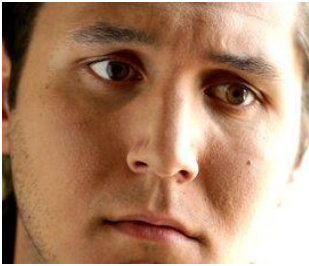


# UNLIKELY HEROES

## Judges: How God Uses Ordinary People

**H**ave you ever admired other people who seem to accomplish great things while you feel that you could never do anything extraordinary? If so, you are not alone. The book of Judges is about how God uses ordinary people to accomplish his purposes. What would you do if God called you to do something beyond your abilities?



### Quick Look at the Period

- Creation
- Flood (Noahic Covenant)
- Patriarchal Period (Abrahamic Covenant)
- Sojourn in Egypt
- Wilderness Period (Mosaic Covenant)
- Conquest of the Land
- Period of the Judges (Unlikely Heroes)
- United Monarchy (Davidic Covenant)
- Divided Kingdom Period
- Exile in Babylon
- Restoration

### Israel's Apostasy

Just before entering the land of Canaan, Moses reminded Israel of the conditions of the covenant. Specifically, he warned Israel of the danger of:

- Forgetting the Lord (Deut. 6:12)
- Following other gods (Deut. 6:14)
- Testing the Lord (Deut. 6:16)
- Not keeping God's commands (Deut. 6:16)
- Not thrusting out all enemies (Deut. 6:19)
- Forgetting God's past protection (Deut. 6:20-24)
- Forgetting the conditions of the Covenant (Deut. 6:25).

What ultimately happened to the Israelites? The book

of Judges recounts their initial steps to apostasy. Instead of totally destroying and driving out the Canaanites, they began to enslave them. The result of their disobedience is seen in one of the most tragic passages of scripture: "They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them, but they mingled with the nations [the unbelieving heathen world] and they learned their practices and served their idols which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to devils" (Psalms 106:34-37; Judges 1:28).

The Israelites chose for the site of their sacrificial rituals, a place called the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. This valley, which still goes by that name today, is just outside of Jerusalem. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom translates into Greek as "Gehenna" - which also the word for hell. It is significant to note that Jesus himself introduced and used this word--one that was fully recognized by the common people of His day as the name of a valley where child sacrifice took place. He used this word to describe the eternal habitation of Satan himself.

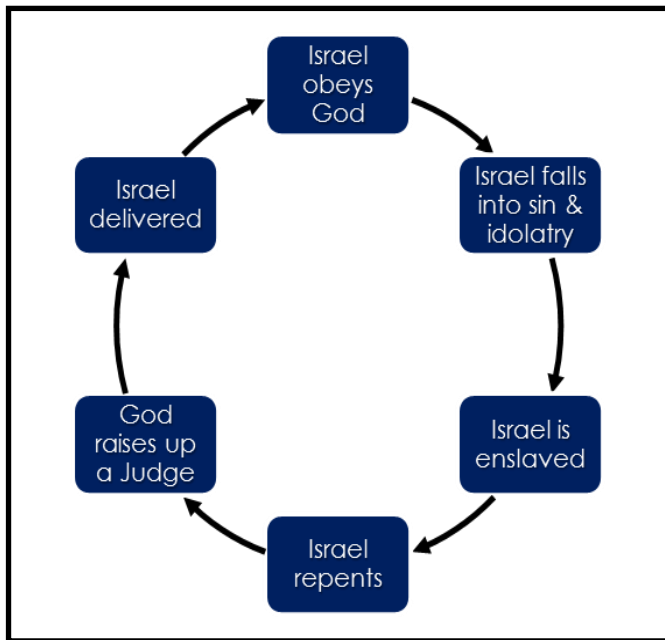
### The Next Generation

After the death of Joshua, the next generation of Israel abandoned their loyalty to Yahweh and the covenant, choosing instead to take up the practices of their surrounding pagan peoples, doing evil in the sight of Yahweh and serving the Baals--heathen gods (Judges 2:8-11).

Because of their disobedience, God sold them into slavery as he promised he would do in his covenant at Sinai (Deut. 28:25). This led to ruin, repentance, and finally, restoration and rest—at least for a period of time.

### Israel's Judges

This vicious cycle was experienced six times over a period of about 356 years. When Israel repented God would raise up a "judge," a military hero, to free them from their oppressors.



- Cycle 1: Othniel (Judges 3:7-11). Othniel was probably the nephew of Caleb, and one of four judges in Bible where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon them." Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson were the others.
- Cycle 2: Ehud and Shamgar (Judges 3:12-30). Ehud was left-handed and hid short sword on his right side to enable him to assassinate the evil Eglon, king of Moab, Israel's oppressor. Normally, one looked on the left side of a person to see if he was carrying a sword. Shamgar (3:31) used an ox goad (long stick with pointed end) as a weapon to kill 600 Philistines.
- Cycle 3: Deborah and Barak (Judges 4:1—5:31). Deborah was the only female judge and an actual Judge. She and Barak (military General) devised a plan to defeat the superior army of the Canaanites. Deborah's victory poem is one of the most beautiful poems in the Bible.
- Cycle 4: Primarily Gideon but including Tola, and Jair (Judges 6:1—8:32). Gideon is known for testing God with a fleece (Judges 6:36-40) and devising a plan to make Israel's army of 300 men, appear to be greater than the Midianite army (Judges 7:15-22). But God reduced Israel's army strength to show the true source of their power—Yahweh (Judges 7:2; cf. Deut. 8:17, Eph. 2:8-9).
- Cycle 5: Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (Judges 11:29-40; 12:8-15). Israel's oppressors were the Philistines, and Ammonites, nomadic descendants of Lot. The period of this oppression

lasted for 18 years. "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah" (Judges 11:29). Jephthah's mistake was making a foolish vow to God (Judges 11: 30-40). Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon were also raised up as judges during this cycle (Judges 12:8-15).

- Cycle 6: Samson (Judges 13:1—21:25). Samson lived during a period under the rule of the Philistines. More than 1/3 of the book of Judges is devoted to Samson who was endowed with the Spirit of Yahweh--the spirit of personal patriotism, and the spirit of vengeance upon a foe of 40 years standing (Judges 13:1,25; 14:6:19; 15:14).

He was passionate, and therefore weak. The animal of his nature was never curbed, but rather ran unchained and free. He was given to sudden fury. Samson was a wild, self-willed man. Passion ruled him. He could not resist the flatteries of women. In short, he was an overgrown schoolboy, without self-control.

Accordingly, he brought no permanent deliverance for Israel and lacked the spirit of cooperation. He



undertook a task far too great for even a giant single-handed. Yet, it must be recognized that Samson paved the way for Saul and David. He began the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines and must, therefore,

be judged according to his times. A period of peace lasted for 20 years following Samson's death.

## Bibliography

- Jensen, I. L. (1978). *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Life Application Bible. (1988, 1989, 1990, 1991). *Life Application Bible: New International Version*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House.
- Logos Bible Software 5.2b SR-8 (5.2.2.1595) . (2000-2014).
- Ortberg, J. (2010). *Teaching the Heart of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Rose Publishing. (2000). *Cycle of Disobedience in the Book of Judges*. Retrieved from [www.Rose-publishing.com](http://www.Rose-publishing.com)
- Youngblood, R. F. (1986, 1995). *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.