

**Purpose**

- To learn about the Judges of Israel
- To learn about Deborah
- To learn about Gideon

**Materials**

- Bibles
- Handouts

**Background Information**

The book of Judges is filled with sensational stories, as exciting as any of today's headlines. It includes gruesome murders, sexual exploits, superhuman feats of strength, and a bizarre mutilation. It also shows what can happen when a society slides downhill in moral decay. But it also shows God's merciful deliverance when people ask to be forgiven. Judges is a book about heroes—12 men and women who delivered Israel from its oppressors. These judges were not perfect: in fact, they included an assassin, a sexually promiscuous man and a person who broke all the laws of hospitality. But they all were submissive and turned to God so God used them to help his people.

**JUDGES OF ISRAEL**

When Joshua was old and dying he challenged the Israelites to always serve God. He then sent the people of each tribe to their own land. At the age of 110 Joshua died. This left the final completion of their voyage in the hands of each tribe. We are going to look into the judges of Israel. When we think of judges we think of a person in a black robe presiding in a courtroom. This is not true of Israel's judges. These judges were more like a military commander, a patriotic leader who rises up in a time of national crisis and stirs God's people to oppose a competitor or oppressor. The first 12 judges of Israel cover a span of 300 years. The cycle of each judge followed pretty much the same pattern. It goes like this. The cycle begins when the people of Israel forget about their loyalty to God and begin to worship the gods of their Canaanite neighbors. God allows a foreign power to attack his people and oppress them. The Israelites in their despair call out to God for help. When God sees their willingness to return to him, he raises up a deliverer, a judge. The judge leads the people in a military uprising the invaders are driven out of their land. Peace follows as the judge becomes the civil leader in Israel and guides them in obedience to God. But when the judge dies the people forget their promises to God and the cycle begins all over again.

On handout 43-1 you will find a list of the judges, the number of years they ruled, and the acts they were known for. You will be given profiles on several of the judges but not all of them. We will discuss just a few of them and the impact they had upon the people of Israel.

The second judge of the 12 is Ehud. Read the bio of him. I'm sure you will find some interesting facts that are not widely known. I had never heard of him so I found it interesting.

## DEBORAH

Deborah was the fourth and only female among the judges of Israel. She was one of the most respected of all of the judges. Remember during this time, women were not very well thought of and almost never respected so that makes this most unusual. Deborah was a prophet, a person who received messages from God for the people and for individuals. Deborah was also married and did literally hear cases and settle them. Most of her cases were heard under a palm tree between the towns of Ramah and Bethel. This is just north of Jerusalem. (Not very sophisticated) Deborah had many roles in Israel and had great standing. She was called "a mother in Israel". Deborah is also known as a great poet, a leader in battle, a judge and a prophet. When Israel is attacked from the north by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali; Deborah summons Barak, from the northern part of the tribe from Naphtali convinces him to recruit an n army and come to her defense. Barak comes but insists that Deborah accompany him into battle. With God's help Deborah and her army defeat their enemy. The story of this battle can be found in Judges 5.

## GIDEON

Another familiar name among the judges of Israel is the fifth king, Gideon. The story of Gideon reads a little like the story of Moses. Gideon was clearly one of the best known and most respected of the leaders of Israel. He is also a very resourceful person even before the angel comes to him with God's call.

An angel of God appears to Gideon and calls him to obey God. Gideon questions if it is really God calling. God had been strangely inactive during this last round of Israel's troubles since the death of Deborah. Surely God did not want him, Gideon, to lead Israel's armies in battle. Gideon prepares a large meal. The angel tells him to place the meat and the cakes on unleavened bread on a rock and pour out the broth he had prepared. The angel touches the meat and the cakes and they are consumed by fire. Gideon's meal has turned into a sacrificial offering. Gideon is convinced and afraid for his life, but God reassures him. Gideon is now ready to worship God.

To prove that he is ready to follow God, Gideon tears down the altar to Baal and destroys it. He does as God commands and at night sacrifices a bull from his father's herd. This was done so that the people would not see it until the next day. The people now recognize Gideon as being committed to God, so when God calls him to lead the Israelites against other tribes that have settled in their land, many of his own clan (Abiezer) and others come to help. So many have come to help Gideon that God twice puts them to a test to reduce the number. 32,000 people come to fight. God tells Gideon to send home anyone who is fearful. They are now down to 10,00. Still too many!!! God then leads all of the troops to a stream for water. Thos who lap the water are selected and all others are sent home. The number is now down to 300.

They are now ready for battle. Each soldier has a trumpet, a torch, and a jar to cover the torch. At a signal, each person sounds the trumpet, waves the torch, and smashes the jar. This throws the Midianites into panic and they race away leaving their equipment and loot behind them. Gideon's army of 300 has driven away a massive army without striking a single blow. The people ask Gideon to become their king, but he refuses because God alone is king. Gideon does accept a present (a ephod, a short outer garment worn by priests when they are asking for God's guidance) from the people. They turn this into an idol and soon turn away from God again. So ends another chapter in the judges of Israel.

### **Procedure**

- Read Background Information of the book of Judges
- Read handout 43-1. This is pretty heavy stuff so read and keep this in your folder.
- Read background information on the Judges of Israel (43-2)
- Read Background information about Deborah. Read about Deborah. She will be a little more familiar.
- Read Gideon background information (and recall 43-3). See if you recall his name, and why we are more familiar with him.
- These handouts can go into your folders.