

The Book of Judges: The Big Picture



This time in bible history is sometimes confusing. The “good guys” aren’t always good and the “bad guys” sometimes do the right thing. It was, in some ways, a wild time. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” ([Judges 21:25](#)).

The stories are often harsh and sometimes difficult for us to understand. The people of God would forget that it was God who kept them safe so God would allow enemies to attack. After realising how bad things became without God, the people would cry out for his salvation.

So God would then send a hero, a judge, to save the people. These heroes were not always upright, spiritual leaders. The heroes were simply the individuals whom God empowered to get the job done in protecting and gathering together His people.

The time of the judges can be depicted as a repeating cycle. Try this simple idea to illustrate the idea of a cycle that goes round and round.

How to Make a Review Wheel for Your Class

You will need a circular object. A hoola hoop was used in the example but a bicycle wheel, hubcap, pizza pan or a round piece of cardboard would work just as well.

Write each of the stages of the cycle on pieces of thick paper and tape them to the hoola hoop to form something like a wheel that can be rotated round and round.

Now it is time to review the cycle with the children in your class. Turn the wheel as you tell about each stage. (To remind you of what to say write the following notes on the back side of the papers.)

1. **SAFE WITH GOD:**
God protected his people as they obeyed him.

2. **FORGET:**

Then the people strayed from God and even started worshipping false Gods.

3. **HURT:**

Because they left God they also left his protection. When the enemies began to hurt them they had no protection from God. This was a terrible time.

4. **HELP!**

Finally, after so many bad things were happening, the people realised their mistake and cried out to God for help.

5. **JUDGE:**

Even though the people forgot God, God never forgot his people. When his people cried out for help he would send a hero (called a Judge) to save the day and turn them back to him. Sometimes these heroes were soldiers, sometimes they were very clever. At least once they were a bit wild and crazy (Samson). God knew what kind of judge they needed. And the cycle continues...The judge would bring the people back to a time of safety with God (repeat number one again). Sometimes many years would pass but then, the people began to forget again...(and this is where you continue to number two and so on).

[Printable Instructions for the Review Wheel](#)

Background Information

After the death of Joshua, the Hebrew nation had no central government. Each tribe had its own portion of Canaan and they governed themselves. Now the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle were moved around from place to place among the tribes.

Although Israel had conquered the Land of Canaan, there were still communities of Canaanites living in places throughout the land. Israelites began to adopt practices of these Canaanite communities and began to intermarry with the unbelievers. Over time they began to even worship Canaanite gods instead of the Lord ([Judges 3:5-7](#)).

The Lord had promised His protection for an obedient Israel. During this time, the Israelites were taught over and over that when they turn away from God—He stopped protecting them and allowed bad things to happen to them. There is a repeating cycle which runs throughout the book of Judges:

1. Safe with God: Israel follows God and prospers.
2. Forget: Israel begins to drift away from God more and more until the people begin to forget Him.
3. Hurt: The Lord allows the surrounding nations to conquer and persecute His people.
4. Help: The suffering people realize their mistake and ask God to save them.
5. Judge: The Lord sends a JUDGE to save the people.
6. Back to number one. The cycle repeats.

These heroic figures—judges—were blessed by God. Each judge did not “reign over” all of the people as a king would. Judges often only acted for the benefit of a few tribes, some were military leaders (Gideon and Jephthah). Others were spiritual examples (Deborah), while others (like Samson) were simply a symbol of God’s strength and power to the surrounding nations.

The last judge, Samuel, was promised to the Lord’s service by his mother even before he was conceived. He served under the priest, Eli, in the Tabernacle of the Lord. Samuel served in the transitional time between the judges and the time of the Kings (coming up next term). Samuel was a judge, a prophet, and a priest. He served God all of his life.

The story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, took place during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1).

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Judge

Scripture (Book of Judges)

Othniel

[3:7-11](#)

Ehud

[3:12-30](#)

Shamgar

[3:31](#)

[Deborah](#)

[chapters 4-5](#)

[Gideon](#)

[chapters 6-8](#)

Tola

[10:1-2](#)

Jair

[10:3-5](#)

Jephthah

[10:6-12:7](#)

Ibzan

[12:8-10](#)

Elon

[12:11-12](#)

Abdon

[12:13-15](#)

[Samson](#)

[chapters 13-16](#)

[Samuel](#)

[1 Samuel 1-25:1](#)

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