















That cycle of sin, rescue, worship, sin continues constantly. These rescues were temporary. Why? Because we find the nation's obedience only lasted as long as that particular judge they had. Out of the 14 judges mentioned, it's interesting to note that in their obedience, the major judges that stand out are the famous stories of Deborah and Gideon and Samson. We don't really pay as much attention to the other ones. I encourage you to even take a little further study yourself into their lives. And we'll talk a little bit more about them as we move on.

Now, in chapters 17 through 31, a big chunk there, we see Israel slumping into a horrid state of moral demise and even ruin. Predominantly, we see in the tribes of Dan and Benjamin how far man has really turned from God, the God of Abraham, the God of their forefathers. The Dan tribe, in fact, had almost completely given into the worship of idols made by a man named Micah, even to the point that they practically defend worshipping idols. Later, the entire tribe of Benjamin is wiped out down to only 600 men in a violent and vicious civil war. It's here that we read the passage of truth, Judges 21:25. We referenced that earlier. "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Israel continues to conquer Canaan after the death of Joshua, but fails to completely drive out the Canaanites as God commands. And that's what creates a lot of these aspects of fighting and in-fighting and wars that took place. Those that remained behind turned Israel toward the worship of their idols, their gods. Not the God, but their gods. Some of them like Baal and Astaroth, which we mentioned before, that's what broke Israel's covenant. Not to mention how it affected God's feelings of seeing his people turn from him after all he'd done for them. But as we stated before, God steps back and the Israelites unfortunately don't learn from their mistake but continue in their path.

Now, the last five chapters of Judges actually take place during one of these times, and they're not pretty. Israel becomes a barbaric nation led by whomever was the biggest and the baddest bully on the block. There's rape. There's murder. There's genocide. There's mass kidnappings aplenty in these chapters. Once God allows Israel to be conquered by oppressors, that time, and then only, is when they find that they need him. So then they turned from their idols and go to him. And what does he do? He sends warriors. He sends champions that were called the judges. Each time God sent a judge, he led that judge into battle for Israel to conquer their enemies. And that's where we see some spectacular power of God in the way that he allowed these minor nations, so to speak, which is what Israel had become, conquer the greater nations that had them in bondage, and in some pretty graphic ways. They restore peace. They restore prosperity. But like clockwork, they go back to it again.

Deborah is the only female judge. She was a prophetess who, along with General Barak, defeats a Canaanite king and his general Sisera with a little help from Jael, a woman, and her handy-dandy hammer. The general goes in there after the defeat looks completed for Sisera and his army. And as Jael sees Sisera take a nap or helps him go to sleep, she takes a tent spike and a hammer and takes care of Sisera in a pretty graphically destructive way. We know it's interesting, but Deborah and Barak are so happy about this that they sing a victory song that lasts a whole chapter. Then they die and the people fall to pieces again.



Then we see Gideon, again, who is oftentimes forgotten. We've talked about Samson. We've talked about Deborah. Now we talk about Gideon. And he rallies Israel. And remember, the unlikely judge, Gideon is hiding behind a winepress, taking a few seeds of grain, trying to make some meal out of it so he could have a loaf of bread to eat. And God calls him, and Gideon over and over again has to ask for the affirmation of God. And how does God do the victory? Once again, he shows the Israelites through the victory that it's not Israel that conquers. It's God that conquers. He takes a small remnant that he shaves down and he asks them just to have three instruments that none of us would choose as weapons of warfare: a pot, a trumpet, and a flame or a torch. He puts them around the invading army, and at the sign given, the pot over the torch, the horn in the hand, they break the pot. It appears as if an army is around them, and the trumpets sound, and the enemy literally is so scared and so discombobulated that they start to kill each other. The hand of God is always powerful.

I just want to mention, as we wrap, up a few things that I find are interesting as we think of the end part of this. And just some of the stories for you to remember and, again, to examine on your own. We see not just the armies that are defeated, but I want to encourage you to look at the numbers that are conquered. We talk about 5000, 10,000, 100,000, which should remind us once again that God is never overwhelmed by the might of man. The might of man never can overcome God. Why? Because God is the ultimate creator. God is the ultimate judge. And that's always good for us to remember as we consider all that God does for us and even to us, that he is a good, kind judge, a judge that wants what's best for us, a judge that is considerate and thoughtful but is not unwilling to mete out justice when necessary.

Now, the Israelites over and over again didn't get that, but you and I can. Obey God and receive his blessings. Disobey God and receive his justice. Don't be shocked by it. Know it's coming when you choose or I choose to be disobedient. There's a lot of great lessons that we can learn from the Book of Judges. And I hope that even as you explore on your own or individually and unwrap each of the 14 judges and find out the part they played, as we mentioned, you'll not only see a flawed man, but you'll see an amazing God to be able to take humanity and have them do the impossible for the redemption of his people.