

Living Life Through Your Own Eyes

Introduction to Judges

Introduction: Living Life Through Your Own Eyes

- Sometimes, doing the things the way we want to do them, even when others have advised us not to do it, can be very dangerous. Failing to listen to others, who often have a clearer vision of our life than we do, can lead to hard times. We know this as parents; and we know this from our childhood. Allow me to share from both perspectives.
- About a month before I turned two years old, I broke my leg. This is the story I have been told over the years. My sister and I were jumping out of a lazy boy chair. My mother told us to stop because someone would get hurt. My sister stopped; I didn't. I had to have that one last jump. And do you know what happened? My sister thought it would be funny to open up the chair as I was jumping out of it. And sure enough, I broke my leg. I blame her. My mom blames my disobedience for the broken leg.
- Now fast-forward about 30 years and I have my own son who is about 3 years old. We tell him over and over again that he shouldn't jump on our bed because he was going to get hurt. Guess what happens? He needs just one more jump, which leads to his falling off of the bed and slices his eyebrow open on the end table (just missing his eye). If you look closely even to this day, he has a scar over his eye.

Not listening to others and always doing things our way can lead to difficult times in life. And if we know this, why do we always think that our way is best? Why do we always think that doing the things we want to do is the best way? Why are we so slow to listen and heed the advice of those responsible for us? Maybe its because there is something so alive in us that wants to live our life the way we want to live it. There's an independence gene somewhere in our chromosomes that moves us to live life our way. We want to live our life through our own eyes, according to our ways. In many ways, when we are honest with ourselves, there is something in us that likes when Frank Sinatra sings this very self-concerning song . . .


Illustration: Frank Sinatra, My Way

- And now, the end is near; And so I face the final curtain.
My friend, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and every highway;
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.

- Regrets, I've had a few; But then again, too few to mention. I did what I had to do, and saw it through without exemption. I planned each charted course; Each careful step along the byway, And more, much more than this, I did it my way.
- Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew; When I bit off more than I could chew. But through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out. I faced it all and I stood tall; And did it my way.
- I've loved, I've laughed and cried. I've had my fill; my share of losing. And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing. To think I did all that; And may I say - not in a shy way, "Oh no, oh no not me, I did it my way".
- For what is a man, what has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. To say the things he truly feels; And not the words of one who kneels. The record shows I took the blows; And did it my way! Yes, it was my way.

This morning, we are beginning a study on the book of Judges. One of the common themes we are going to see throughout this book is that it tells the story of people who did it their way. It tells the story of people who live their life through their own eyes. They live their life the way they want to live it and it wreaks havoc on their lives and their nation. This book is actually summarized by its last verse.

 *Judges 21:25 → "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*

In this way, the book of Judges is a very modern book. It tells the story of people not wanting to be ruled by anyone, particularly God, and they want to do what's right in their own eyes. And time and time again, we are going to see that their way is not the right way. Their way is not best. This book adequately describes to us one truth that we must learn and become convinced of every day of our life: *Following God's Ways is Always the Best Option!*

Do you believe that? I'm not saying in theory. I hope in theory we all believe it. I hope when everything is good and we sit here on a Sunday morning, we say that we believe that God knows better than I do on how life should be lived. But when we are faced with decisions throughout our week, do we live in the reality that God's ways to live life are better than what we think? This is a constant struggle for me and I'm going to guess for you as well.

Well, my goal this morning is to summarize the book of Judges so that we have a view of the forest before diving into looking at each of the trees. It looks like this series is going to take us most of the fall and part of the new year to get through, but I pray we are all going to enjoy this study. It's interesting. Not many churches preach through this book, and I wonder if it's because they are scared of it. It truly is a remarkable book; an interesting book filled with colorful people and stories that range from humorous to extremely graphic in nature. In fact, if Hollywood decided to make a movie on this book, it would probably not be a movie suitable for children.

In this book, we find a couple of the great Bible stories often told in Sunday School; that of Gideon and Sampson. And yet there is so much more. There is a guy by the name of Ehud who would make Jack Baur look tame. There is a woman named Deborah who worked with Barak to lead the nation out of captivity and then wrote a song about it. We see how families fall apart because of greed and power. And we see so much more. I can't imagine this book not being interesting to you. I doubt anyone falls asleep reading this book. It's not Leviticus (which isn't as boring as everyone makes it out to be). It is a character study about people loving God and other things and mighty warriors raised up to save the nation of Israel. It's really colorful!

And yet, when we see these colorful people throughout this book, we face a danger. There is the temptation to become so consumed with their interesting lives and miss the main point of the book. This book is not about the sin the people commit; and it's not about the Judges raised up to save Israel. It's ultimately a book about God. The theme of this book is simple: **GOD'S PEOPLE ARE UNFAITHFUL IN THE FACE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.**

What we find in this book is that even the judges raised up by God are unfaithful people. They do some pretty horrific things in this book. But their story is not the main story. They are not the leading role in this book. They are supporting actors. The lead role is about a God that stays and remains faithful to His people even when they continually and repeatedly stray from Him, over and over again. I'll come back to this point in a few minutes, but it reminds me of Paul's incredible words of encouragement found in . . .

📖 *2 Timothy 2:13 → "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."*

This has to be one of the most encouraging verses in the Bible. He is faithful, even when His people are unfaithful. While this is a book that talks a lot about horrific sins and judgment, I think what we are going to take away from this week after week is the grace of our God. Like a good eclipse, His faithfulness blocks out the unfaithfulness of His people so that we are left speechless at His incredible love. Tim Keller has said . . .

“The Bible (unlike the books on which other religions are based) is not about following moral examples. It is about a God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through us despite our constant resistance to his purposes. Ultimately, there is only one hero in this book, and he’s divine.”¹

I suppose this is as good of time as any to give some of the basic details of the book. There is nothing in this book that tells us who the author is. We really don’t know. But tradition attributes this book to being written by Samuel, who appears at the end of the book. Four times in this book, the author says, *“In those days, Israel had no king.”* Because of this, most people assume that the author writes at a time when they did have a king. That makes perfect sense.

In addition, in Judges 1:21, the author says that *“the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.”* But we know that in 2 Samuel 5 that one of the first acts after being anointed King of Israel, David removes the Jebusites from Jerusalem. This tells us that the book of Judges is written at some point when there is a king in Israel, but before David is King. And so, Samuel is a good choice as the author of Judges during the reign of King Saul.

This book tells the story of Israel’s history between the conquest of their land as told in Joshua (and the death of Joshua) and the beginning of their nation with a king as told about in 1 Samuel. Depending on how you date the activity in the book of Judges, it tells the history of about 250–400 years. Think about that for a minute. Let’s just imagine it is telling the history of Israel for about 300 years. This past July 4th was the 239th anniversary of our nation. The book of Judges tells a part of history of Israel, which is longer than our nation, has been around.

And this history it tells us is really depressing. It describes some of the darkest years of Israel’s history, a cycle of sin that happens over and

¹ Keller, Timothy. *Judges for You*. (USA, Good Book Company, 2013), 10.

² Phillips, W. Gary. *Judges, Ruth*. Holman OT Commentary. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2004), 2.

over, progressively getting worse. We are going to refer to this as the Judges Cycle, and it is generally organized around Five Steps . . .

CYCLE STEP 1: SIN & IDOLATRY

Let me just show you a few of the instances where we are told the people sin in idolatry. This is how the cycle begins for the people of Israel as told in the book of Judges.

📖 *Judges 2:11 → “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.”*

📖 *Judges 3:7 → “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.”*

📖 *Judges 3:12 → “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”*

📖 *Judges 4:1 → “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.”*

You get the point. The Judges Cycle always begins with the people of Israel abandoning God. They live in a time of spiritual pluralism where there are many gods served by the people of the lands. They live in a mixed land with those who love God and those who despise Him. And so they faced daily decisions if they were going to honor Him or follow the ways of the land and worship the gods of the land. It is something they are warned about at the very end of Joshua’s life as they enter the land.

📖 *Joshua 24:14–24 [open & read]*

And then we are told of Joshua’s death in Judges 2 right before their first cycle of unfaithfulness. We see the sins of the culture becoming the sins of God’s people just one generation after this promise. It’s amazing how quickly a generation can decline in their morality, but it shouldn’t be to us. In his commentary on Judges, Gary Phillips quotes historian James Hitchcock on the moral decline of a culture.

He says that it begins with someone speaking unthinkable thoughts. These thoughts are talked about. Things that at the time wouldn’t have even been thought about are now mentioned as possibilities. And the

rationale for listening is that we should be open to hear all points of view on a particular subject. It then moves to respected people in the culture taking those thoughts seriously. The idea is that some people want to avoid being too rigid in their thinking. This then leads to some respected people publicly accepting the new ideas. They may not agree, but they do preach the message that everyone should have a right to do whatever they want to do. And then the last step is for respected people to publicly acknowledge that they have adopted these ideas as their own. It's now not *"they have a right to do what they want"*, but *"we have a right to whatever we want and you shouldn't be so intolerant."*

Phillips goes on to make the statement . . .

*"Thus, within an amazingly brief period, the unthinkable becomes the new orthodoxy, and those who disagree are rigid, eccentric, and perhaps even dangerous to society."*²

If this is what describes the moral decline in this Cycle Step 1 of sin and idolatry in the book of Judges, do you think it's a fairly modern book? Do you think its applicable to what's going on today in our society? My guess is that those who are over 50; maybe over 60 sitting in here today would never have thought we would live in a country that not just accepts, but promotes same-sex marriage. Those things that seem impossible can and do become the norm when people do what's right in their own eyes. I'd encourage you to listen to our study on Romans 1 when we made the point that *we should never underestimate where the rejection of God's truth will lead us.*

Their sin and idolatry then leads to . . .

CYCLE STEP 2: SLAVERY

At some point, God has enough and He brings nations in to capture His people & make them slaves. He removes the good life from them. Listen to how it is described in the book . . .

📖 *Judges 3:8 → "Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years."*

² Phillips, W. Gary. *Judges, Ruth*. Holman OT Commentary. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2004), 2.

📖 *Judges 4:2 → “And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan . . .”*

📖 *Judges 6:1 → “. . . and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years.”*

We could go on and on, but you get the point. There are two points here that are worth pointing out. [*First, God is sovereign over the slavery of His people.*](#) We are never told that a nation comes in and God allows them to capture Israel. No. He orchestrates it. He raises up these foreign, ungodly nations to attack His people to take them captive. He gives them into slavery. He does it; very actively.

It teaches us that we must never forget that there is always something going on behind the scenes that we cannot see. Sometimes, God is passive in it, like in the story of Job where Satan comes wanting to test one of God’s people and God allows it. And then there are other times where we are told that God does in fact actively bring about trials in our life to bring about a desired result in His people. Let’s not forget what the writer of Hebrews tells us, “*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives*” (12:5–6).

Some people never want to think that God is active in bringing about discipline in the lives of His people and so they always interpret everything according to Job’s illustration. That’s fine. But you can’t miss the point that in the book of Judges, God actively brings about the slavery of His people. He wants to get their attention.

[*Second, their slavery is an act of grace by God.*](#) This is another thought that might take us out of our comfort zone a bit. Their slavery is God’s grace in that moment to bring about their repentance. You see, they always tend to slip into idolatry and sin when things are good. And so He removes from them the good life they have so they might get a perspective of what is really important.

This is a huge issue that we do not talk about much, but whatever you are going through; whatever trial we may be experiencing; whatever persecution we may find . . . they are all God’s grace to draw us closer to Him or keep us close to Him. They are all acts of God’s grace meant to help us see that He is the greatest treasure. Sometimes, the greatest act of grace we can give to our child is something that is going to hurt.

We rip the Band-Aid right off because we know it is better in the long run, but they don't see that in the middle of it. It's the same way with God and our lives. Throughout this study, we are going to see God's grace over and over again in the middle of the pain of slavery of the people of Israel. I hope it helps us gain a good perspective. And it usually brings about a desired result in the book of Judges . . .

CYCLE STEP 3: CRY OUT TO THE LORD

The slaveries and oppression by these countries wake the people up to the reality that they have forgotten their Lord. And so they cry out to Him for help. But let's not miss the reality that it often does not happen right away. This is one of the shockers of the book of Judges, to me at least. For instance, in the first cycle, we are told they serve the king of Mesopotamia for eight years before they cry out to the Lord for help.

Eight years. Does it really take them that long to wake up? We are then told the second cycle, they served the king of Moab for 18 years. That's incredible. The third main cycle is for 20 years. The last cycle is at the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. It takes 40 years to wake up and cry out to the Lord. As I read this, I just can't imagine a nation so blind to their own history that it takes them this long to cry out to their God. But this is what we have and eventually, the slavery wakes them up to seek the Lord. This leads to God's way of dealing with their slavery . . .

CYCLE STEP 4: GOD RAISES UP A JUDGE

The judges are significant leaders that are usually seen in a military sense, but not always. We should resist thinking of them as superhero's because they are not rescuing innocent people; they are rescuing people who have come to their senses and are in process of repentance. Plus, as we read the book of Judges, we see that the storylines move from noble judges (at the beginning of the book) to questionable judges (at the end of the book). They follow the same spiral downward as the people of Israel.

God uses these judges as deliverers for His people. But they are never intended to be spiritual leaders. They are for the most part, acting in faith in God, but their continued failures remind us of the danger of putting too much trust in a leader. We must always be careful to not put any leader where they were never designed to be . . . and that is in the place as the Savior. God does work through imperfect people, and we should see that throughout this book. But every time we see these

Judges fail, it makes us long for the perfect Judge to come. It is impossible to read and study this book without thinking of the future deliverer who comes to save His people. His name is Jesus Christ. This book reminds us all that we need a True Savior, to which every human deliverer points through their continual failures. Let's not miss this point as we study this book. This then leads to . . .

CYCLE STEP 5: ISRAEL IS DELIVERED AND SERVES THE LORD

God hears their crying and rescues them back to Himself so they can serve Him. He wins their love. After this, we are told the people have rest for many years. This is God winning His people back. I want all of us to note that it is at some point during these days of rest that they slowly and subtly slip back into their ways of idolatry and then the Judges Cycle starts all over again. We all want the good life. We want rest. We want things to go well. But let's not miss the reality that it is often during these times when things are going well, that we slowly move away from the things of God.

This is the book of Judges that I'm very excited to jump in next week and walk through with you over the next several months. Can I make an honest plea to you? Three things:

- (1) Will you make it a priority to be here on Sunday mornings as we walk through this book?
- (2) You have the schedule in our Upcoming Sermon Schedules, will you read the text of what we will be preaching a few days before the sermon? It will help you.
- (3) Will you begin a dialogue with me before and after the sermon about what you are studying and what you are learning from the study, as well as any questions that are not answered for you.

I pray God helps us see ourselves in light of His faithfulness through this book. All for His glory and our good.