



Guided Reading
&
Life Group Discussion Guide

I
GOT
THIS.

& Other Life Disasters
in the Book of Judges

“I Got This”

And Other Life Disasters from the Book of Judges

Guided Reading and Life Group Discussion Guide

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Key Background Issues

Welcome to the book of Judges!

A mentor of mine used to say that a child is born asking two basic questions, “Who loves me?” and “Who is in charge?” They are fundamental to our existence. We want to fit and we want to be protected.

Sadly, over time we often want to appoint ourselves the answer to the “who is in charge” question. We want everyone to love us, but we want to be in charge. Most of the time we feel we are best at navigating the challenges of the world. Then, when we mess up — and we all do — we tend to see other people as the source of the problem. “If they would live their life the way I do, this would never have happened.” We tend to fail to see our mistakes because we think our hearts are good, right, and well-intended.

But Scripture tells us something different. It tells us that our hearts are “deceitful... and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV). We need someone to be in charge to keep our hearts from manifesting the worst parts of ourselves.

Few books expose this reality like the book of Judges. What is the problem in this book? The very last sentence tells us...

***In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
— Judges 21:25 (ESV)***

They chose themselves to be in charge and they did what they thought was right. They said, “I got this!”

Yet the book depicts one of the darkest times in human history — violence, corruption, fear — not a fun time to be alive. Why did these things happen? Because “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” That is right. Every time you read something and go, “that is sick... that is awful... why is this in the Bible...”; remember, someone thought it was “right” because they had put themselves in charge. They were being guided by the same sinful heart that lives in us and tells us we can rule ourselves.

How are we saved from such misery? We need a King. The beauty of this book is that it points us to a King that can change our hearts, love us, and ask us to submit to Him. Behind the misery of the lives of the people of Judges lies the beauty of being mastered by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords — Jesus. I hope you enjoy your journey.

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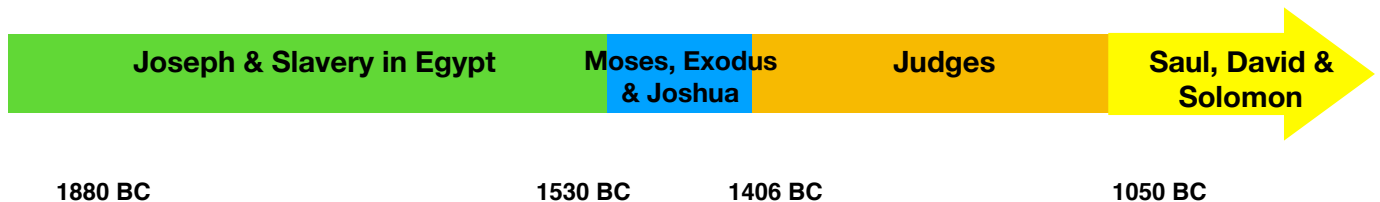
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Timeline and Context

No historical book in the Bible is written to stand on its own. They are each plugged into a context of history, theology, culture, etc. Judges is no different.

As mentioned above, Judges is a particularly dark time in Israel's history when there was no king. It takes place after Moses had delivered the people from Egypt, and Joshua enters the Promised Land, and before the Kingdoms of Saul and David.



There are a couple of important things to note about the time and context of the Judges. First, while the book is only 21 chapters, it spans a time period of almost 350 years. That is 100 years longer than the history of the United States. In fact, the people of Israel lived in the period of the Judges for almost as long as they were slaves in Egypt!

Second, it was a very chaotic time. Joshua had helped to conquer the Promised Land, but Israel was never really established as a unified political force in the region. As a result, and exacerbated by their disobedience, it was easy for foreign armies and regional strife to wreak havoc on the struggling tribes.

Finally, while there were some natural reasons for the chaos — no centralized government, chaotic geopolitical circumstances — the author of Judges (unknown) clearly sees a theological reason for the misery of this time period.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. — Judges 2:11-15 (ESV)

Not wanting the people to stay in this predicament, God would then have mercy on them...

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. — Judges 2:16

But this deliverance would be short-lived and the people would just repeat the pattern. Only each time they repeated this pattern the circumstances would get worse. The author outlines this theology through the following themes.

Key Themes

“Bad to Worse”

As you read the book of Judges you will probably find yourself thinking, “Well this started out rough” and then by the end of the book saying something like, “How can this be in the Bible?” It naturally moves from a state of difficulty and degenerates into utter horror and chaos. It goes from “bad to worse.”

Chapters 1-5 show how some simple mistakes led to unwanted oppression. The leaders of Israel did not conquer all of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. This allowed certain strategic footholds for enemy nations to come in and oppress the people.

Early in the book the situation wasn't without hope. During the lifetimes of the first few Judges — Othniel, Ehud, Deborah — the enemy nations oppressed the people for relatively short periods of times — 8 years, 18 years, and 20 years. After the Lord used these Judges to free his people, the reign of peace after each Judge was fairly long by comparison — 40 years after Othniel, 80 years after Ehud, and 40 years after Deborah.

But the book takes a dramatic turn after the life of Gideon. From that point on not only does the oppression of foreign enemies create havoc, but the internal turmoil among the tribes of Israel becomes a problem. There is little peace even when God's people have defeated foreign enemies. The book goes from “bad to worse” and the “worse” is actually self-inflicted by the people of God.

This becomes the point of the book. God eventually just leaves the people to their own wishes — “We will rule ourselves and not be ruled by God.” In the end, Israel ruling itself is actually worse than being oppressed by their enemies.

“Underdog”

Another reoccurring theme is that of the underdog. When God selects a judge to deliver Israel, He typically uses someone that doesn't naturally fit the “hero” motif: Ehud is left-handed, Deborah was a woman in a patriarchal society, Gideon is from the smallest family in his tribe, and Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. Almost none of the judges would have been naturally picked to lead God's people to salvation. This is intentional and it is directly connected to the next theme.

“God Is Savior”

“The Lord said to Gideon, ‘With the 300 men who lapped I will save you...’” (Judges 7:7a)

The entire point of the underdog theme is to constantly remind Israel — and us the readers — that it was God who saved them from their oppressors. In this book God constantly used the weakest and most frail to demonstrate His power! Israel is being saved because of the power and grace of a God who loves them not by the power, wit, or heroism of a person.

God's desire in this time in history was for His people to recognize that His will and ways would keep them safe and keep them in a right relationship with Him. If they turned to God as King, He would be there for them. He saved them from Egypt, He saved them from their oppressors, and He can save them from themselves.

Unfortunately, the people never get the message and instead constantly trust themselves. After every victory, after every salvation, after every judge, they simply say to God "Thanks, but we've got this."

"I Got This"

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. — Judges 21:25 (ESV)

"I got this" is such a common phrase. Yes, I admit, most of the time it doesn't carry great significant when we utter it. However, it is such a simple statement of our own sovereignty. "I got this" reveals we want to be our own kings.

"I got this" is the ultimate tragedy of God's people in the book of Judges. They are constantly telling God they want to rule themselves. Amazingly, it reaches its most destructive moment in the life of Gideon and his son Abimelech. Abimelech means "my father is king." Under their collective reigns Israel turns away from God and reaches the peak of ruling themselves.

Just like "I got this" is a modern phrase to express a deeper heart issue, I wanted to make this book as accessible to modern times as possible. So I have attached a modern phrase that we take for granted, but can often lead to a tragic downfall, to each of the major judges in this book. These are the "other life disasters." They are simple ways of thinking that sound great, but ultimately can lead us down a path that is the opposite of the grace and truth of Jesus.

They are as follows:

"What's the Worst that Can Happen?"
Othniel and Ehud (Judges 1-3)

"I Don't Have the Anointing"
Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5)

"I Got This"
Gideon and Abimelech (Judges 6-9)

“God, if You Will, I Will”
Jephthah (Judges 10-12)

“God Told Me”
Samson (Judges 13-16)

“Live Your Truth”
Danites and Benjamin (Judges 17-21)

Each statement left independent of the will, ways, and accountability of God can lead us from bad to worse! And each of these stories invites us to submit to a loving and saving King.

Why the Gore?

As I mentioned before, this is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to read. I have often had people ask me, “Why is this stuff in the Bible?” Judges is one of the books that is frequently used to say the Bible is “dangerous” or “promotes violence” or shows an evil God. So why the gore, violence, and chaos? Here are three reasons.

The Writer Reflects True, Ancient Life

The chaos and gore actually demonstrate that the Bible is trying to be a historical book. The writer accurately reflects the reality of ancient life. Think about it for a moment. If someone wanted to make up a story about how their race of people were chosen by God, it would be easier to write a story about how their race never suffered and always prospered because “God was on our side.”

However, the Bible does just the opposite. It exposes the sin and faithlessness of God’s people in gory detail for all to see! There is NO way to put a positive PR spin on this book. God’s people failed and failed terribly. So this depiction demonstrates the historical truthfulness that the writer is trying to portray. A historic reality of the ancient world.

The Writer Describes the Actions, He/She Does Not Endorse the Actions

There is a misunderstanding among some who read the Bible that if a Bible character did an action — particularly if he is a “good guy” — that the Bible is saying that action is okay. But this is not the case.

The writers of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, are recording the historical actions of the characters. They record the good, the bad, and the ugly. Then they will tell us how God responds or interpret the theology of what is going on to us.

Judges shows us this phenomenon. It isn't until the end of the book that the writer says, "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." In other words, "You see these actions, you see the results, this is why it is happening."

So just because the Bible records violent acts and sinful deeds — even among its heroes — it is not endorsing these actions.

Misery Is the Point

The chaos of the book is supposed to be that bad because the author wants us to know that our hearts are that bad. If he sugarcoated the events of the book we might walk away thinking "Life without God is pretty enduring." No! Misery is the point. The more we, like Israel, try to do life without God the worse it will become.

What was a Judge?

The book is named "Judges," which is the title given to the different people that God raised up to deliver and, in some cases, lead His people in their time of crisis (Judges 2:16). Aside from the title, there isn't much that they have in common. Some of them had miraculous and personal encounters with God, one of them had a prophetic gift, several came from scandalous backgrounds, most of them were military leaders, but aside from a calling to deliver God's people, there are few common characteristics.

Essentially, they would be used by God to deliver His people and then serve as some type of decision maker for the people during their lifetime.

How do they Point to Grace and Faith

Perhaps one of the most difficult realities to reconcile with the book of Judges is when you examine the actions and lives of many of these men and women, and then contrast them with what the author of Hebrews says about them in Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 is lovingly called the "Hall of Fame of Faith" in the Bible. In it the author is listing out the great deeds of the heroes of the Old Testament to encourage a persecuted church to stay true to their faith in Jesus.

Most of the names the author lists are people we believe should be there; Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, etc. But then he drops this line on us;

**And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson,
Jephthah... — Hebrews 11:32a (ESV)**

Given the accounts of these men, one could question whether or not they were truly champions of faith! They seem more like scoundrels!

And here is where we find the difference between how we think and how God works. We tend to measure our goodness and faithfulness by our failures, but God measures them by our faith in Him. The author goes on to say about these men;

... who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice ... escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

— Hebrews 11:33-34 (ESV)

These men did all of these things. While their lives for the most part were complete messes and ruled by chaos, at a few key points and in a few critical ways they saw God as he truly was, put their faith in Him, obeyed Him, and experienced victories that would immortalize them in our history of faith. It is another simple and powerful reminder that the grace of God knows no limits when we reach out to Him by faith.

Remember: "I Am Israel"

I titled this series *"I Got This" and other life disasters from the book of Judges* because we are no different than the characters we read about in this book. When we respond and obey in faith, we are capable of tremendous feats of bravery that bring hope and salvation to those we know and love. When we reject God's grace and will, and do things on our own, we are more than capable of the same levels of depravity and misery. Therefore, Judges serves as a stark warning and encouragement to us. A warning of the evil depths of our sinful hearts. Hearts that need to be given to Jesus to be redeemed. And encouragement that the best way to live life is in full-of-faith obedience to the will and ways of God! When we submit to his calling on our lives, we find peace in the chaos. And none of us, no matter how ruled by the chaos of our evil hearts we are, is outside the reach of His amazing grace.

Enjoy your study.

Weekly Studies

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. — Judges 2:16

Week 1

“What is the Worst that Can Happen?” Othniel and Ehud

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 1-3** and answer the questions below.

Key Scriptures

The following Scriptures best illustrate the “What is the Worst That Can Happen?” attitude of the people.

Judges 2:1-5, 11-19

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

Week 2

"I Don't Have the Anointing" Deborah and Barak

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 4-5** and answer the questions below.

Key Scriptures

The following Scriptures best illustrate the "I Don't Have the Anointing" attitude of the people.

Judges 4:8-9

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

Week 3

"I Got This" Gideon and Abimelech

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 6-9** and answer the questions below.

Key Scriptures

The following Scriptures best illustrate the "I Got This" attitude of the people.

Judges 8:22-23, 27, 31

Judges 9:6

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

Week 4

“God, if You Will, I Will” **Jephthah**

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 10-12** and answer the questions below.

Key Scriptures

The following Scriptures best illustrate the “God if You Will, I Will” attitude of the people.

Judges 11:30-31

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

Week 5

“God Told Me” Samson

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 13-16** and answer the questions below.

Key Scripture

The following Scriptures best illustrate the “God Told Me” attitude of the people.

Judges 16:20

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

Week 6

“Live Your Truth” Danites and Benjamin

Scripture Passages

This week spend time reading **Judges 17-21** and answer the questions below.

Key Scriptures

The following Scriptures best illustrate the “Live Your Truth” attitude of the people.

Judges 17:13
Judges 19:30
Judges 21:25

Judges 18:30-31
Judges 20:13

Study Questions

Over the next few days, read and re-read the passages above and then answer the following questions. If your Life Group is studying Judges together, be ready to share your answers in the group to gain a better understanding of the passages.

Who are the key characters in the passage?

What are the key events in the story?

What actions did God take?

What were actions the characters took that were filled with faith?

What were the actions the characters took that were foolish?

What is God teaching you?

LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Thank you for leading a Life Group discussion through the book of Judges. Judges is one of the more challenging books of the Bible to understand, but I am confident that with the study guide above, the message notes, and a few tips below, you will have a very meaningful and life-changing Life Group during these next few weeks.

Below are some recommendations on how you can be prepared to lead your Life Group discussions.

What You Should Do Before Your Life Groups Meets Each Week

#1 — Pray for your group and the members of your group.

I would recommend having a way to write down prayer requests for your Life Group each week. Then add these requests into your regular prayer routine. Study after study has shown that the single greatest impact on a successful Life Group experience is the prayer life of the leader.

#2 — Contact your group before each meeting.

Create a group in REALM and then use the REALM tool to send out reminders to your group before you meet. The reminders might include the passage of Scripture you will study or you can even use it to pass along the Sunday message notes to them ahead of time.

#3 — Read the Passages and Use the Study Guide Above.

Unlike other books of the Bible, there is little room for not being prepared with the book of Judges. Makes sure you spend time studying the passages above and doing the study guide. Also, each week, Pastor Jim will send you a copy of my message notes so that you can have an extra resource to use when preparing for your group.

#4 — Buy an Extra Reference Resource and Use It When You Feel Stuck.

Pastor Jim and I are recommending two simple commentaries to assist with this study. They are listed below. I recommend you purchase at least one of them. When you are going through your study guide and come across something that is confusing in the passage you can use the commentary to learn what is going on. The commentary will also be helpful if there are questions that arise in your Life Group.

Message of Judges (Bible Speaks Today), Michael Wilcox, InterVarsity Press, 1992
Judges & Ruth, Arthur E. Cundall, Leon Morris, Tyndall Press, 1968

Both can be found at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Sample Life Group Schedule

Arrive Time (5-10 minutes)

- Serve a snack, coffee, or drinks
- Have some light music playing

Gather and Conversation Starter (5-10 minutes)

- Gather your group together
- Have a light-hearted question to begin the discussion (what is your favorite childhood vacation, if you could be a dessert what would you be, etc.)

Discuss the Bible Passage and Sunday Message (45-50 minutes)

Ending Prayer (10-15 minutes)

- Go around your group and see if they have prayer requests
- Pick a few people to pray for each other

Close