

Judges for Airdrie Baptist Church

The Big Picture of Judges

The context anchor of Judges is the death of Joshua. Before he died, Joshua led the people in a pledge to set aside all other gods and remain faithful to the One True God. If they broke that pledge, then God would make it hard for them.

Judges follows their story for four hundred years after that oath.

The Book of Judges can be seen to fall into three primary movements.

At first, the book deals with the failure to fully conquer and cleanse Canaan. This “not quite finished” theme recurs often in the latter chapters of Joshua, and Judges picks up that the same rhythm in its opening section.

With the allowance for Canaanite and Midianite enclaves to persist, Israel finds herself unable to resist the allure of their foreign and detestable gods.

In the middle section, which is by far the longest, we see a consistent sequence repeated over and over:

- Israel does evil by chasing other gods. God in turn gives them over to oppression (as He had promised).
- When the people cry out for help, God raises up a judge to defeat the enemy and restore God’s rule. These stories are episodic and geographically scattered.
- There is a general trend from south to north (Judah to Dan) although Samson, the last judge, was a Danite who lived among the Philistines in Dan’s old territory.
- The careers of thirteen judges are considered, although Abimelech, Gideon’s son, is technically not a judge, but a judge imposter.
- Even the character of the judges trends downwards. From Othniel, Caleb’s nephew, to Deborah, each judge is described without mention of any character flaws. But from Gideon on to Samson, we see a gathering trend towards foolishness and license.

The third and final section can be taken as one extended discourse, since the events are interrelated. The rape of a Levite’s concubine initiates a series of episodes that culminate in civil war and the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin. They are forced to rebuild their tribe by taking wives from the indigenous population (who should not have been there in the first place). The implied result is that from that point on, Benjamin was a tribe of half-breeds, never quite in full fellowship with the community of God.

