

JUDGES

Judges is full of stories about strange and wonderful people whom God raised up – twelve leaders or Judges, some of whom are described very quickly. I have provided a list of the major stories.

Deborah	Prophet and woman warrior	Judges 4 and 5
Gideon	Tests God's instructions with a sheepskin fleece, obeys and saves his people	Judges 6, 7 and 8
Abimelech	Killed his 70 brothers and brought a curse	Judges 9 and 10
Jephthah	Rejected by his family until needed, a mighty warrior	Judges 11 and 12
Samson	Strong man with a weakness for pretty women	Judges 13-16
Levite and his concubine	Abused woman, punished tribe	Judges 19-21

The first chapter of Judges establishes the context for the whole book. Historically, this book covers the time when the Israelites are getting established in the Promised Land. God had done great things for them: escape from Egypt across the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, 40 years in the wilderness under Moses' leadership, successful entry into the Promised Land under Joshua.

Now the 12 tribes are taking over in the areas allotted to each one. There is, however, one major problem: they have not been fully obedient. They have not trusted God. Therefore, now God lets them discover life without his protection.

Throughout the 200 or so years covered by Judges, the cycle of faith and blessing, ignoring God, trouble and desperation, and rescue by God is repeated over and over. God raises up unexpected leaders. God works through people who have failed. God sets up situations where it is clear that the defeat of enemies is God's doing. (Gideon's army is incredibly small). God reveals abuse, negligence, and unfaithfulness. (The Levite and his concubine.)

And yet, God protects the people he has called to be God's people. God raises up leaders when and as they are needed.

These stories are told to make a point. Trust and obey. The collector of these stories into the book we have now was really addressing people from 500 or more years later. After 5 centuries of kings, with much unfaithfulness by kings and other leaders, these older stories with unlikely leaders and brutal actions, are a sermon on trusting God and obeying God's teaching.

*There is a hymn with a famous line: **Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*** This is the lesson of Judges. You will find these stories very helpful for daily living. Some will be puzzling, but that too is helpful: sometimes God does things we do not understand. That is no reason to choose our way instead of God's way.