

General Church Education



# The Book of Judges

Judges 1:1-26, 2: 1-23

## Lesson 18

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 4: The Lord Is the Hero

For ages 9-10

# The Book of Judges

Judges 1:1-26, 2:1-23

## Teacher Background

The book of Judges begins a new period in Israel's history. Under Joshua's leadership the land of Canaan was conquered, divided into territories and settled. Joshua's parting words for Israel were to stay faithful to the Lord, and to destroy the enemies that remained in the land. But only Judah and Simeon tried to wipe out the enemies in their areas, so many enemies remained. For these nations, the idea of a God of all the earth was a new "abstract" concept. Their gods were made from wood and stone.

After everyone who knew Joshua had died, a new generation of children of Israel grew up that did not know the Lord. They thought that the worship practices of the nations seemed fun and exciting, so they started worshipping the idols instead of the Lord. Because of this, they could not fight off their enemies and fell into trouble. Each time a local enemy attacked, the people cried to the Lord for help. He would raise up a local judge to lead the people back to Him, and there would be peace in the land. But, in time, the children of Israel would forget the Lord again, get into trouble, call for help, and the Lord would raise up a new judge. These judges represent the Lord as a hero. This cycle repeats throughout the book of Judges.

The cycle of the judges is the cycle of our lives. Like the Israelites, we worship false gods, or "idols". They are things we give precedence to and put above the Lord. The Lord warns us to obey His commandments, allows us to make mistakes, and permits the consequences with the hope that we will learn to do better. He is always ready to help us. When we feel sorry, we are ready to accept this help and turn to Him—though the consequences of our choices may still remain.

## Key Ideas

- A judge was someone the Lord raised up to lead the children of Israel.
- A judge's most important job was to help people follow the Lord.
- If we fall away from the Lord we can always return to Him.

## From the Writings

The 'thumb,' and the 'hand,' signified the power which truth has from good. In ancient times it was usual to cut off the thumbs and the great toes of their enemies, which represented taking away all power. When the thumb is cut off, the hand is of no use in war. See *Arcana Coelestia* 10062.

When evils are forgiven after we have repented, they are moved to the sides. Since evils are not taken completely away, but only put off to the side, and since we can be moved from the center to the sides, we can once again get involved in evils we thought we had left behind. It is part of our nature that we can move from one desire to another, and sometimes into an opposite one. This means that we can move from one center to another. A desire determines our center as long as we are caught up in it. Then we are absorbed in its pleasure and its light. See *Divine Providence* 279.

# The Book of Judges

## Judges 1:1-26, 2:1-23

### Vocabulary

**judge**—(noun) a local leader in a part of Israel

**tribute**—money or valuables one nation pays to another

**Baal**—male idol or false god

**Asherah**—female idol or false goddess

### Moses and Joshua, Leaders for the Lord

The Lord led the children of Israel for sixty-four years by means of two great leaders, Moses and Joshua. Moses led them for more than forty years. He took them from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Moses helped Israel become a strong nation. He prepared the people to enter Canaan.

Joshua trained under Moses. He was a military leader. Soon after Israel left Egypt he led them to victory over the Amalekites. After Moses died Joshua led Israel for twenty-four years. Under Joshua Israel conquered the promised land. He divided it into territories for the twelve tribes, and the people settled there and built new lives.

### Who Would Lead Next?

When Joshua died, the Lord did not raise up a new overall leader right away. But for hundreds of years, He did call men and one woman to lead parts of Israel when people got into trouble and needed help. These people were called judges. Judges led fights against Israel's enemies. They brought

people back to the Lord. Some judges led Israel for a few years. Other judges led Israel for much longer. One judge ruled for eighty years. In times of peace, Israel did not need a judge and years went by with no judges.



### Joshua's Final Command

Do you remember Joshua's final command to the children of Israel? He told them to worship the Lord. He also told them to get rid of the enemy nations living in the land. In the south, the

tribes of Judah and Simeon worked together to conquer the Canaanites and Perizzites. They killed many people. They cut off the thumbs and big toes of the king so he could never hold a weapon to fight again. But they were not strong enough to overcome enemies who had iron chariots.

Read Judges 1:1-24.

Judah and Simeon were the only tribes that fought their enemies.

Other tribes did not even try. They let the enemies live in the land. Sometimes the enemies forced them to pay tribute money. At other times enemy nations drove the tribes out of their inherited land!



### **Israel Disobeyed**

With the enemies living among them, the children of Israel came to know their idols of wood and stone. The idols were called Baals and Asherahs. Baals were male idols or statues. Asherahs or Ashtoreths were female idols or statues.

The Lord had given the Levites cities throughout the land so they could lead worship of the Lord. But a new generation grew up who did not know Joshua, and did not know the Lord. They liked the idols and began to bow down and worship them instead. Some Israelites disobeyed the Lord and married wives or husbands from the enemy nations. Gradually the children of Israel started to worship idols as well as the Lord.

In the time of Israel the Lord sent angels to visit people. “Angel” means messenger. Angels who appeared to the Israelites were messengers sent by the Lord. They often came when people had done something wrong. The angels told the people to be sorry for what they had done, and to do what was right. People believed the angels were the Lord. When the people broke the Lord’s covenant and started to worship idols like other nations, the Angel of the Lord came to them. When they heard the Angel’s message they cried out.

Read Judges 2:1-6.

### **The Lord’s Love Seemed Like Anger**

It seemed to the people as if the Lord was very angry with them. He told them He would not help them drive out the nations, but would make the nations bring trouble. Do you think the Lord really was angry? The Lord’s great love may feel like anger when we turn away from Him and disobey His laws.

Have you ever felt as if parent or teacher was angry with you when you did something wrong? Maybe you have seen a young child run into the street, and their caretaker seems angry. When we shut ourselves off from the Lord or from our parents and teachers their deep love for us sometimes feels like anger.

Read Judges 2:11-23.

When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, He raised up judges who delivered them from their enemies and brought peace in the land. But peace did not last forever. When the judges died, people forgot about the Lord, worshiped idols, and the cycle began again.

Like the children of Israel, we may worship what we care about most. If we only do what we want, what feels good to us, we are worshipping an idol. If we choose to do what's right because the Lord commands us to, we are worshipping the Lord. When we turn to the Lord, He can lead us back to Him so we can experience the blessing of His peace.

### Discussion Questions

- What events happened while Moses led the children of Israel?
- What events took place while Joshua led the children of Israel?
- The children of Israel fought many battles. What led to their successes? Why did they sometimes lose?
- What helps us win our spiritual battles? What makes it difficult for us to overcome selfish feelings and thoughts?
- Who led the children of Israel after Joshua?
- Compare being led by a leader like Joshua or Moses with having no leader. What difference does having a leader make? Would it work to have a school without a principal, or a country without a leader? Why or why not?
- Choices have consequences. If you choose to do something wrong, you are also choosing the consequences. Compare the consequences of making a good choice with the consequences of making a bad choice.
- Think of a time when you have fallen down—either physically, or by doing something wrong. How did you “get up”? Who helps you get up?
- Do the consequences of making a bad choice stop you from making the same choice again?

# Activity Overview | The Book of Judges

## Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies;  
In You I take shelter.  
Teach me to do Your will,  
For You are my God. Psalm 143:9,10

## Projects

Choose one or two activities.

- The Cycle of the Judges—The Cycle of My Life
- What Is a Judge?
- Picture to color—Worship of Idols (Judges 1)

## Additional Activity Ideas

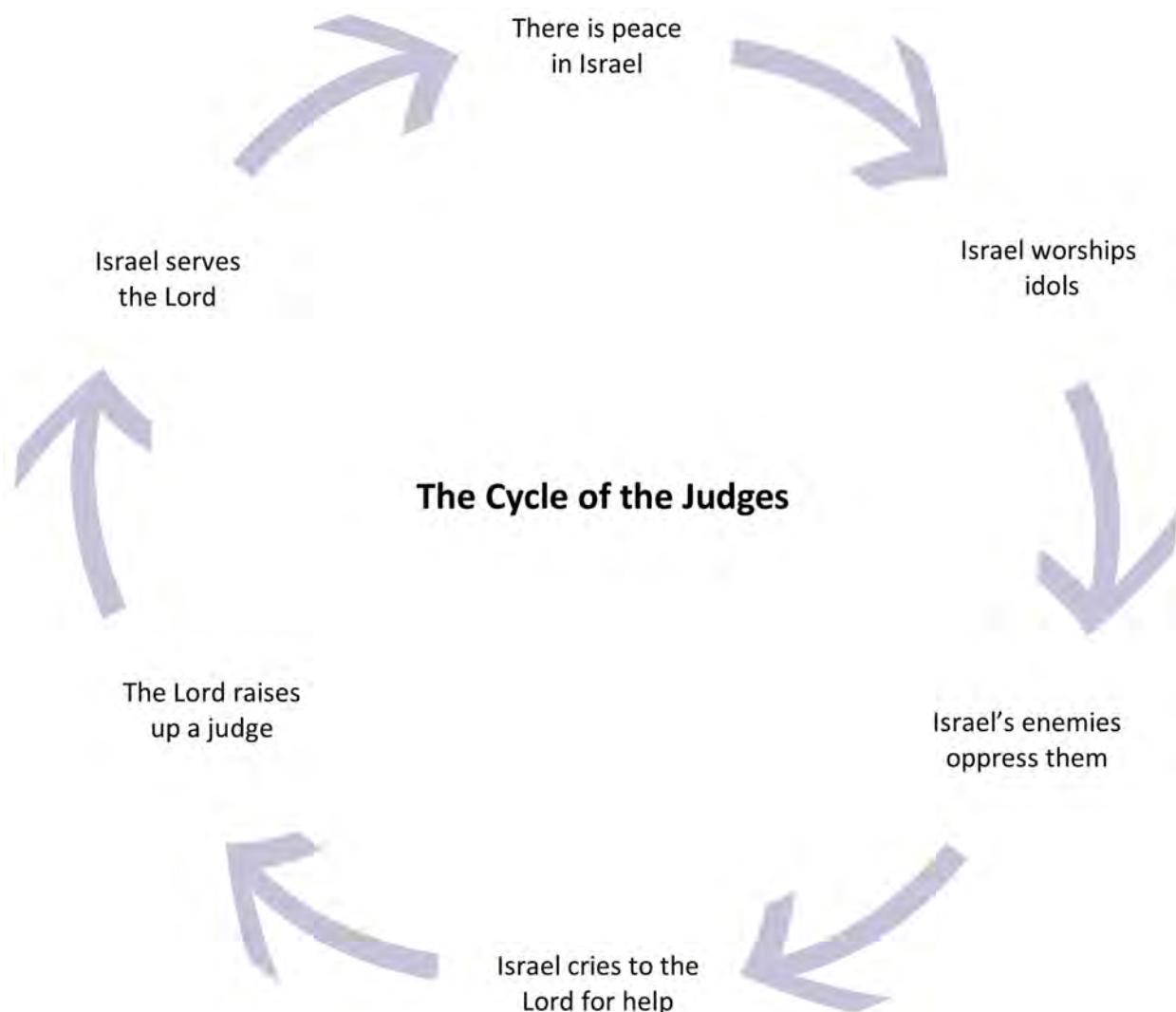
- Stories in the book of Judges follow a cycle: there is peace in Israel; Israel worships idols; Israel's enemies oppress them; Israel cries to the Lord; the Lord sends a Judge; Israel returns to the worship of the Lord; there is peace in Israel. Think of other cycles you know, e.g. the rain cycle. Why do you think the Lord created cycles? What cycles can you think of? How might cycles help someone learn to trust that the Lord is caring for them?
- Explore a cycle, such as the rain cycle, the lifecycle of a plant or animal.
- Complete a chart with an overview of the first three judges in Israel, online at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-first-three-judges-of-israel-complete-the-chart-judges03.pdf>.

## Activity 1 | The Cycle of the Judges-The Cycle of My Life

The stories in the book of Judges follow this pattern or cycle:

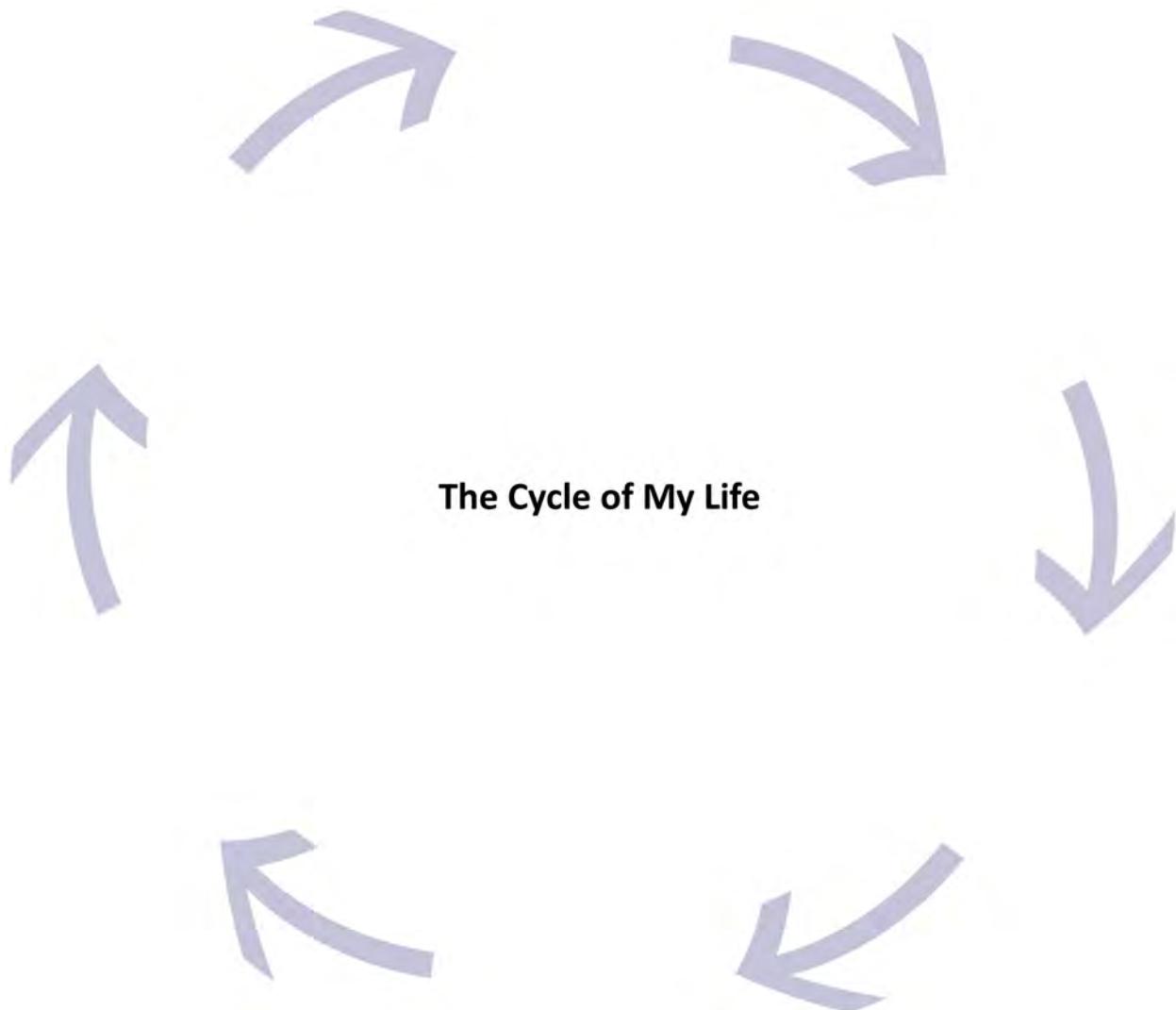
1. There is peace in Israel
2. Israel worships idols
3. Israel's enemies oppress them
4. Israel cries to the Lord for help
5. The Lord raises up a judge
6. Israel serves the Lord

This pattern repeats again and again throughout Judges. We can show this cycle by putting it into a circle. On the next page you will see how this pattern takes place in our lives too.



## Activity 1 | The Cycle of Judges-The Cycle of My Life

We have cycles in our lives too. For example, things may go well when we remember the Lord. But then we get angry and do something we regret. We might ask an adult for help. The adult gives help and things settle back down. The Lord always provides a way forwards. Think of a cycle like this in your life. Write the cycle in the blanks between the arrows.



## Activity 2 | What Is a Judge?

What does the word “judge” mean to you? Perhaps “judge” brings to mind making judgments about others, or a person who judges in a court of law. The judges in the Word were heroes for the Lord. They answered the Lord’s call to serve by bringing people back to Him when they had gone astray.

Judges were men and women who brought *judgment* on Israel’s enemies. They fought battles that restored peace in the land. While some judges, like Gideon, led an army, others, like Samson, fought alone. Deborah judged sitting under a palm tree while the commander of the army, Barak, fought against the enemies. Judges settled local problems that did not involve all of Israel. One problem Israel faced was hunger, because other people were stealing their food. Another problem was military oppression. They had to pay their enemies lots of money in taxes.

Write the qualities of a judge around the picture below.

