

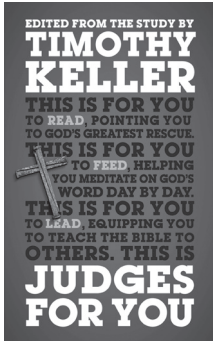
Timothy Keller

Judges

The Flawed and the Flawless



 **6-Session Bible Study**



Judges For You

These studies are adapted from *Judges For You*. If you are reading *Judges For You* alongside this Good Book Guide, here is how the studies in this booklet link to the chapters of *Judges For You*:

Study One > Ch 1-2

Study Four > Ch 7-8

Study Two > Ch 3-4

Study Five > Ch 9-11

Study Three > Ch 5-7

Study Six > Ch 12-13

Find out more about *Judges For You* at:
www.thegoodbook.com/for-you

Judges: The Flawed and the Flawless

A Good Book Guide

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Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God's word as "a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we've discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They're perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let's take a look at what is included in each session.

Talkabout: Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

Investigate: These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

Apply: These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

Explore More: These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

Getting Personal: These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

Pray: Here, you're invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you've seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven't got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you'll find a **Leader's Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God's light-giving 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 their 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 worshiping 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.

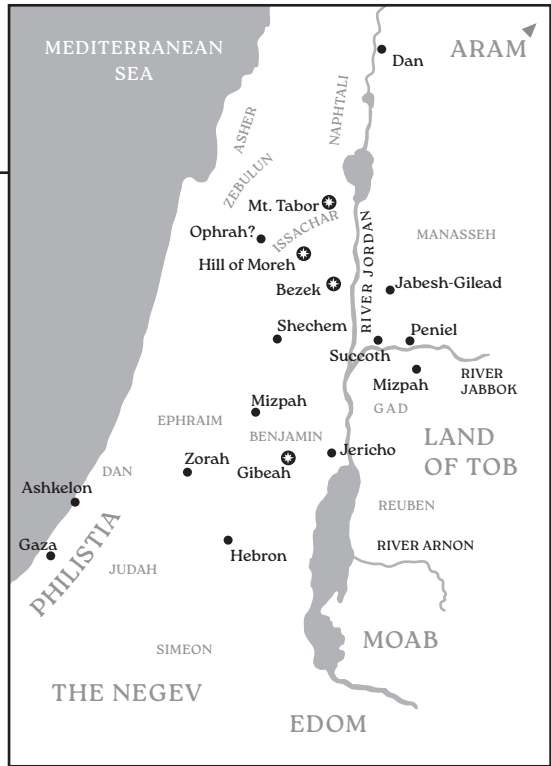
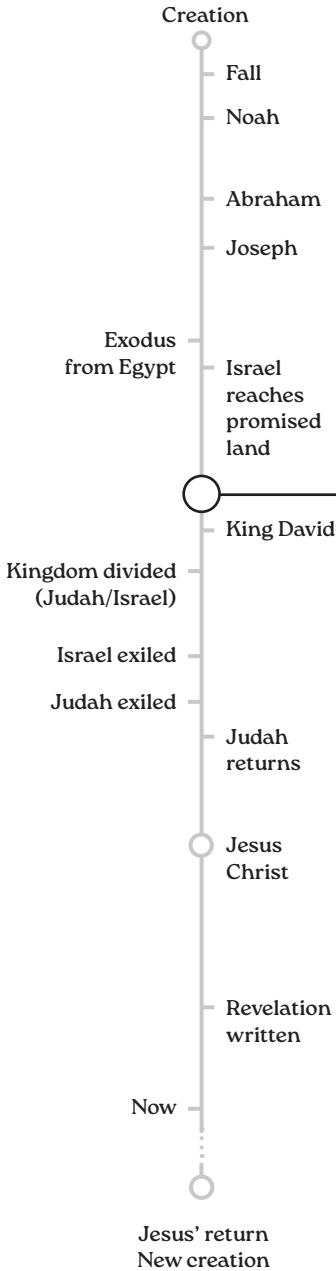
Judges is not an easy read. But as God’s people, living in the era we do, it is an essential one.

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.

NOTE: This study guide was put together using the 1984 edition of the New International Version of the Bible. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations come from that translation. Occasionally this is different to the 2011 NIV.



Judges c. 1375 - 1055 BC



⊕ Site of battle

1

A Shaky Start

Judges 1:1 – 3:6

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 1:1-9; 23:3-13**

DICTIONARY

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


Book of the Law (1:8): the laws God gave his people through Moses.

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

Invoke (23:7): appeal to.

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

- What must they *not* do?

 **Read Judges 1:1-36**

3. How well does Israel obey God's commands in the following verses?

- v 1-2

- v 3 (Note what God had said in verse 2.)

- 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) for why the tribes of Israel failed to settle in all the land God had promised them, pushing the Canaanites out.

5. What examples of wholehearted 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 | OPTIONAL

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 that they couldn't manage it.

Can you think of times in your life when 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

Judges 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 2:1-5**

DICTIONARY

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

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

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)?

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

Read Judges 2:6 – 3:6

DICTIONARY

Baals (2:11): false gods worshiped by the Canaanites.

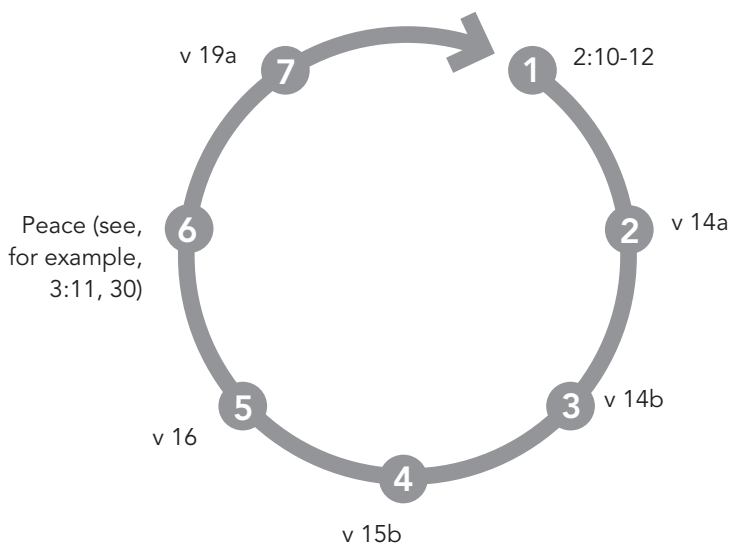
Forsook (v 12): abandoned, gave up.

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

Violated (v 20): broken.

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

10. What cycle in Israelite history does 2:10-21 summarize? Add words beside the verse numbers to complete each label in the diagram.



Explore More | OPTIONAL

Compare 2:7 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 6:4-9, 20-25**

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

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 | OPTIONAL

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 wholehearted 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.