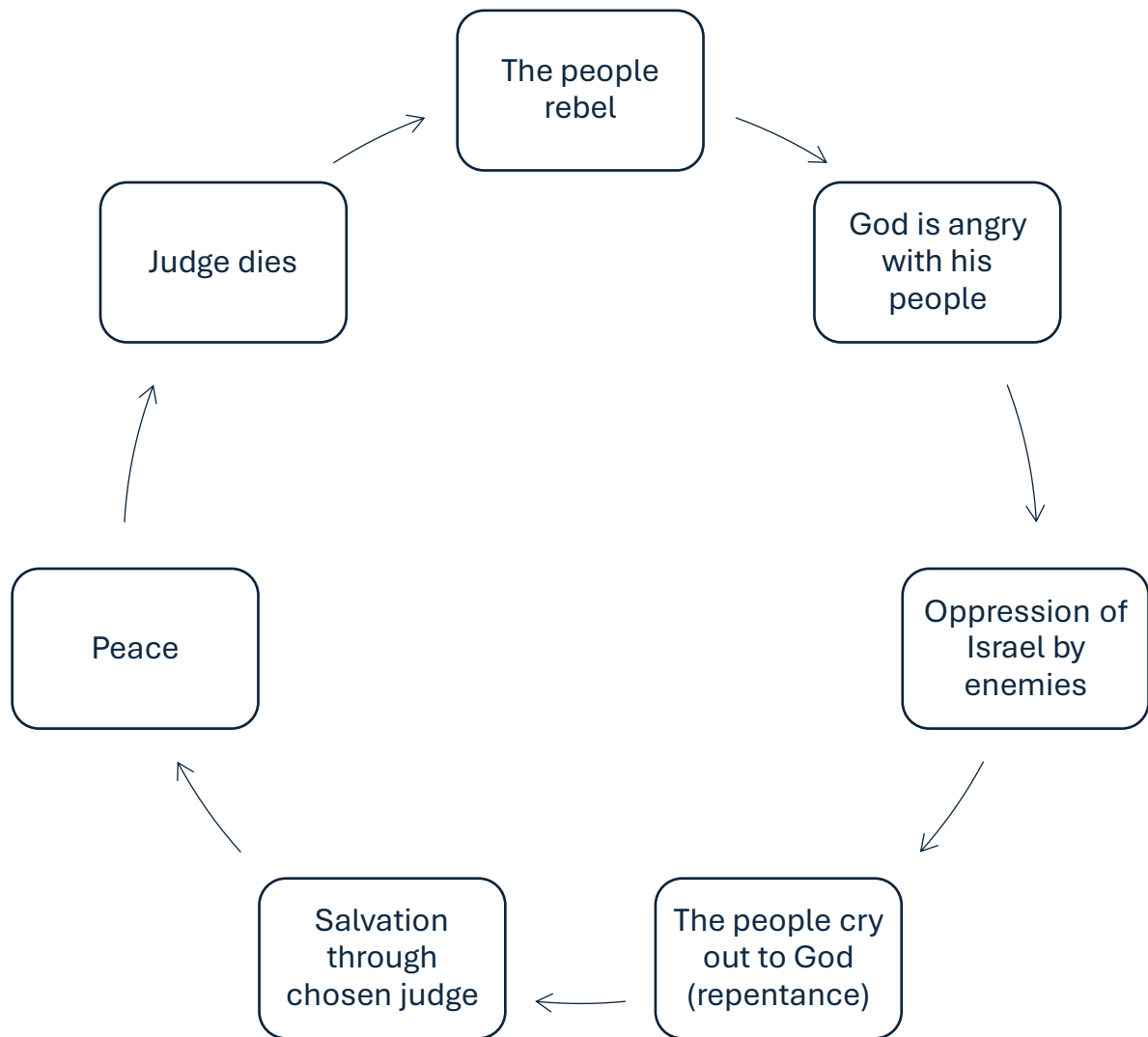
The consequences of wrongdoing

God's Faithfulness: Even in the Darkest of Times

The State of Israel: The hope of a King

Appendix 1: The Judges Cycle:

(Following Keller 2013 *Judges for You*)



Appendix 2: Judges Overview: (following Keller 2013 *Judges for You*):

	3:7-11	3:12-30	3:31	4:1-5:31	6:1-8:32	8:34-10:5	10:6-12:7	12:8-15	13:1-16:31	17-21
Worshipped	Baals & Asherahs	Unspecified Idols		Baals & Asherahs	Baal-Berith	Baals, Ashtoreths, gods of five other nations	Unspecified Idols		Unspecified Idols	Breaks Judges cycle
Given over by God to	Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram Naharaim	Eglon of Moab	Philistines	Jabin/Sisera of Canaan	Midian	Abimelech	Philistines, Ammonites		Philistines	
For a duration of	8 years	18 years		20 years	7 years	3 years	18 years		40 years	
How bad?	Subjected	Took tribute		Cruelly oppressed, village life ceased	Had to live in caves, crops ravaged		Crushed, great distress		Almost complete integration	
Does Israel cry out?	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	No	Yes		No	
Interlude before rescue?	No	No		No	Yes- prophet sent		Yes		No	
Judge	Othniel	Ehud	Shamgar	Deborah, Barak	Gideon	Tola, Jair	Jephthah	Ibzan, Elon, Abdon	Samson	
Of tribe/clan	Judah	Benjamin		Ephraim, Naphtali	Manasseh	Issachar, Gilead	Gilead	Judah, Zebulun, Ephraim	Dan	
Supported by	Israel	Israel		Zebulun, Naphtali	300 men		Gilead, Manasseh		No-one	
Spirit of God?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Infighting within Israel?	No	No		No	Ephraimites complain, two towns unsupportive	Shechem destroyed	Ephraimites slaughtered		Judah seeks to arrest Samson	
Victory?	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes		No	
Peace?	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes, though with idol-worship		No		No	
Duration of Judges rule	40 years	80 years		40 years	40 years	45 years (in total)	6 years	25 years	20 years	