

## Reading Judges

### The Big Picture

#### **1-3:6 Israel fails to take the entire land of Canaan**

- 1 Partial conquest of Canaan
- 2-3:6 Narrator's Introduction to the book

#### **3-16 Israel's "judges" (= rulers)**

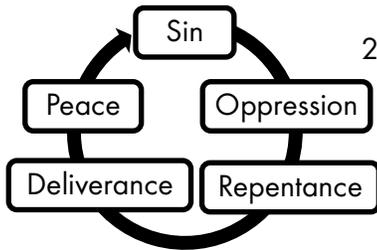
- 3 Othniel > Ehud > Shamgar
- 4-5 Deborah and Barak
- 6-9 Gideon & Sons
- 10-12 Tola > Jair > Jephthah
- 13-16 Samson

#### **17-21 Conclusion: Israel's apostasy in the land**

- 17-18 Israel's religious apostasy (idols and other gods)
- 19-21 Israel's social/moral apostasy (rape, murder, civil war)

### Key Themes in Judges

1. Israel fails to complete the conquest of the land (ch.1) > the Canaanites that remain become a temptation to Israel (ch.2).



2. Judges illustrates the vicious cycle of apostasy, oppression, deliverance.

- Yahweh repeatedly raises up "judges" (rulers who were military and judicial leaders) to deliver the people.
- 2:6-23 is the author's summary of the entire book
- This pattern is repeated six times by Israel (remind you of anyone you know?!)

3. The period of the judges (chs. 3-16) represents a downward spiral into apostasy and injustice
  - The judges go from good (Deborah, Gideon) to bad (Abimelech, Jephthah) to worse (Samson, a tragic figure who lives like a Canaanite).
  - Each judge is more ambiguous and morally compromised than the previous.
4. The book ends with a horrifying conclusion:
  - Israel has abandoned Yahweh to follow other gods, served by unauthorized priests (chs. 17-18).
  - Which leads to rape, gross murder, civil war, and the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin (chs. 19-21, these stories are not for the faint of heart).
5. The author highlights Israel's need for a king to bring justice and lead people back to Yahweh; a perfect transition into Samuel-Kings.

**17:6** *In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.*

**18:1** *In those days there was no king in Israel...*

**19:1** *In those days, when there was no king in Israel...*

**21:25** *In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.*

**\*\*NOTE:** Judges can be a depressing read. Consider it a long essay on how sin and selfishness ruin human beings, communities and entire nations. But also pay attention to God's faithfulness despite Israel's horrible sin and failure. There are many lessons for us here.

