

Judges

Grace in Pain

Judges is a sequel to the courageous account of Joshua as the Israelites move into the land of Canaan. Now the task in front of them is to form a new nation looking to God as their King. Instead of looking to Him, however, the people look to the approval and help of others.

What follows is 400 years of a cycle of moving away from God, experiencing pain and returning to God. To call people back to Himself, God raises up judges. These judges are political and spiritual leaders who spiritually call people back to God and who politically lead the nation to victory and prosperity. We see the grace of God as He uses broken and flawed people to accomplish His plans. Despite their deep flaws, many of these people are described in Hebrews 11 as men and women of faith.

Several themes that recur throughout the book of Judges:

- a. God is always in charge even when it does not look like it.
- b. Spiritual complacency is detrimental to our lives.
- c. Judges urges us toward continual spiritual renewal.
- d. No matter how hard we try to fix things, we need a savior.

What we see throughout the whole book is that no matter what our circumstances and no matter who we are, God's grace prevails. He continually offers grace to people, even when they don't deserve it, seek it or appreciate it.

Week 1

Judges 1-2 (OVERVIEW)

This week is an overview of the whole book and series. The book of Judges consists of a repeated cycle in this period of Israel's history: The people become complacent and turn their focus away from God. Eventually, trouble and difficulty come their way, usually from oppressive enemies. They call out to God for help, and God raises up a Judge who leads them to political victory and spiritual fullness. The people return to God and enjoy His favor until they become complacent and the cycle repeats itself. We all bow down to something or someone. Our choice is whether we bow to a God who saves or a god who enslaves us. Judges reminds us that small areas of disbelief can have big consequences.

Week 2

Judges 3 Othniel: Grace of the reward of a long obedience in God's direction

Desperate times require a desperate cry to God. After a season of success moving into the Land of Canaan, Israel was in desperate straights and they cried out to God. Othniel was a man known for his faithfulness. He had a long history of serving God. When trouble came, Othniel was the man who led Israel because he was open to the leading of the Spirit in his life. His success was in surrendering to the power of the Spirit in his life. It was not by might or power, but by the Spirit of God that he was able to lead people. Othniel reminds us that we need more than talent, courage and strength. No matter how good we try to be or how proficient we are, we can do nothing without the Lord's strength and Holy Spirit in us.

Week 3

Judges 3 Ehud: Grace of our weaknesses becoming our strength.

Scriptures often speak of an upside-down world. God uses the weak to confound the wise. The one who is last will in the end be first. Here in Judges, God uses Ehud's weakness to accomplish His plan. Ehud had lost the use of his one hand living in a society that disdained disabilities, he would have been greatly marginalized. But when Israel cried out for relief from a neighboring nation, God used Ehud and his weakness to provide safety and security for His people. In using Ehud to do that, the scriptures remind us that our weaknesses become God's best asset when surrendered to His power. One day we will tell others how our own suffering turned to joy through the grace of God.

Week 4

Judges 4-5 Deborah: Grace in the midst of the unlikely

When we think of the great heroes of the faith, the names that often come up are male. In a male-dominated world, Deborah is an unlikely leader but stands a role model of grace and inspiration in leading God's people politically and spiritually. When no one else is willing to stand in the gap, Deborah does and God uses her in a powerful way. Sitting on the sidelines robs us of a great reward and makes us susceptible to a curse. Deborah encourages us to seize the opportunities God sets before us knowing that He uses the unlikely to accomplish His tasks.

Week 5

Judges 7-8 Gideon: Grace of courage in the midst of doubt

When we first meet Gideon, he is the most unlikely candidate for a heroic judge. Considering himself the least of the least, he is hiding from all people. As Paul writes though, it is when we

are weak that He is strong. Jesus is the one who brings courage. God calls Gideon to a task and gives him the courage to accomplish it. Gideon teaches us that courage is not the absence of fear, but the pursuit of God in the midst of difficult situations. Courage started for Gideon at home where he had to confront the idols of his family. Courage is not something we muster up in our own strength, but a result of growing and increasing trust in God.

Week 6

Judges 9 Abimelech: Grace in the midst of evil

Gideon starts his leadership well, but he, too, has feet of clay and the nation declines at the end of his life. He is succeeded by his son Abimelech who is almost an anti-judge. His life story is hard to read because it is filled with violence and gore. He declares himself king, steals money from the people and kills 69 of his 70 brothers! Jotham, the only surviving brother, warns him that judgment will come. Abimelech continues to live a violent life, taking the lives of many people until he himself is injured and eventually begs his servant to kill him. His story reminds us that God's judgement is always sure even when it comes slowly. When God seems absent in the midst of evil, He is only preparing to do a work. Evil will not go unpunished. That is the promise of Jesus, the perfect savior, who will bring all things to justice under His feet.

Week 7

Judges 10-11 Jephthah: Grace of a redeemed past

We meet Jephthah one of the darkest times of Israel's history. Once again the Israelites are experiencing difficulty but instead of crying out to God, they cry out to the false gods around them. Idolatry leads us to spiritual slavery, but we learn here that spiritual slavery can lead us back to greater idolatry. God raises up Jephthah who is far more influenced by the culture than he imagined. He makes some terrible mistakes as our idolatry influences us more than we can know. Even in the midst of the darkest of situations, God's grace and mercy prevail. We need a savior who brings life even in the midst of the darkest of situations.

Week 8

Judges 13-14 Samson: Grace of grace in the midst of failure

For the seventh time, we see the same cycle repeating itself. Because of the neglect of God, difficulty falls upon the people. As they cry out to God, He brings salvation and relief to them. This time that “savior” is Samson who is a man of great outward strength and renown. He is also a man of faith having taken a Nazarite vow to always honor God. Like all the other judges, he is flawed. He falls prey to the temptation of women, seduction, and manipulation. Like us, his greatest enemy was himself. Eventually, his own choices almost defeat him. It is never too late though, to cry out to God and in one final moment of God’s grace in his life, Samson is able to deliver his people.

Judges reminds us of the folly of looking to other people to save us. Their flaws will always let us down. But there is a greater savior, Jesus, who perfectly meets us in our difficulty bringing peace and hope to us.