

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Judges: We Need A King

Dr. Pete Enns (The Bible For Normal People substack), *Armageddon: The Temptation To Turn War Into Prophecy*.

Every time violence erupts in the Middle East, one word seems to emerge in the Christian subculture: Armageddon. Some religious voices have not been able to resist the temptation to frame the conflict in apocalyptic terms, even suggesting that it could be part of “God’s divine plan” - and events leading to the end of the world. Revelation is not a predictive geopolitical blueprint but a poetic, symbolic text written to encourage oppressed believers under Roman rule, using vivid imagery to expose how violent, domination-based power systems ultimately collapse. When modern Christians interpret contemporary wars as steps toward Armageddon, they reverse Revelation’s message, turning a warning about violence into an endorsement of it, undermining peace and diplomacy in the name of faith. The last thing the world needs right now is people eager to turn ancient apocalyptic poetry into modern military strategy. That’s not what it means to be “biblical.” [\[Substack Link\]](#)

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- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.
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- Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*. New York: Convergent Books, 2019.
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Subject: “Judges: We Need A King”

Summary: Judges is a part of the Deuteronomistic History (DH – Deut., Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings – excludes Ruth) which offers a covenant framework where obedience = blessing; disobedience = disaster. It lands between the time of Joshua’s death and the monarchic period. From the Exodus to Saul’s reign, Israel’s first king – is about 200 years (1200-1020 BCE). A strict chronology of Judges is hard to establish – as ch.s 17-21 deal with matters happening at the beginning of the book, not the end. Israel is not yet a “nation.” It is the story of Israel’s search for identity. Moral and social chaos, disobedience, oppression and desperate cries for help seem to grow increasingly disturbing, rather than heroic. Judges intentionally shows flawed, impulsive, and often violent “judges” whose behavior mirrors Israel’s unraveling values, culminating in stories **meant to unsettle the reader and set up the monarchic period** (i.e., the demand for a king). Here, the judges are not settling legal disputes (except Deborah). They are military commanders, warriors, priests or prophets – bottom line, the judges are tribal leaders who arose to deal with some threat or conflict.

The book concludes, **Judges 21:25** “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes”—as less of a defense of independence, and more as a critique of a society losing its moral compass, revealing a theological point, not about individual sin, but about what happens when a people abandon justice, covenant responsibility, and communal ethics.

I. The Introduction (1-3) recounts Israel’s failures to get rid of the Canaanites. The land remains unconquered. Why? Disobedience (to Torah) and Unfaithfulness (other gods, foreign women).
A. “Deuteronomistic” tropes: obedience results in blessing, disobedience invites punishment.

II. Major Judges (disobedience and difficult images of God).

A. Othniel (Judg. 3:7–11) – delivers Israel from King Cushan-rishathaim (translated as “doubly wicked” – which acts as a clue that this is not an exact history but a theological narrative).

B. Ehud (Judg. 3:12–30) – delivers Israel from king Eglon (Moab). Eglon is used by God to punish Israel.

1. 3:12 – “The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord strengthened King Eglon of Moab against Israel.” Yet, Ehud kills Eglon and “the dirt came out” (or poop – this seems to be meant to be as a sarcastic insult).

a. **D.R.A. or “Divine Reprobating Activity”** – where God seems to bypass free will, uses someone (e.g., “strengthens” Eglon/Moabite; Pharaoh; Abimelech) for a divine purpose, then destroys them.

C. Deborah (Judg. 4–5) – prophetess/judge – commands Barak (warrior).

1. King Jaban (Jabin) and Sisera (his general) are enemies of God, but used by God to punish Israel, then are punished by God (another example of DRA).

D. Gideon (also called Jerubbaal, Judg. 6–8) – delivers Israel from the Midianites. Again, God delivered Israel into “the hands” of the Midianites for “doing evil in the sight of the Lord.”

1. Jerubbaal/Gideon tears down the altar of Baal.

2. For his efforts, Israel asks Gideon to be their king – but he refuses.

a. Foreshadowing of I Sam. 8 – “YHWH” is already our king.

E. Abimelech (Gideon’s son) attempts a monarchy (9).

1. Hires mercenaries (9:4 “worthless and reckless fellows”) to kill his 69 other brothers. But, Jotham escapes and provides an allegory (“the parable of the two trees”) that acts as a Critique against monarchic rulership.

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- a. God sends an “an evil spirit” (negative divine influence generated by God) to punish Abimelech (9:23).
- b. Judges 9:56-57a “Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers; ⁵⁷ and God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads (more DRA).

F. Jephthah (Judg. 10:6–12:7) – warrior, son of a prostitute.

1. The Ammonite conflict. Israel cries out deliver us. YHWH says pray to the gods you’ve been worshiping. But, YHWH gives in and delivers them through Jephthah.
2. Jephthah’s vow – **Judges 11:30-31** And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, ³¹ then whatever (**whoever**) comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord’s, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering.”
 - a. Jephthah’s daughter “bewails” her virginity for two months in the mountains with friends.
 - b. This is another narrative clue things are getting worse without a king.
3. Lethal Linguistic Peculiarity (Judges 12:6) after Jephthah defeats the Ammonites he comes into inner Israelite conflict (civil war) with the Ephraimites.
 - a. Those who pronounce Shibboleth correctly are allowed to live.
 - b. 42,000 mispronounce it Sibboleth and are killed.
4. **Montheism? Judges 11:23–24** Jephthah argues that YHWH, the God of Israel, gave Israel their land, just as Chemosh, the god of the Ammonites/Moabites, gave *them* their land—so neither side should contest the other’s inheritance.
 - a. God allows or assigns different tribes to “lesser gods” – then seems to punish them for His assignment.

G. Samson (Judg. 13–16)

1. Samson’s mother was barren – angel appears and says “you will bear a child” (consider the Sarai and Mary conception narratives).
2. Covenantal tropes: don’t drink wine, don’t cut hair.
3. Samson is a Nazarite – separate or consecrated (similar to Samuel).
4. This story is a tragedy (i.e., What happens when you marry outside of your tribe).
5. Samson is folklore or legendary tale: Ties 300 foxes together, lights them on fire and sends them into Philistine crops. Kills 3,000 Philistines with jawbone of an ass. Carries city gates 40 miles.
6. Visits prostitutes regularly. Ultimately falls in love with Delilah (who is paid by Philistine leaders to get his secret). Lies 3 x’s – finally reveals his secret – “covenant.” While in prison his hair grows back – story of breaking covenant, punishment and redemption.
7. Samson is a prototype of Saul (e.g., tall, strong, warrior types – who fail God).

III. Minor Judges

- A. **Shamgar** (Judg. 3:31) – one verse, kills 600 Philistines with a cattle prod. Some scholars think he was included to satisfy numerological demands (12).
- B. **Tola and Jair** (Judg. 10:1–5) – no pertinent info. **Ibzan, Elon, Abdon** (Judg. 12:8–15) all we know is where they’re buried – as of the editor is eager to get to Samson.

IV. **Judges 19–21** presents the book’s darkest conclusion, depicting Israel’s complete moral collapse: a Levite’s concubine is brutalized to death in Gibeah of Benjamin—an episode deliberately echoing **Sodom and Gomorrah**—after the Levite sacrifices her to protect himself. He dismembers her body in 12 pieces

