

## Introduction

- There is a popular song that boasts “I did it my way!”
- Though it sounds appealing, is this really the best way to live?
- We’re going to look at around 400 years of history when an entire nation decided to do it their way in our lesson on.....

## Judges & Ruth

### *My Way or God’s Way, how to live the Best way*

#### From our earliest days

- We want to do things *our way*.
- We don’t want anyone else to tell us what to do.
- Though we may appear to go along with rules as we get older, in our heart of hearts we often think ***we know what’s best for us.***
- But do we?

#### The books of Judges and Ruth

- Give us interesting pictures from Old Testament history on what happens to individuals and people when they either—
- ***Do what they want to do regardless of what God wants.***
- ***Or trust Him no matter how difficult it might be.***
- Judges is a little-studied book in its entirety, but as you’ll see it’s a very relevant one for our world today and for us personally.

#### Basic facts about Judges and Ruth

- Both most likely written by Samuel, time frame approximately 1380-1045BC., around 400 years, from when Israel conquered the land until they get a king.
- Many people often skip Judges or only read selective stories out of it and that’s understandable.
- Judges is an incredibly depressing book as the people and their leaders go from being a victorious people of God to a people oppressed by their enemies because of their sins.
- The Bible summarizes the span of the book in this way in Judges 21:24 where it says, *“In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.* Judges 21:24, NLT

#### Tips on reading Judges correctly

- Remember or review the lesson on how to read the narrative/story parts of the Bible.
- Keep in mind that not every story, very action recorded in the Bible is something to follow.
- Judges is an example of how God reports true events, but many are not positive ones.
- ***We are supposed to understand as we see the people’s actions and consequences, how people ought to behave, and understanding consequences when they happen—keeping our previous reading in mind.***
- And from their examples, learn how their successes, and failures apply to our lives.

#### Be especially careful in reading about “heroes” in Judges and as we go through the rest of the Bible

- This may be the first time you’ve read Judges in detail.

- When you do it may be surprising to see a more complete picture of the life of characters such as Gideon and Sampson, especially as told in children's stories.
- They did some great things, but their lives, and the lives of many we read about in the Bible aren't ones to emulate.
- ***We are reminded in Judges that the true hero of the book (and all books of the Bible) is God, not fallible humans.***
- God is the one who shows mercy, who uses imperfect people to accomplish His plans, who keeps Biblical history moving forward to accomplish His plans of redemption.

#### **Book opens—**

#### **Joshua died and passed on leadership to.....**

- **That's the first problem—he didn't.**
- *Judges 2:7 The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel.*
- <sup>8</sup>*Joshua . . . . .died . . . . .*
- <sup>10</sup>*After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.*
- We are never told why he (and the other elders) didn't intentionally train a leader(s), but we see the results in the next 400+ years from the death of Joshua until the Saul becomes king.

#### **I am asking why this was?**

#### **Contrast Moses and Joshua**

- I'm sharing this as simply my opinion and not a categorical truth from scripture, but as I've thought about it, why one passed on strong leadership and the other didn't, here are some of my comments.....
- Both led, legislated, and fought numerous battles.
- Even though the Israelites didn't go into the land they still had to fight during the 40 years.
- Many similarities in the demands of their lives, so that wasn't the reason.

#### **A big difference in one area**

- ***Moses preached to the people continuously about how they ought to serve God.***
- Other than battle instructions, Joshua had one final sermon where he says the famous line that "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)
- That's very good—but he basically says—My family will serve God, but whatever the rest of you do—that's your problem.
- The results were not good.
- I can't help but wonder if the history of Israel for the next 400 years would have been different if Joshua had cared as much about instilling the commands of God in the people as Moses did.
- Yes, there were battles to fight, but

#### **Winning the land (making lots of money, having fun) means little if hearts aren't won**

- **We need to be intentional, consistent, and persistent about living and then passing on Biblical truth to coming generations.**

- **We need to be more interested in preparing and challenging the next generation than anything else we do for them.**
- **They were told this in Deut. 6 as we are:**
- *These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land . . . <sup>2</sup> so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands . . . be careful to obey so that it may go well with you*
- <sup>4</sup> *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*
- Serving God in every way possible is to be a pattern in our lives—PERSONAL APPLICATION is the most important thing to pass on.

#### **How to do that? Here are two suggestions**

- Spiritual disciplines and habits and practicing the presence of God.
- More on these on the Bible805 website and YouTube channel, but here are two books HIGHLY recommended.
- ***Spiritual Disciples for the Christian Life*** by Donald S. Whitney
- ***The Practice of the Presence of God***, in Modern English
- **NO book has the authority and overall truth of the Bible.**
- But both have very good suggestions, ***ESPECIALLY the Spiritual disciplines book is the best I've read on them so far.***

#### **Because they didn't do that, here is the overall pattern of Judges**

- The people sin, give into base impulses, serve other gods, the ones they should have gotten rid of, but didn't.
- Serving other gods results in moral deterioration that you see especially in the later chapters of Judges.
- God punishes them by allowing the people who should have been conquered, such as the Philistines, to oppress them.
- The people cry out to God for deliverance.
- God responds and sends a "judge," who is not only a decision maker, but often a military leader and they are delivered, but then the cycle repeats itself when they forget God's deliverance and go back to worshipping other gods.
- Again and again, you see the Judge's action in deliverance, but ***not in continued teaching or in many cases, even moral living and so because they didn't deal with the core issues of sin that caused the problems in the first place, they repeat the same mistakes, get into the same messes and need a Judge to bail them out.***

#### **A better definition on who were the Judges?**

- Overall, Warren Wiersbe defined a biblical Judge in this way: *ruler, military leader, one who decided in judicial matters, over limited areas. No income or taxing power, not a hereditary office. Called and empowered by God.*

- Warren Wiersbe says regarding Judges that *“the monotony of Israel’s sins can be contrasted with the creativity of God’s methods of deliverance.”*
- No two stories are the same.
- 12 is the traditional number of them, some we know well such as Sampson and Gideon, but some we know very little about some such as Ehud, Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Iban, Elon, and Abdon.
- Let’s look at a few of the more complete stories.

#### **Deborah, Judges 4-5**

- Israel was suffering 20 Years of oppression.
- She was already leading Israel and serving as a judge. She is the only identified female author of Scripture (Judges 5).
- God called her to deliver people; she summons Barak to lead the army.
- He is victorious though the war ends with the opposing general being killed by Jael, a Kenite woman (Kenites were relatives of Moses).
- Once again, land has rest for 40 years.

#### **Comments about Deborah**

- She was the only judge also called a prophet.
- Until Samuel, she is the only one who was actively serving God when called to deliver the people.
- She is the only one who writes a Psalm of praise after victory, which is included in the Bible.
- It is interesting that there is no comment she was unique or unusual and or was she the only example that a women led, prophesied, and held a position of spiritual authority and power in the Old Testament.

#### **Gideon, Judges 6-9**

- Israel oppressed by Midianites for 7 years.
- The Midianites were also descendants of Abraham, they were the people Moses fled to, but something had gone very wrong in their relationship with the Jews.
- Idol worship was rampant and public—in Gideon’s town there was an altar to Baal.
- Angel of the Lord appears to him hiding and threshing grain.
- ***“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior—mighty man of valor.”*** Judges 6:13 (God sees all we can be)
- Gideon protests—if God is with us, why all the problems? The Lord doesn’t answer, simply calls him to be the deliverer.

#### **Then the situation with the fleece....**

- Gideon is testing to see if God would make it wet or dry to confirm God’s calling.
- ***It was NOT a sign of trust, but a sign of his continuing unbelief.***
- ***God is merciful in His answer, but we aren’t to do this.***
- ***NOT an example we should follow.***
- Gideon calls out his army.
- Then the Lord reduces his army from 22,000 to 300 and gives them a great victory!
- Lesson here—if you don’t think you have the resources to do what God wants –that might be precisely the point, precisely where God wants you to be.

### **But after the victory**

- People wanted Gideon to rule over them.
- He refused, but he makes a golden ephod and people worshipped it.
- Again a physical battle has taken place with no spiritual revival and so...
- There are 40 years of peace, but then people return to sin.
- His son, Abimelech kills all his brothers and is a tyrant until dies in battle.

### **While all this drama—the story of Ruth is taking place**

- There is a famine in Israel during the time of the Judges and Elimelech and Naomi go to Moab.
- Their two sons marry Moabite women. All three men die.
- Naomi hears things are better back in Israel and decides to go home.
- Both daughters-in-law start out with her, one turns back, Ruth remains .
- *“Where you go, I’ll go. (Ruth 1:16)”* Ruth says, and the most significant part of her declaration is when she says, *“your God, will be my God.”*

### **They go back to Bethlehem**

- Important—this was obviously a city that still revered and lived by God’s law.
- We see that in that they obeyed the laws of gleaning and of the “kinsman redeemer”.
- ***Important to note: there are always people who serve God in the midst of evil times.***
- ***YOU may feel alone in your work, school, or family situation, but stay strong—God is with you and there are usually others also!***
- Back to the story....
- Ruth and Naomi have no money, no income, no protector, so Ruth goes out to glean [gather the leftover scraps] in the fields.

### **Ruth “happens” to go into Boaz’s field**

- But there are no accidents with God.
- Boaz (descendant of Rahab) notices her, protects her.
- He is her “kinsman Redeemer” one who can buy their land, marry Ruth, and have children to carry on the name of the family.
- He does that and their son is Obed, father of Jesse, father of David.
- Ruth is blessed and Naomi ends her life with joy.

### **Lessons of Ruth**

- No matter how bad overall society may be,
- No matter how difficult personal circumstances may be,
- ***God always has people who serve Him.***
- ***And God is at work in their lives and circumstances, perhaps in bigger ways than you can imagine.***
- That’s why it’s important to not focus on things we can’t control,
- But on our God, who is in control and who will work out His plan no matter what.

### **Sampson, Judges 13-16**

- Called from before birth to be a judge.
- When younger, he married a Philistine woman (expressly forbidden), it did not go well, and he ends up killing a thousand of them in revenge.
- He then led Israel as a judge for 20 years
- But...never got over sins with women.
- Went to Gaza (a Philistine city) and visited a prostitute.

- Some time later. . . he fell in love with Delilah, a Philistine.
- After many deceptions he finally reveals the secret of his strength—his hair—he had been a Nazarite from birth.
- His hair is cut, he is weak and captured, his eyes are put out.

#### **But the hair on his head began to grow.....**

- The Philistines bring him to their temple so they can mock him.
- He asks the young man with him to put his hands on the pillars of the temple.
- He does and he prays:
- ***“Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Judges 16:28***
- And it crashes down.
- Great example of God’s second chances.

#### **Archaeologists have uncovered two Philistine temples. . . .**

- Both temples share a unique design;
- Two central pillars supported the roof. The pillars were made of wood and rested on stone support bases.
- With the pillars being about six feet apart, a very strong man could dislodge them from their stone bases and bring the entire structure down.

#### **Here are additional reminders that these early stories are not fairy tales, but real people and places**

- Archeological verification of names, places, battles, and timelines.
- ***This is not a small thing—does not happen in all religious texts***
- See other lessons for the differences in the historical accuracy of the Bible as compared with other scriptures.
- The TIMELINE confirmation is especially important as it establishes the truth of Biblical prophecy.

#### **Ras Shemar**

##### **Book ends with horrid stories**

- Judges 17 and 18—a Levite serves a man for pay and uses his family idols to do it.
- A group of Danites comes by, takes the Levite with them; they go to another city and slaughter everyone.
- Judges 19 is story of Levite and his concubine, who is killed brutally. Then in revenge for her death, a tribe is almost destroyed and because of a foolish vow, they kidnap women to be wives for the warriors.
- **This is NOT how God’s people were supposed to live.**
- Ends with the summary statement I shared at the start: ***In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. Judges 21:24, NLT***

##### **The challenge of Judges—His way or our way—our choice**

- Judges shows what happens when we do it our way and the results of not passing on how God wants His people to live.
- We have a choice—no matter what might be happening in our crazy world, individual actions matter.
- Romans 12:1,2 MSG tells us how to make the positive choice:
- ***So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around***

*life—and place it before God as an offering. . . .Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

**It truly will make us most happy when we do that**

- St. Augustine summed it up this way when he said,
- *“You have made us for yourself oh God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”*
- And when we fail in resting in God, in living like He wants us to, we can admit it to Him, as Brother Lawrence did when confessing his faults to God, he said, *“I shall never do otherwise, if You leave me to myself.”* Without God, we are a mess, He knows it and loves us anyway.
- Our Lord doesn't leave us to ourselves—He's given us His Word, the Holy Spirit, our church and friends to remind us.
- *Make it your goal that each day of our lives and the end of our lives, let's not say, “I did it MY way,” but “I did it God's way.”*

**Go to [www.Bible805.com](http://www.Bible805.com) for links to:**

- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
- Chronological Bible-reading schedules