

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

JUDGES

*No matter how far down our sins take us,
God will go farther to bring us back—
again and again.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

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NAVPRESS 

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Judges

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the individual books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding, plus a thirst to return to the book throughout your life.
2. To give you study patterns and skills that help you explore every part of the Bible.
3. To offer you historical background, word definitions, and explanation notes to aid your study.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

As you begin

This guide includes eight lessons that will take you chapter by chapter through all of Judges. To benefit most from this time, here's a good way to begin your work on each lesson:

1. Pray for God's help to keep you mentally alert and spiritually sensitive.
2. Read attentively the entire passage mentioned in the lesson's title. (You may want to read the passage from two or more Bible versions—perhaps at least once from a more literal translation such as the New International Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or New King James Version and perhaps once more in a paraphrase such as *The Message* or the New Living Translation.) Do your reading in an environment that's as free as possible from distractions. Allow your mind and heart to meditate on the words you encounter—words that are God's personal gift to you and to all His people.

After reading the passage, you're ready to dive into the numbered questions in this guide that make up the main portion of each lesson. Each of these questions is followed by blank space for writing your answers. (This act

of writing your answers helps clarify your thinking and stimulates your mental engagement with the passage as well as your later recall.) Use extra paper or a notebook if the space for recording your answers seems too cramped. Continue through the questions in numbered order. If any question seems too difficult or unclear, just skip it and go on to the next.

Most of the questions will direct you back to Judges to look again at a certain portion of the assigned passage for that lesson. At this point, be sure to use a more literal Bible translation rather than a paraphrase.

As you look closer at a passage, it's helpful to approach it in this progression:

Observe. What does the passage actually *say*? Ask God to help you see it clearly. Notice everything that's there.

Interpret. What does the passage *mean*? Ask God to help you understand. And remember that any passage's meaning is fundamentally determined by its *context*. So stay alert to all you'll see about the setting and background of Judges, and keep thinking of this book as a whole while you proceed through it chapter by chapter. You'll be progressively building up your insights and familiarity with what it's all about.

Apply. Keep asking yourself, *How does this truth affect my life?* Pray for God's help as you examine yourself in light of that truth and in light of His purpose for each passage.

Try to consciously follow all three of these steps as you shape your written answer to each question in the lesson.

The extras

In addition to the regular numbered questions you see in this guide, each lesson also offers several "optional" questions or suggestions that appear in the margins. All of these will appear under one of three headings:

Optional Application. These are suggested options for application. Consider these with prayerful sensitivity to the Lord's guidance.

For Thought and Discussion. Many of these questions address various ethical issues and other biblical principles that lead to a wide range of implications. They tend to be particularly suited for group discussion.

For Further Study. These often include cross-references to other parts of the Bible that shed light on a topic in the lesson, plus questions that delve deeper into the passage.

(For additional help for more effective Bible study, refer to the "Study Aids" section starting on page 137.)

Changing your life

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, "Lord, what do You want me to notice here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does my life measure up to this?" Let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so you'll increasingly be able to act on this truth as a natural way of living.

At times you may want to consider memorizing a certain verse or passage you come across in your study, one that particularly challenges or encourages you. To help with that, write down the words on a card to keep with you, and set aside a few minutes each day to think about the passage. Recite it to yourself repeatedly, always thinking about its meaning. Return to it as often as you can for a brief review. You'll soon find the words coming to mind spontaneously, and they'll begin to affect your motives and actions.

For group study

Exploring Scripture together in a group is especially valuable for the encouragement, support, and accountability it provides as you seek to apply God's Word to your life. Together you can listen jointly for God's guidance, pray for each other, help one another resist temptation, and share the spiritual principles you're learning to put into practice. Together you affirm that growing in faith, hope, and love is important and that you need each other in the process.

A group of four to ten people allows for the closest understanding of each other and the richest discussions in Bible study, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and church classes. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide, regardless of their previous experience in Bible study.

Aim for a positive atmosphere of acceptance, honesty, and openness. In your first meeting, explore candidly everyone's expectations and goals for your time together.

A typical schedule for group study is to take one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if your preparation or discussion time is limited. (You can always return to this guide later for further study on your own.)

When you come together, you probably won't have time to discuss all the questions in the lesson, so it's helpful to choose ahead of time the ones you want to make sure to cover thoroughly. This is one of the main responsibilities a group leader typically assumes.

Each lesson in this guide ends with a section called "For the group." It gives advice for that particular lesson on how to focus the discussion, how to apply the lesson to daily life, and so on. Reading each lesson's "For the group" section ahead of time can help the leader be more effective in guiding the group.

You'll get the greatest benefit from your time together if each group member also prepares ahead of time by writing out his or her answers to each question in the lesson. The private reflection and prayer this preparation can stimulate will be especially important in helping everyone discern how God wants you to apply each lesson to your daily lives.

There are many ways to structure the group meeting, and in fact you may want to vary your routine occasionally to help keep things fresh.

Here are some of the elements you can consider including as you come together for each lesson:

Pray together. It's good to pause for prayer as you begin your time together.

When you begin with prayer, it's worthwhile and honoring to God to ask especially for His Holy Spirit's guidance of your time together. If you write down each other's prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes

Worship. Some groups like to sing together and worship God with prayers of praise.

Review. You may want to take time to discuss what difference the previous week's lesson has made in your lives as well as recall the major emphasis you discovered in the passage for that week.

Read the passage aloud. Once you're ready to focus attention together on the assigned Scripture passage in the week's lesson, read it aloud. (One person could do this, or the reading could be shared.)

Open up for questions. Allow time for group members to mention anything in the passage they may have particular questions about.

Summarize the passage. Have one or two people offer a summary of what the passage says.

Discuss. This will be the heart of your time together and will likely take the biggest portion of your time. Focus on the questions you see as the most important and most helpful. Allow and encourage everyone to be part of the discussion for each question. You may want to take written notes as the discussion proceeds. Ask follow-up questions to sharpen your attention and deepen your understanding of what you discuss. You may want to give special attention to the questions in the margins under the heading "For Thought and Discussion."

Encourage further personal study. You can find more opportunities for exploring this lesson's themes and issues under the heading "For Further Study" in the margins throughout the lesson. You can also pursue some of these together during your group time.

Focus on application. Look especially at the "Optional Application" listed in the margins throughout the lesson. Keep encouraging one another in the continual work of adjusting your lives to the truths God gives in Scripture.

Summarize your discoveries. You may want to read aloud through the passage one last time together, using the opportunity to solidify your understanding and appreciation of it and clarify how the Lord is speaking to you through it.

Look ahead. Glance together at the headings and questions in the next lesson to see what's coming next.

Give thanks to God. It's good to end your time together by pausing to express gratitude to God for His Word and the work of His Spirit in your minds and hearts during your time together.

Keep these worthy guidelines in mind throughout your time together:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

(HEBREWS 10:24)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

(GALATIANS 6:2)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(ROMANS 15:7)

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

A Gripping Story of Tragic Decline

The book of Judges is embarrassing. “It is so earthy, so puzzling, so primitive, so violent—in a word, so strange—that the church can scarcely stomach it.” Yet it’s hard to ignore, partly because it tells us about a key period in the history of God’s involvement with His people and partly because as one commentator puts it, the book is “*so interesting*.”¹ Admirable leaders emerge in the darkest of times, and sometimes God chooses to work through anti-heroes who are colorful to read about but who can’t have been easy to live with.

The judges themselves

The book is named after a key Hebrew term used over and over in the book. That term is traditionally translated with our English noun *judges* and our verb *to judge* (NIV: “leaders” and “to lead”). Much of the book tells the stories of these “judges” or “leaders” who led the tribes of Israel for many generations after the death of Joshua until God gave Israel her first king.

In the book of Judges, eight men and one woman are specifically said to have “judged” (“led,” NIV) Israel: Othniel (3:10), Tola (10:2), Jair (10:3), Jephthah (12:7), Ibzan (12:8-9), Elon (12:11), Abdon (12:13-14), and Samson (15:20; 16:31), and the woman Deborah (4:4-5). Three others—Ehud (3:12-30), Shamgar (3:31), and Gideon (6–8)—are shown in the book to be judges, though that specific Hebrew word is not used for them or their actions.

In the later book of 1 Samuel, the priests Eli (4:18) and Samuel (7:15) are also said to have “judged [led] Israel.” Samuel was the last of this kind of leader before God let Israel have a hereditary king. King Saul was the first king, and David succeeded him after God rejected Saul and his heirs.

The judges of Israel weren’t hereditary kings, but neither were they what we would call judges, presiding over law courts. Other than Deborah (Judges 4:4-5), they didn’t sit and hear legal disputes all day. Instead, they were political leaders, often military men leading Israel’s citizen militia to resist armed enemies.

In Judges 2:12-19, we find an overview of God’s purpose in sending the judges. The passage tells of a cycle that repeated over and over for several centuries. The Lord’s chosen people drifted away from Him and worshiped

the gods of their neighbors. The Lord's justice demanded that He respond by withdrawing His protection from them. The Israelites then lost their battles against their enemies and became oppressed. After a period of oppression, the Lord had mercy on His people and raised up a judge to lead them in battle against their enemies. The judge succeeded in liberating the people but had mixed success in leading them afterward to be faithful to the Lord. After the judge's death, the people went back to their corrupt practices, and the cycle repeated.

This passage suggests that the judges were expected to have some spiritual influence over the people, not just military prowess. Samuel was certainly a spiritual leader (see 1 Samuel 7:6; 12:7), but other judges such as Samson (see Judges 15:20; 16:31) were not. On the other hand, Samuel and Deborah were not military leaders.

The days of the judges

The book of Joshua ends on a high note. The Israelites pledged to serve no gods except the Lord, and this commitment set them up to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land. But when Joshua and that first generation of committed elders died, the people became lukewarm in their commitment to the Lord. There was also a “leadership vacuum”²—without a strong central government, the nation frayed into a loose confederacy of squabbling tribes. Moral decay and political instability set in. The blessings of the Promised Land were squandered.

This went on for 350 years, from the conquest of the land under Joshua (about 1400 BC) to the time of Samuel (about 1050 BC). The first leader mentioned in Judges, Othniel, lived in the generation after Joshua. The last leader, Samson, died after Samuel was born. During these centuries, Israel had constant trouble with the native inhabitants of the land of Canaan, as well as with neighbors from the north, south, east, and west.

The Israelites' response to their troubles was the opposite of faith. They worshiped the Lord alongside the gods of Canaan and their neighbors. They committed shocking crimes—rape, murder, dismemberment—that the writer of Judges describes bluntly as a record of just how bad things were. His summary of the people's core problem, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25, *esv*), might be a description of our own day.

When the book was likely written

Certain clues in the book of Judges indicate that this book may well have been written about the time when David's rule as king was being established in Israel, following the reign of Saul. At that time, the Israelites were debating whether they should accept the house of David from the tribe of Judah as their royal family, or whether they should follow Saul's son Ish-Bosheth from the tribe of Benjamin. David ruled the southern tribes from the city of Hebron, while Ish-Bosheth ruled the northern tribes.

Accordingly, the writer repeats his observation “in those days Israel had no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) just when he’s telling something truly appalling about those kingless days. This refrain suggests that he favors having a godly king to lead the nation. He also appears to favor David over Ish-Bosheth, because his book “ends with events that severely compromise the reputation of the tribes of Benjamin.”³

The teaching of Judges

The book of Deuteronomy laid out a theological framework for interpreting Israel’s history. In Deuteronomy, the Lord says that if Israel is faithful to Him, He will bless the nation, but if Israel worships other gods, He will allow enemies to oppress the nation. The writer of Judges tells his story to illustrate that this is exactly what happened. He shows that “Israel’s spiritual condition determined its political and material situation.”⁴ His goals seem to be to support David’s claim as king and to inspire his own generation to be faithful to the Lord.

1. Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 9.
2. *Life Application Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), introduction to Judges.
3. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), introduction to Judges, “Date and Occasion”.
4. Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 378.

JUDGES 1-3

The Pattern Begins

Judges 1

The book of Joshua tells how Joshua led the first phase of the conquest of the Promised Land. In that first phase, the Israelites swept through the land, conquering strategic cities in every region. Then Joshua died, and the various tribes of Israelites were supposed to carry out the second phase of conquest: driving out the pagan Canaanites and settling their allotted territories. Judges 1 sketches some scenes from that only partially successful second phase.

Modern readers are often troubled by this conquest. It seems unjust for Israel to kill masses of people and take their land. But the biblical writers take the view that the Lord owns the land. He gave it to the Canaanites, and they built a vile society in which kings and nobles oppressed the common people, children were sacrificed to the gods, and drunkenness and

Optional

Application: After Jesus' resurrection, when He was explaining Old Testament passages to His disciples, He "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Ask God to do that kind of work in *your* mind as you study the book of Judges so you're released and free to learn everything here He wants you to learn and so you can become as bold and worshipful and faithful as those early disciples of Jesus were. Express this desire to Him in prayer.

For Further Study: Review Israel's conquest of Canaan — the immediate background for the book of Judges — by looking over and familiarizing yourself with the book of Joshua.

promiscuity were standard features of religious rites (see Leviticus 18:6-30; Deuteronomy 18:9-14). So the Lord decided to take the land away from the Canaanites and give it to the Israelites on the condition that they build a just society without these abuses. The conquest was ugly, but the Lord considered it just.

1. Outline and summarize the significant events and details recorded in these sections of the first chapter:

1:1-7

1:8-15

1:16-21

1:22-26

Come up with us. . . . We in turn will go with you. . . . The men of Judah went with the Simeonites (1:3,17). When the tribes worked together in unity, the Lord added His own assistance and gave them success. Later we will see the disasters that occurred when the tribes were not unified. The writer of Judges wants the tribes of his own day to learn from this and unite under one king.

As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb (1:20). See Joshua 14:6-15; 21:11-12.

Jerusalem (1:21). This pre-Israelite city was on the border between the territories allotted to Benjamin (later King Saul's tribe) and Judah (later King David's tribe). Neither Benjamin nor Judah managed to conquer it in the days of the Judges. Judah managed to "take" the city temporarily (see Judges 1:8), killing many of its pagan inhabitants, but Judah didn't settle the city with Israelites, and Benjamin didn't do so securely either, so pagans returned to the site and resettled it. Not until the time of David did Israel firmly drive the pagans out of Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 5:6-9).

To this day the Jebusites live there (1:21). The writer of Judges must have written his book in a time before David conquered Jerusalem, probably only a few years before.

- Referring to 1:27-36, list the tribes named and summarize what they had in common.

For Further Study:

What reasons and motivation for Israel to completely drive out the Canaanites from the land do you find in Exodus 23:20-33?

Optional

Application: Judges 1 shows how easy it is to be successful in worldly terms (money, influence, people’s approval) while failing at the things that matter to God. In light of this, how would you assess your own “success” in the eyes of God?

For Further Study:

How do the words of Jesus in Luke 16:10 relate to what you see happening in Judges 1?

Optional

Application: With the examples and lessons of Judges 1 in mind, how do the words of Jesus in Luke 16:10 relate to your own life at this time?

Judges 1:22-36 shows that the tribes were less and less successful in taking and securely settling the land that Joshua had allotted to them.

Forced labor (1:28,30,33,35). The Israelites were supposed to drive out these groups of pagans so that they wouldn’t have a negative influence on the way the Israelites lived. In the generation after Joshua, the Israelites had the power to do this. Instead, they chose to turn the pagans into an underclass of forced laborers. At this stage they were successful in worldly terms but failing spiritually.¹ The results of their spiritual failure were invisible at the time and became visible only later (see 2:11-13,19; 3:5-6). They started off tolerating the pagans in their midst and ended up adopting their practices—the very practices that God was trying to wipe out.

Judges 2

3. What were the major elements in the message from the Lord to Israel as recorded in Judges 2:1-3?

The angel of the LORD (2:1). Probably not just one of God’s many angels but a visible manifestation of the invisible God, which scholars call a *theophany*. When the Lord’s premier messenger speaks, the biblical text says it is the Lord speaking (see Judges 6:11-24; compare Exodus 3:1-17). The angel of the Lord led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 14:19; 23:20-23). He may be God the Son before He became incarnate as the man Jesus.²

Traps for you, and . . . snares to you (2:3). God forbade His people from marrying Canaanites or having anything to do with them because He knew this would lead His people to adopt the gods and rites of Canaan. Then He would have to do to His people what He was doing to the Canaanites: drive them out of the land (see Numbers 33:56; Joshua 23:13; 2 Kings 17:5-8; 25:1-11).

4. From 2:4-5, summarize the people's response to the message they had been given from the Lord.

Wept aloud (2:4). They wept because their punishment was painful, not because they were grieved at their misdeeds and committed to changing their ways. Wet eyes don't necessarily indicate repentance, as any parent of a toddler knows.

Bokim (2:5). This means "weeping."³

Judges 2:6-3:6 lays out the pattern of events that will be repeated over and over in chapters 3-16. It's important to stop and study the pattern so we can look for it in later episodes. The pattern shows what the Lord is doing behind the scenes.

5. What details from Joshua 24:28-31 are repeated in Judges 2:6-9?
-

For Further Study:
How does Judges 2:1-5 compare with the situation you see in Nehemiah 8:1-12? How does it connect with what God asks of His people in Joel 2:12-13?

Optional

Application: Reflect on 2:10 and how easy it is for a new generation to lose the “knowing” of the Lord that previous generations may have experienced. What is it about the Lord and His actions in the past that you tend to lose sight of? How can you keep in fresh touch with these?

Israel shouldn't have become the victim of those she was supposed to conquer. To explain how this shocking turn of events happened, the writer of Judges backs up to review the end of the book of Joshua.

6. What is the significance of the details given in 2:10?

Another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel (2:10). Each generation was supposed to raise their children with the stories of the Lord's mighty deeds, especially the calling of Abraham and the freeing of the people from slavery in Egypt (see Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:1-6). If the people truly knew who the Lord was and what He had done for their ancestors, they wouldn't be attracted to other gods. They would obey the covenant given through Moses. “But the leaders—heads of families, priests, and judges—failed to keep the covenant or to tell the next generation about God's mighty deeds.”⁴

7. What specific consequences of the situation in 2:10 are spelled out in verses 11-13?

8. Reflect especially on the statement made in 2:11. How would you summarize its full significance?

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD (2:11). A constant refrain in Judges. See also 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1.

Served the Baals (2:11). As Deuteronomy predicted, the crime of serving other gods was the foundational crime on which all of the rest of Israel's disobedience was built. See also 3:7; 8:33; 10:6,10. Notice also the warning in Deuteronomy 4:23.

9. How would you summarize God's response as given in the last sentence of 2:12 and in verses 14-15? What does this reveal about the character of the Lord?

In his anger against Israel (2:14). More literally, "So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel" (ESV). "Such anger should not surprise us. It is the price we pay for being loved."⁵ Because the Lord loves us, He is jealous when we drift off to other lovers, other things we love (or fear) more than Him.

For Thought and Discussion: What reasons can you give for why the people of Israel so readily went after foreign gods while neglecting the one true God?

The hand of the LORD was against them (2:15). The Lord’s “hand” is His power. He has used it to save Israel (see Exodus 3:20; 6:1; 13:3; Deuteronomy 4:34). Now He uses it to discipline them. Later He will use it to rescue them again. Now He is acting with justice. Later He will offer them grace again.

Just as he had sworn to them (2:15). More literally, “as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them” (ESV). He was only doing what He had earlier promised to do if Israel was unfaithful. His anger “is a *faithful anger*.”⁶

10. What important facts about the judges are given in 2:16?

The LORD raised up judges, who saved them (2:16). This is sheer grace. They don’t deserve to be rescued, but He does it because He is ever faithful.

11. In 2:17, what is emphasized about the people’s response to the judges and the reasons for that response?

Prostituted themselves to other gods (2:17). The writer of Judges sees the Lord as Israel’s true husband, so consorting with other gods is prostitution. The name of the god Baal, the chief god of Canaan, means “husband” or “owner.”⁷

12. Summarize the details of the cycle of action described in 2:18-19.

The LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them (2:18). The use of the word “groan” recalls Israel’s slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 2:24; 6:5). The Lord’s compassion is as great as it was when He rescued the people back then. Even though their groaning reflects unhappiness, not repentance, it still moves Him to see them so desolate.

The people returned to ways even more corrupt (2:19). Sin is an ever-increasing slavery, an addiction, a tyrant.

Their evil practices and stubborn ways (2:19). “Sin is not simply an action you do or fail to do, that you can choose to do or not to do. Sin is a power that holds you in its grip.”⁸

13. What does God promise to do in 2:20-23, and for what reason?

14. In Judges 2:22, we read of God’s intention to test Israel. In 3:1-2 and 3:4, what more is said about God’s reasons for testing His people?

For Further Study:
 Judges 2:18 mentions God’s compassion as His people groaned under affliction. In what encouraging ways do you also see this compassion in the following verses: Deuteronomy 32:36; Ezra 9:8-9; Nehemiah 9:31; Psalm 12:5; 78:38; 86:15; 106:44-45; Lamentations 3:22-23; Micah 7:18-19; Matthew 9:36; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Hebrews 4:15; James 5:11?

For Further Study:
 How is Israel’s entrenched sinfulness (as seen in Judges 2:19) a reflection of us as well? In what particular ways is this addressed in Romans 3:9-18? And what further connection to this topic do you see in these passages: Ephesians 2:1-7; 1 John 3:4-10; 5:19-20?

For Thought and Discussion: Think more about God’s stated intention (in Judges 3:2) for His people to be familiar with warfare. How might that relate to God’s intention for believers today to be skilled in spiritual warfare?

Optional Application: Reflect again on God’s statement in Judges 3:2 promoting His people’s familiarity with warfare. How would you assess your own battle-readiness and experience in spiritual warfare?

Judges 3

15. Summarize Israel’s situation as described in 3:1-6.

The five rulers of the Philistines (3:3). In the list of “the nations” left in Canaan (see 3:1-3), the Philistines take first place as Israel’s main enemies. They had five cities along the Mediterranean seacoast: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron.

16. Judges 2:6–3:6 shows what the Lord is doing in the time of the judges. How would you summarize what the Lord is doing during this time?

Why was Israel so enticed by the religions around them? One reason was that the people spent so much time with Canaanites and got first familiar and then comfortable with Canaanite ways. They seemed normal, the kinds of things normal people do. If the people who live next door to you, who do business with you, practice child sacrifice and have promiscuous sex during their religious festivals, all of that becomes normal.

Today we have no command from God to physically attack the pagans next door. But we still need to resist the pull to see all of their practices as normal in the sense of “okay.” We need to establish some separation from their culture—even more, we need a robust and winsome culture of our own—or we will increasingly blend in.

Judges 3:7–16:31 is the core of the book. It shows a repeating cycle of events patterned on what we saw in 2:6–3:6. While the details about each judge vary, the point of all the cycles is that the people remain unrepentant. Each time a judge dies, the people return to their sin.

These chapters describe six major judges with six minor ones interspersed. “The cycles of the twelve judges show that the judges could not lead the people into faithfulness to the covenant. There was a downward spiral of increasing disobedience.”⁹

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. . . . Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD (3:7,12). See also 2:11; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1 for more examples of this refrain.

17. a. Reflect especially on the statements made about Israel in 3:7,12. What further significance do you see in these words?
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For Further Study: In what important ways does Psalm 106:34–40 summarize Israel’s situation during this time period of the book of Judges?

For Thought and Discussion: What should be the right response of Christians today to the culture around them? In what ways should we be combating this culture? What aspects of our culture should we be actively opposed to, and what are the most important ways we can do this?

For Further Study: In what important and practical ways does Romans 12:2 address the issue of God’s people remaining distinct from the culture around them?

Optional

Application: What do you see as your personal responsibility as a believer in Jesus Christ for not blending in to the culture around you?

For Further Study: With the facts of Judges 3:8 in mind, what further wisdom about this do you find in these passages: Deuteronomy 29:18-28; Psalm 90:11; Isaiah 33:14; Nahum 1:6; Luke 12:5; Revelation 6:17?

b. What specific sins of the people are mentioned in 3:7?

c. In 3:8, what was God's specific response to the people's sin?

They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs (3:7). See also 2:12; 8:33; 10:6,10; as well as the warning in Deuteronomy 4:23.

18. a. How does 3:8 reflect the pattern of God's actions first described in Judges 2:14-15?

b. In 3:9, how did the people react to God's discipline?

c. What did God specifically do for them?

The anger of the LORD burned against Israel (3:8). The Lord is in charge of Israel’s history. These are not random events.

Cushan-Rishathaim (3:8). The name means “Cushan of double wickedness.”¹⁰

Cried out (3:9). A wail of deep distress — misery, not repentance. Out of sheer grace, the Lord doesn’t wait to see repentance before He responds to anguish.

Othniel (3:9). A relative of Caleb from the tribe of Judah. In 1:11-15 we saw his success as a warrior.

19. What important details about Othniel are given in 3:10? What impresses you most in Othniel’s brief story (see 3:7-11)?

The Spirit of the LORD came on him (3:10). The Spirit of God was the one who enabled judges to free their people. See 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14. Despite the great failings of the people during the period of the judges, it was a time when God poured out His Spirit on a regular basis. This outpouring of the Spirit after the time of Joshua foreshadowed the outpouring of the Spirit after the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry (the name Jesus is a variant of Joshua).

Peace (3:11). Or “rest” (ESV, NKJV). Rest was one of the blessings promised to those who were faithful to God’s covenant. God gave it for a period of time after Othniel’s victory, but the people squandered it through infidelity. See also 3:30; 5:31; 8:28.

20. In Ehud’s story, how does 3:12-14 reflect the pattern of God’s actions first described in Judges 2:14-15? What do you learn about Ehud in 3:15?

21. a. Outline and summarize the events that unfold in these sections of Ehud’s story:

3:16-18

3:19-20

3:21-23

3:24-26

3:27-29

b. What is significant in the two summary statements given in 3:30?

The handle sank in after the blade (3:22). Ehud used a dagger without a crosspiece so that he could hide it under his “long, flowing outer garment.”¹¹

The Lord physically saved His people through Ehud, but Ehud couldn't change his people's hearts. They were stuck in the slavery of sin. We, however, have a Savior who will save His people from sin if we cry out to Him for help.

Follow me . . . for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands (3:28). The king of Moab had officials and troops with him at the City of Palms (Jericho). When Ehud assassinated the king, his supporters were thrown off balance, and Ehud's men had an ideal chance to fight and defeat them.

Peace for eighty years (3:30). Or “rest for eighty years” (ESV). See 3:11; 5:31; 8:28.

22. a. What impresses you most in Ehud’s story?

b. How does his story reflect the pattern of God’s deliverance first described in Judges 2:16-18?

23. What do you find most significant in Shamgar’s brief story in 3:31?

Oxgoad (3:31). Apparently Shamgar had to use a farm implement because the Philistines had taken swords and other arms away from the Israelites they dominated. (see Judges 5:8; 1 Samuel 13:19-22).¹² God can work through all sorts of tools: an oxgoad, a dagger (see Judges 3:16), a hammer (see 4:21), torches and trumpets (see 7:16), a millstone (see 9:53), and a donkey’s jawbone (see 15:15).

He too saved Israel (3:31). We know nothing about Shamgar. He could have had Canaanite blood for all we know. All we know is that God worked through him to save Israel. God can work

through anyone.

24. What do you think God wants us to see most about Himself in chapters 1-3?

25. What would you select as the key verse or passage in Judges 1-3—one that best captures or reflects the dynamics of what these chapters are all about?

26. List any lingering questions you have about Judges 1-3.

For the group

In your first meeting, it may be helpful to turn to the front of this book and review together the “How to Use This Guide” section.

You may want to focus your discussion for lesson 1 especially on the following issues, themes, and concepts (all of them major overall themes in Judges). Which of these are dealt with in some way in chapters 1-3, and how are they further developed there?

- God's grace and mercy
- The power and ugliness of sin
- God's certain judgment of sin
- The neediness of God's people, especially for godly leadership
- God's authority in the lives of His people and their loyalty to His lordship
- God's discipline of His people
- Deliverance from oppression
- God's covenant faithfulness
- The work of God's Spirit

The following numbered questions in lesson 1 may stimulate your best and most helpful discussion: 3, 12, 13, 19, 22, 24, 25, and 26.

Look also at the questions in the margins under the heading "For Thought and Discussion."

1. Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 24–25.
2. Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 392.
3. Wolf, 392.
4. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), at Judges 2:10.
5. Davis, 37.
6. Davis, 37–38.
7. Wolf, 395.
8. Davis, 42.
9. *New Geneva Study Bible*, introduction to Judges: "Characteristics and Themes."
10. Davis, 51.
11. Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale, 1968), 76; as quoted by Davis, 60, note 2.
12. Wolf, 402.