



The flawed and the flawless

JUDGES

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The flawed and the flawless
The good book guide to Judges
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introduction: good book guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- 🗺 **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that’s not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗨 **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with his concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.



why study Judges?

Judges can be described as “despicable people doing deplorable things.” It is a history of (few) highs and (more) lows; of murder, assassination and massacres; of immorality, lawlessness and unfaithfulness.

It is the story of some of the Bible’s most familiar “heroes”: Samson, Gideon, Deborah; as well as some of its more unsung ones: Othniel, Barak, Jael. It tells of how Israel’s “judges” saved the people over and over again from the cruel oppression of the nations around them.

Yet as the history unfolds, the “heroes” become increasingly flawed and failing. They do many appalling things, and the efforts bring about less and less good. Really, they are hardly heroes at all. Judges is a dismal story—and it is all true.

So as we read it, we will be led to ask, repeatedly: *What in the world is this doing in the Bible?*

And the answer is crucial. It is the gospel! Judges (like the rest of the Bible) is not a book of virtues; it is not a series of inspirational stories to imitate; it will not present us with a moral code. It *is* about the God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through and for his people; and who does so despite his people’s constant resistance to his purposes, both then and now.

Ultimately, we will only find one hero in this book—and he’s God.

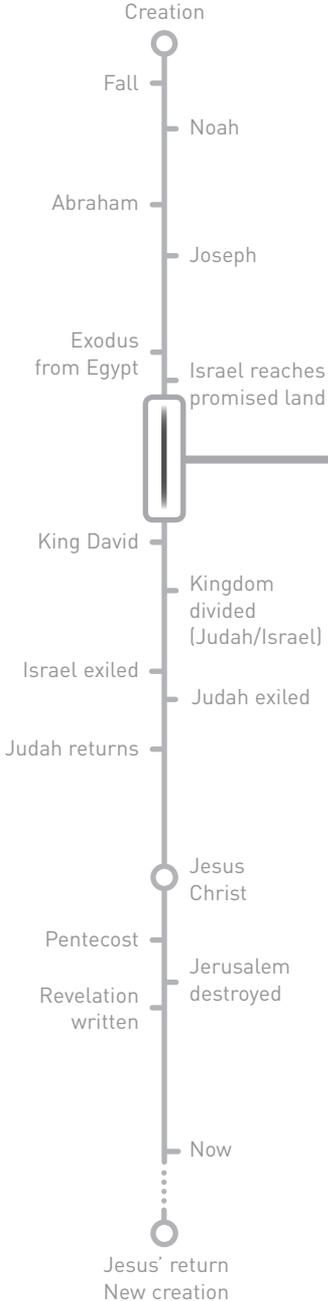
We’ll read of how he rescued Israel from the mess that they made by worshipping the gods of the people who lived around and among them. We’ll learn from the mistakes of God’s people as they lived in a time which offered them a great variety of alternative “gods” to love and serve and trust—a time not so different from our own. And we’ll be thrilled as we see, in the men and women God used to rescue and rule his people, dim shadows of the One who God would send finally to lead us.

Judges is not an easy read. But as God’s people, living in the era we do, it is an essential one.

One last word. There are six studies, covering all 21 chapters of Judges. That is a lot to cover! You will get much more out of your times together if you each read through the section individually before you meet.

BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does the book of Judges fit into the whole story of God's word?



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1

Judges 1 v 1 – 3 v 6

A SHAKY START

talkabout

1. Why do things go wrong in churches?

investigate

As we'll see, the book of Judges begins by pointing us back to Joshua...

▶ Read Joshua 1 v 1-9; 23 v 3-13

2. What does God command Israel to do, both in Joshua's time and after he has died?

- What must not they *not* do?

▶ Read Judges 1 v 1-36

3. How well does Israel obey God's commands in:

- v 1-2?

- v 3 (note what God had said in verse 2)?

DICTIONARY

Moses (1 v 1): Israel's leader as God rescued them from Egypt and brought them to the edge of the promised land.

Book of the Law (v 8): the laws God gave his people through Moses.

Allotted (23 v 4): gave, shared out.

Invoke (v 7): appeal to.

- v 4-11?
- v 19-21?
- v 22-26?
- v 27-33?
- v 34-36?

4. Make a list of the reasons given (or hinted at) why the tribes of Israel failed to settle in all the land God had promised them, pushing the Canaanites out.

5. What examples of whole-hearted obedience do verses 12-16 show us?

 **apply**

6. How does this episode show us the difference between common sense and faithful obedience?





getting personal

It is not our lack of strength that prevents us from enjoying God's blessings, and which means we do not worship God wholeheartedly; it is our lack of faith in *his* strength. Othniel attacked a city in God's strength; the tribe of Judah concluded they couldn't manage it.

Can you think of times in your life you have been brave because of your faith?

When do you find it hardest to follow God's commands instead of your own "common sense." Why?



investigate

Chapter 1 represents Israel's perspective on the campaign, their "press releases" on what happened. In summary, the Israelites said: "We could not drive them out."

▶ Read Judges 2 v 1-5

7. What is God's verdict on the same episode (v 1-3)?

8. What is the tension between what God had said before (v 1), and what he says now (v 3)?

DICTIONARY

Covenant (v 1-2): binding agreement, or set of promises.

Altars (v 2): places for making sacrifices to a god.

God is saying: *You have put me in an impossible situation. I have sworn to bless you as my beloved people, and sworn not to bless you as disobedient people. I have promised to love you as my people; but I have also promised that I will judge sin. How am I to solve this dilemma?*



9. **Read Romans 3 v 23-26 and 2 Corinthians 5 v 21.** How did God solve the dilemma, so that he could be both just *and* forgiving to his people?

➤ **Read Judges 2 v 6 – 3 v 6**

This section should be seen as a “second introduction” to the book of Judges. We need to have both 1 v 1 – 2 v 5 *and* 2 v 6 – 3 v 6 in mind as we read through the rest of the book.

10. What cycle in Israelite history do verses 10-21 summarize?

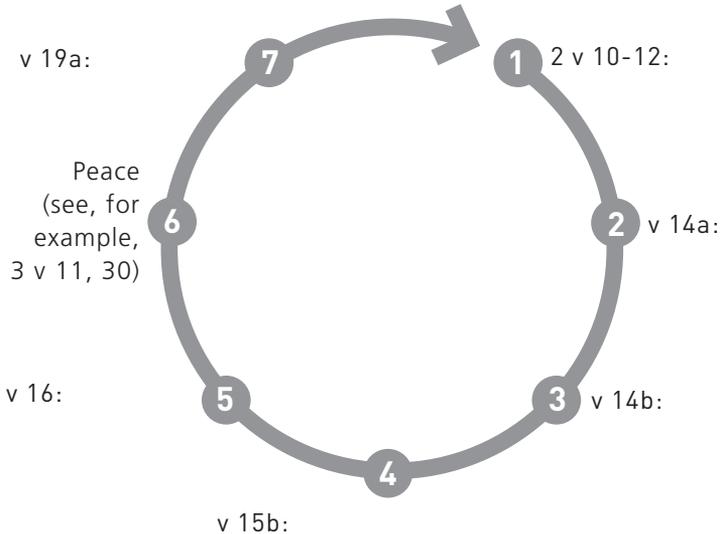
DICTIONARY

Baals (v 11): false gods worshiped by the Canaanites.

Forsook (v 12): abandoned, gave up.

Prostituted (v 17): here, it means loving something instead of God, as though it were God.

Violated (v 20): broken.





explore more

optional

Compare 2 v 7 and v 10-11. Within a generation, Israel had gone from being people who “served the LORD” to people who “served the Baals.” There is no automatic passing of faith from one generation to the next, from parents to children.

➤ **Read Deuteronomy 6 v 4-9, 20-25**

What do we need to do to pass our faith on to the next generation?



apply

11. How might we say: “I could not” but God says: “You would not,” when it comes to:

- forgiveness?

- telling the truth / sharing the gospel?

- being tempted?





getting personal

How does the reality of your sin and of God's grace prompt you to praise and thank him today?

Are there areas where you say to God: "I cannot" but the truth is you will not? What would change if you had whole-hearted faith in him?



pray

Thank God for his promises to his people, then and now. Thank God that, through the cross, he keeps his promises to bless us, despite our sinfulness. Thank God that he challenges us to see where our "can'ts" are in fact "won'ts."

Ask God to show you where you need to obey him wholeheartedly. Ask him to give you the trust in him which will enable you to do so. Speak to him about any other ways this study has excited or challenged you.

