

Judges

Taught by David DeWitt in Wisla, Poland, October 20-22, 2000

The time of the Judges is 3,000 years ago. There are 288 years from the first to the last judge. It is the period between the patriarchs and the monarchs, specifically between the leadership of Joshua and Samuel (and Samuel reluctantly introduced the kings).

There are three times in Israel's history when God did not designate any headship: (1) family/patriarchs of Abraham through Joseph, (2) while slaves in Egypt for 430 years (then God raised up national patriarchs Moses and Joshua), and (3) the time of the judges. Then there was the time of the leadership of the kings and the prophets, the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, and then the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

During the time of Judges, there was no designated head over the nation of Israel. But unlike their time in Egypt when they were under another nation, here they were not supposed to be under another nation.

During this period, each individual Israelite was to personally make God his or her king. The challenge of the book of Judges is that everyone was to make God king of their life. The message of the book is their failure to do that.

Thirteen of the 21 chapters are about the judges, so 38% of the book is not about the judges. But all of the book of Judges is about people who failed to make God their king. The most repeated statement in the book is, In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (21:25).

The book was written sometime after there was a king in Israel. The statement (21:25) assumes there is now a king. The Talmud says the author was Samuel. It was written sometime after the coronation of Saul but before the conquest of Jerusalem by David because of 1:21.

Morality was left up to the individual. Both God and Samuel preferred the time of the judges to the time of the kings (1 Samuel 8-9). In Judges, God dealt with the people. At the time of the kings, God dealt with the king. Generally speaking, after the times of the kings, the people were blessed or suffered based on the actions of the kings.

The context of the Judges is that the Canaanites were left in the land. Two reasons they were left there: humanly speaking, it was because the Israelites did not drive them out. From God's point of view, they were left there to test the people and teach them war. The test was whether or not they would learn war.

The lesson of the book is that when the Canaanites became Israel's friends, they became a far greater danger than when they were Israel's enemies. When God's enemies become your friends, they become a worse problem because now God is against you. I'm suggesting, by application, that our lives are a lot like the times of the Judges. The Canaanites in our lives are our sinful habits. These sinful habits are baggage that provide temptations for us. Why are they there? From a human standpoint they are there because we did not get rid of them. From God's perspective, they are there to teach us war. The spiritual life is a war between your new self and your sinful nature.

The book of Judges is about war. All the judges in the book are those who learned war.

The judges were not elected or appointed or by any other way selected by the people. They were raised up by God to exercise their own will to carry out justice in different ways but usually to carry out military justice.

In the whole book of Judges, which is about 300 years, approximately 1350-1050 B.C., the Ark of the Covenant was at Shilo, and Shilo functioned as the temple of Israel. The Ark first sat at Gilgal, near Jericho, then was brought to Shechem for the ceremony which Moses prescribed, repeating the cursings and blessings from Mts. Ebal and Gerizim. As far as we know, the Ark was taken from there to Shilo, along with the tabernacle. There Joshua set up the tabernacle and put the Ark in it, and that was the final resting place of the tabernacle. The Ark was there until the sons of Eli took it into battle and lost it to the Philistines, during the days of Samuel, after the book of Judges.

Joshua's assignment to the nation was to possess the land by setting up their tribal territories and eliminating the Canaanites in those territories. At the time of Joshua, they only partially eliminated the Canaanites. He made treaties with some of them and made slaves of others. Joshua did not disciple a successor for after he died.

Although the land had been conquered and occupied by Joshua, many important Canaanite strongholds had been passed by, which left the final conquering of the Canaanites up to the individual tribes. The book of Judges describes this warfare as the Hebrews struggled to complete the occupation of the land.

The judges were military and civil peace makers. They were judges in the sense that they dealt out justice.

The last verse is a key verse mentioned throughout the book. It needs to be considered in light of Deuteronomy 11–12 and 1 Samuel 8 and 12. It is very clear what Israel was to do when they entered the land. God's instructions through Moses was that they were to be very careful to keep His commandments and to love the Lord God only. Then God would drive out the other nations before them. No man will be able to stand before them. They were to utterly destroy all the places where the nations worshipped the idols. In Deuteronomy 12:5, they are to seek the Lord in the place where He chooses His name to be and not just anywhere. The place where they worshipped and sacrificed was very important to God. It was to be done only in the place which God designated. That place was Shilo, where it was throughout the time of the judges.

What happened during the times of the judges is similar to what has happened in the church age. In Israel they went from having God as their king to appointing kings. If you don't do it God's way and do it the way of the world, there will be rain on the harvest. They appointed a king because of the chaos of the people, which led to God's punishing them, by raising up other nations against them. Then they wanted a king to rule over them and make decisions for them. In the church, the apostles set up a coequal brotherhood. The elders were mature believers, not someone of higher rank or officers. But we've appointed leaders for ourselves like the other nations, where Christ was our shepherd, father, and high priest. Instead we've appointed for ourselves other shepherds, fathers, and high priests. There is a big difference. If we assume that the Bible alone is the Word of God, when Israel wanted a king, God reluctantly accepted it and blessed David and his household, although the kings ended up in sin, compromise, and idolatry so they eventually lost the land (as Samuel said, rain on the harvest). But in the church, God never agreed, even reluctantly, to our appointing shepherds, fathers, and high priests.

Joshua 23 and 24—Joshua's final message to Israel.

- (1) v. 3—Joshua was old. The Lord their God is the One Who has been fighting for them. Whatever your circumstances, understand that God is fighting for you. He's clearing the way for you to serve Him in your circumstances.
- (2) v. 4-5—"He's appointed these nations to possess their land"—God's appointed a piece of His work to each of us. He's given us the opportunity to be involved with Him while He builds His church.
- (3) v. 6—"do all that is written in the Law of Moses"—We should also obey the commands written in the Scripture, not turn to the right or to the left.
- (4) v. 7—Do not associate with these nations, don't even mention the name of their gods. We're to be separated from the culture of our world. Don't be in social situations which tempt you to live like they do. Don't even pretend to follow the gods of the world, such as the horoscope, karate, etc., and don't intermarry with them (v. 12).
- (5) v. 11—Be diligent to love the Lord your God. Your first command is to love the Lord your God (Matthew 22) then other people.
- (6) v. 13—If you ignore the Word of God and become like the world, then God will not use you to build His church.
- (7) v. 14—Not one good word of God has failed, v. 15 and so His word will not fail. Realize that God's Word will not fail concerning what He says about the church.
- (8) 24:1-13—Brief history of what God's done. v. 14—Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth, not with selfish motives.
- (9) v. 15—"Choose for yourself who you will serve"—Don't serve God and idols. Don't call yourself a Christian and read your horoscope or pursue a divorce or have an affair, or practice karate, or lie to your customers, etc.
- (10) v. 19—God is a jealous God. Realize that because God is holy, you will fail in serving Him. Because He is a jealous God, He will not tolerate your failure. Your failure will be in serving Him only. You will mix serving God with materialism, etc. Your only recourse is repentance and confession. v. 23, put away your foreign gods in your midst.

Chapter 1

v. 1—After the death of Joshua, they ask who will go up before them to fight the Canaanites. God said Judah should go up. Judah asks tribe of Simeon to go with them. Simeon was more or less incorporated into Judah. It's not clear what happened to Simeon. They had territory in midst of Judah (Joshua 19:1). However, they seem to be part of the Northern Kingdom in 2 Chronicles 15:9. [The Southern Kingdom was originally only Judah, but then in 1 Kings 12:21 Benjamin joined them.] But in the first battle of Judges, Simeon fights with Judah against the Canaanites.

v. 4—They went up to Bezek in the Sorek Valley. They found Adoni-Bezek (Lord Bezek). He fled. They cut off his thumbs and big toes.

v. 7—He felt he was being revenged because he had cut off thumbs and toes of 70 other kings. Purpose was to make them unable to use weapons and fight war.

v. 8—They capture Jerusalem.

v. 9-10—They capture Hebron.

v. 11—They capture Debir, formerly Kiriath-sepher. Here is the story of Caleb. (He and Joshua were the only spies who wanted to take the land and they and Moses were the only ones of that generation who lived through the wandering in the wilderness.) He has a warlike spirit. Whoever conquers, he'll give his daughter as a wife. His nephew captured Kiriath-sepher and got Achsah for a wife.

v. 14-15—She persuaded Othniel to ask Caleb for a field, and she asked Caleb for a spring of water. She got both of them.

v. 16-17—The Kenites, from Moses' father-in-law, went with Judah from Jericho to capture the Judean Wilderness (Arad and Hormah), across from Masada and the Lisan area.

v. 18-19—Judah took Gaza and the Philistine area.

[Kenites from Jericho, in-laws of Moses' but not Israelites. They made peace with the Canaanites in Hazor. The family of Heber lived up there, who gave General Sisera of the Canaanite army protection. They fought with Israel but they also made peace with the Canaanites.]

v. 21-36—Each of the tribes did not drive out the Canaanites. Seven times it says they did not drive them out. Four times it says the Israelites put the Canaanites to forced labor. Two times it says they lived among the Canaanites.

[Notice the downward spiral of chapter 1. In v. 4-15, the enemy is rightly destroyed with the power of God. But in v. 16, the Kenites live with them. In v. 25-26, Joseph's descendants wrongly allow a Canaanite man to live in the land. In v. 27, the Canaanites, as a group, live in the land, although not among the Israelites. In v. 29-30, the Canaanites live among the Israelites. In v. 34-35, the Danites are forced to live out of their territory because they are too weak to conquer. Chapter 1 begins with obedience and ends in disgrace. And so do the judges. It begins with the obedience of Othniel and ends with the disgrace of Samson.]

Chapter 2

v. 1—The angel of the Lord (theophany of Christ, one of three appearances in the book, the other two being 6:11-18 and 13:3-23) came up from Gilgal to Bochim (perhaps Bethel). Up there He gave a speech: "I brought you up from the land of Egypt to the land I swore to give to your fathers."

v. 2—I told you to tear down their altars. But they didn't do it.

v. 3—So God would not drive the Canaanites out, but they would be a snare to the Israelites.

v. 4—The people wept.

v. 5—Which is why it is called Bochim, which means "weepers." They made a sacrifice there. (An altar was made there by Jacob, so it's why many feel this was Bethel, a place known to offer sacrifice to God). This probably happened after the failure of everyone but Judah to drive out the Canaanites.

Applications—

(1) When enemies become friends, they are a greater danger because they influence us to evil. Then God becomes our enemy.

(2) Without a plan and an effort to discipleship, the people will always deteriorate into sin. Good doesn't happen by itself. Evil does.

(3) Israel forgot that this was God's land, and they were to purge it from pagan idolatry and altars in the same way we tend to forget that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we are to purge them from the influence of the world's gods.

(4) The deterioration into sin is usually gradual. It happens when we ignore God and focus on people.

(5) Caleb and his family show us that righteousness can be maintained in the midst of a deteriorating people. So do Hannah, Ruth, and Boaz, all who were righteous people in the time of the Judges. It's not necessary to follow the crowd into sin.

v. 6—3:6—Next section. It's a flashback in time. A second introduction. Back before the death of Joshua. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua. "The people served the Lord"—serving God is not necessarily obedience to God. Service is only one kind of obedience, and it's usually connected with worship (such as Exodus 20:5, "don't worship or serve other gods"). In Joshua 24, both in v. 14 and 24 it seems to say it is possible to serve God without sincerity. The service of God seems to be more of a mechanical act. This is the word when Jacob served Laban for Rachel and Leah—something he did but did not want to do.

v. 8—Joshua died at 110 years of age.

v. 9—There is a tomb today in Ariel, in the hill country of Ephraim, about halfway between Shilo and Shechem.

v. 10—All the second generation died. The first generation came out of Egypt with Moses and died in the wilderness. The second generation is their children who entered the land, under the leadership of Joshua. Another generation (third) arose who did not (1) know the Lord or (2) the work He did for Israel.

v. 11—The result—They did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baals.

v. 12—They forsook God and followed other gods, the gods of the people around them, and bowed down to them. Their disobedience was the result of their ignorance. They did not know God or the work of God. No good theology—Who God is and what He does. It is exactly the situation of the church in America.

v. 14—The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of those who plundered them.

v. 15—Therefore they were severely distressed.

v. 16—Therefore God raised up judges who delivered them.

v. 17—But it didn't help. They didn't listen to the judges and bowed themselves down to other gods again. "They turned aside quickly."

v. 18—God was moved to pity because of their groaning.

v. 19—When the judge died, they turned back to more corrupt ways than their fathers.

Why do people do that? What is the attraction of the religion of the world? The reason it is so appealing is that instead of depending on God's grace and mercy, religion encourages my ego into thinking that I can manipulate God into doing what I want. By my devotion or commitment or sacrifice, I can get God to do what I want Him to do. The problem is, the God of Israel had an agenda—He wanted the people to do what He wanted them to do, which was not necessarily what they wanted to do.

Chapter 3

v. 1—He speaks of the nations left in the land. The third generation did not know war. (They did not know God either.) God left the Canaanites in the land to test them and to teach them war.

v. 2—That they might be taught war.

v. 3—Lists some of the nations, including the five cities of the Philistines.

v. 4—They were for testing Israel to see if they would obey the commandments of God. The test was whether or not they would go to war. Were they willing to learn war. The question is the same to you and I. Are you willing to learn war, to go to war, and teaching your children to go to war with the ways of the world. Or are you keeping them from learning war. Christian schools, Christian entertainment, etc. to keep Christians away from the world rather than going to war with the temptations of the world. On the one hand, God wants us to be rid of our sin, but on the other hand, the sin nature is still there and needs to be warred against. This war is fought in two ways: the inner struggle against our sin nature and the outer struggle against demonic powers (Ephesians 6). We're not to be at war with the people of the world but the ways of the world, which are of Satan

Othniel, the First Judge

v. 7—The children of Israel sinned and forgot their God. It is too uncomfortable to sin and remember God. They served the Baals (because they give them what they want). They did not necessarily sin in the sight of each other. When you forget God, two things happen to your possibilities: they get broader and shallower. In Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel, God said that now nothing would be impossible for them. Sin broadened their possibilities. But they did not deepen their possibilities. When you choose to follow God, your possibilities get narrower and deeper.

v. 8—The anger of God was against Israel. It comes from the justice of God. The reason it is right for God to be angry at His enemies and not right for us to be angry at our enemies, is because He is the standard for righteousness, and we are not. Israel was sold into the hands of the enemies.

v. 9—They cried to the Lord. God raised up the first judge—Othniel, Caleb's nephew.

v. 10—The Spirit of God came upon Othniel, he judged Israel, and then he went out to war. The good guys go to war as a means to obedience.

v. 11—The land had rest for 40 years, and Othniel died.

Ehud, the Second Judge

v. 12—The sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of God.

v. 13—The enemy, King Eglon of Moab (a descendant of Lot), recruited his relatives the Ammonites (also a descendant of Lot). Also the Amalekites (south of Dead Sea). These three on east side of Dead Sea, possessed Jericho.

v. 15—Ehud from a people known as left-handed warriors (20:16).

v. 16—Made a long sword and put it on Ehud's right thigh, to be reached by his left hand. They hid it under his cloak.

v. 17—Eglon of Moab, a very fat man. Ehud made a tribute to Eglon.

v. 19—When he went by the idols at Gilgal, Ehud turned around and came back to Eglon.

v. 20—Ehud has a secret message for Eglon from God.

v. 21—Ehud, with his left hand, took the sword from his thigh.

v. 22—He stuck the sword in Eglon's fat belly.

v. 23—Ehud escapes and closes and locks the doors behind him.

v. 24—The servants thought Eglon was on the toilet.

v. 25—They wait a time. But it was too long, so they took the key to check on him. They found him dead.

v. 26—Ehud goes back pass the idols at Gilgal and into the hill country of Ephraim.

v. 27-30—So they chased the Moabites, killing 10,000 Moabites. The land had rest for eighty years.

Shamgar, the Third Judge

v. 31—We know very little about him. We assume he is a judge because he is listed here and he struck down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad and saved Israel.

Chapters 4-5

Deborah, the Fourth Judge

v. 1—The children of Israel did evil again.

v. 2—God sold them into the hand of Jabin, King of Canaan, from Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim (Megiddo).

v. 3—Israel cried to the Lord, for Sisera had 900 iron chariots and oppressed Israel for 20 years. In Joshua 17:18 God said to drive out the Canaanites, even though they had iron chariots.

v. 4—Deborah, a prophetess.

v. 5—Sitting under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel. The sons of Israel came to her for judgment.

Seven observations about Deborah:

(1) She was a prophetess.

(2) The Israelite men sought her out for judgment in a specific place.

(3) She was probably older than most because she called herself “a mother in Israel” (5:7).

(4) She and Othniel are the most favorable of the judges.

(5) Her prophetic advice included how to go to war (v. 9, 14).

(6) She is a writer (of the Psalm in chapter 5).

(7) She refused to personally lead men (4:6). She summoned Barak to do that. She was even reluctant to go with him into battle and announced God’s penalty against Barak because he wanted her to go.

So she judged men and gave God’s prophetic word to men, but she was not willing to lead men. She gave wisdom, advice, and information. That’s okay for women. But leading men is not okay.

v. 6—She summoned Barak from the Naphtali area in north Galile (maybe Tiberias) near where Sisera is. She may have called him because of revelation from God as a prophetess. She tells him to gather 10,000 men at Mt. Tabor.

v. 7—God will draw Sisera out to the River Kishon.

v. 8—Barak won’t go without Deborah. It’s conditional obedience. (Better than no obedience.) Barak had more confidence in the presence of Deborah than in the word of God. We tend to do that with spiritual leaders also.

v. 9—His conditional obedience had only a partial reward. Deborah would go with him but the honor of the victory would go to a woman. That was okay with Barak. Is that true of us? Are we willing to have less faith and less rewards? Probably.

v. 10—Barak calls together the 10,000. And Deborah went along.

v. 11—Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites. This verse is a sort of parenthesis to the action. Hodab is the brother-in-law of Moses, not the father-in-law. Ruel (Jethro) is Moses’ father-in-law. He had seven daughters and Hodab. One of those daughters (Zipporah) is Moses’ wife. Probably the son took over the family when Jethro died, so Moses would relate to him as father-in-law. Also, the Hebrew root can mean any in-law relationship. The Kenites continue to cause problems. They hang around Israel but are not necessarily loyal to Israel.

v. 12—Then they told Sisera that Barak had 10,000 men on Mt. Tabor,

- v. 13—Sisera got his 900 iron chariots near Megiddo at the Kishon River
- v. 14—Deborah said now was the time God would deliver.
- v. 15—God routed Sisera. How did that happen? In chapter 5 we're told the God sent rain and the Kishon flooded and became muck and the iron chariots got stuck and the horses kicked and flayed in the muck.
- v. 16—Barak destroyed them near Megiddo.
- v. 17—On foot, Sisera fled the army and heads east toward Tiberias and Heber's tent. He is gone but Jael is there. He went there because there was peace between Heber and Jabin.
- v. 18—Jael invited Sisera into the tent. Jael obeyed God instead of her husband's decision of peace with the Canaanites. She made a decision contrary to her husband's when her husband's decision was contrary to God.
- v. 21—She gave him some milk, then took a tent peg and nailed his head through the temple into the ground. She acted quickly. She seized the moment of opportunity. She used what was handy and what she was familiar with. If you have a mentality to be obedient to God, you may have to act quickly with what you have at hand and what you are familiar with.
- v. 2—Praise for the leaders and the volunteers. (She does not consider herself as one of these leaders, see v. 9.) It is literally "the people who offered themselves" (as Leviticus 7:16-23 "free will offering").
- v. 4—God went from Seir (mountains on east side of Dead Sea down to Red Sea).
- v. 5—"This Sinai"—She is equating this with these mountains of Seir on the east side of the Red Sea (not in the Sinai Peninsula).
- v. 6-8—She talks about the conditions before this battle: (1) The highways were deserted, travellers went a round-about way because of danger on roads or military control of roads by Sisera. (2) The peasantry ceased gleaning in the fields. (3) New gods were chosen, probably Israel's idolatry. (4) War was in the gates. Not a shield or spear was seen because of control by Sisera.
- v. 9—Her heart goes out to the commanders of Israel.
- v. 10-11—General call to worship because of the prosperity that exists now after the battle. Rejoice and give credit to God.
- v. 12—They came to her for help.
- v. 13-15—She gives the 5 1/2 tribes (Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir [half tribe of Manasseh in Numbers 26:29], Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali) who volunteered praise for helping in battle.
- v. 16-18—She criticizes the 4 1/2 tribes (Reuben, Gilead [Gad and other half tribe of Manasseh], Dan, Asher) who did not participate in the battle. Judah and Simeon not mentioned in the song.
- v. 19—The battle itself. They fought the kings of Canaan near the waters of Megiddo.
- v. 20—The stars of heaven, maybe lightening and rain.
- v. 21—The torrent of Kishon, from great rain.
- v. 22—The horses' hoofs thrashing while iron chariots were stuck.
- v. 23—Curses a city of Meroz (don't know where this is) because they did not help in the battle in the midst of a region which did help.
- v. 24-27—Tribute to the woman Jael: (1) She was on God's side against the will of her husband. (2) Her careful strat-

egy, a well-thought-out execution. (3) Her use of the familiar and common things to do the will of God. She was not a prophet or a scholar but she used what she had to obey the will of God. (4) Her decisive execution of her plan. She had no hesitation.

v. 22-30—The description of the mother of Sisera. Wondering why Sisera was late coming back from battle, fantasizing him dividing up the spoils.

Some contrasts in the song:

(1) Deborah was obedient to the word of God alone, and Barak was unwilling to follow the word of God only.

(2) The 5 1/2 tribes who helped and the 4 1/2 who didn't.

(3) Heber the Kenite and his wife Jael. He made peace with the enemy. She killed the enemy.

(4) v. 31, the conclusion, the enemies of God are to perish, those who love God are like the rising sun in its might.

(5) Deborah, Barak, and Jael contrasted to Sisera, his mother, and Jabin.

(6) The city of Meroz and Jael, the city which did not help in the midst of others who did. Jael is one who helped in the midst of those who didn't.

(7) A mother in Israel (Deborah) and the mother of Sisera. True hope vs. false hope.

Chapters 6-9

Gideon, the Fifth Judge

v. 1—Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and He gave them into the hands of Midian. For us, when we do evil in the sight of the Lord, He will turn us over to the world. That means we will lose rewards in heaven, we are out of fellowship with God. He has not abandoned us any more than He has abandoned the Israelites, but it seems like it because we are not in communion with God. Also, God when turns us over to the world today, it probably means greater prosperity but greater immorality. Penalty is increased anxiety, stress, conflict, divorce, etc. Before the 1900s the objective was holiness. After the industrial revolution (1900s) the objective is happiness. Before the 1900s appetites were seen as things which are to be controlled. Now appetites are things to be served.

v. 3—The Midianites (east of Red Sea, also relatives of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law) recruited the Amalekites (east of Jordan between Dead Sea and Red Sea).

v. 4—They destroyed the produce as far as Gaza.

v. 5—They came in with a huge number of people and camels, like locusts they devastated the land. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his second wife Ketura in Genesis 25:1-2. In general, they were always considered enemies of Israel.

v. 6—Israel cried to the Lord.

v. 8—God sends a prophet, who is not named. He does not announce deliverance. Instead: (1) He reviewed their history, that it was God who delivered them from Egypt. (2) He reminded them of the word of God, especially the commands against idolatry. (3) He pointed out their disobedience. It was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted deliverance, not to be told what they did was wrong.

v. 11—The second appearance in the book of the angel of the Lord (Jesus). He sat under an oak tree in Ophrah, belonging to the father of Gideon. Gideon is beating wheat in a wine press, a hole in the ground. Normally it was done on top of a hill so the wind could blow away the chaff. But he is hiding so the Midianites would not see it and steal it.

v. 12—The Lord is with Gideon, O valiant warrior. God saw Gideon as what he would be not what he was.

v. 13—Gideon asked, If God is with us, why are we suffering? Where are all the miracles that our fathers have told us about? Apparently the fathers told of the miracles of God but not the commands of God. Now God has abandoned us into the hands of the Midianites. Gideon's 3 mistakes in his thinking: (1) He assumed that suffering indicates that God is not with us. (2) He thought the presence of God was evidenced only by miracles. (3) He thought problems means that God has abandoned us to the mercy of the source of the problems. One positive thing about Gideon (maybe why God chose him to be the judge), Gideon looked for a solution from God, not the idols of the Gentiles, even though his own father's house had idols. When he was suffering, he complained to God about it, he did not turn to

other gods. If you are angry with God about your situation, it's okay to complain to God. You just have to apologize. But if you abandon God for the ways of the world, then you are going to be liable to the judgment of God. Gideon was never reprimanded by God for complaining to God.

v. 14—God said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from Midian." What strength was that? The strength "I have sent you."

v. 17—How am I do that when I am the least and the youngest? If I have found favor, give me a sign. Gideon had hesitant faith. It is a legitimate request. He's not doubting God. He's making sure it is indeed God he is talking to, since the person looked like a normal man, maybe a Midianite deceiver. It's good to test the spirits (1 John 4:1-4).

v. 18—Don't leave. I'll bring an offering.

v. 19—He got a significant sacrifice, since food was scarce. Worship is sacrifice.

v. 20—Put the sacrifice on a rock.

v. 21—The angel put out a staff and fire sprang out and consumed the meat. Nothing special about the rock. Any rock would do. Interesting the angel had a walking staff.

v. 22—Then Gideon realized it was God whom he was seeing face to face. This was God the Son, not God the Father (no one shall see the Father and live—Exodus 33:20). In John 1:18, no man has seen God the Father at any time. But the Son has declared Him. Therefore, God the Son is who Gideon saw.

v. 23—God tells Gideon he will not die because he saw God the Son, not God the Father.

v. 24—Gideon built an altar, usually indicates the presence of God. Named it the "The Lord is Peace," and it is still there at the writing of the book (at the time of Samuel). Ophrah of the Abiezites, descendants of Joseph through Manasseh.

v. 25—That same night, the Lord came to Gideon and gives him some commands. He is to take 2 bulls, one to pull down the altars to Baal (made of stone) that belonged to his father and cut down the Asherah (made of wood).

v. 26—Build an altar to the Lord on the top of the stronghold. Ophrah at western base of Moreh, so perhaps this is at top of Moreh. Then he was to sacrifice the second bull on the altar.

v. 27—He did it that same night. He took 10 men of his servants. Even though the times were poor, they still had servants, and Gideon has servants of his own apart from his father's.

v. 28—When the men of the city arose in the morning and realized what happened, they wanted to know who did this.

v. 29—Someone tells them that Gideon did it.

v. 30—They go to Gideon's father and want him to bring Gideon out so he can die for doing this. They were willing to kill to defend their sin. A typical scenario. We sin, we suffer because of our sin, then we meet the suffering with more of the sin that caused the suffering, then we defend the sin that caused the suffering. They were willing to kill Gideon because their sin had become their security.

v. 31—But Gideon's father said, "Why doesn't Baal plead for himself?" Why doesn't Baal defend himself?

v. 32—Gideon's name is changed to Jerubbaal, "let Baal contend for himself."

v. 33—Then the enemies assembled, crossed over, and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

v. 34—The Spirit of the Lord "clothed" Gideon. The work of the Holy Spirit is different in every age, but no age is without the work of the Holy Spirit. Today He indwells individual believers.

v. 35—He gathers Abiezites and he gathers four of the northern tribes.

v. 36—Gideon tests the Spirit, after he gathers the troops.

v. 37-40—He puts out the fleece for testing the Spirit, not for direction. He already knew what God had told him to do. Putting out the fleece has become a common phrase for Christians to find out God's will. But notice: (1) It was the fruit of unbelief, not the fruit of belief. (2) It was not for guidance or to determine God's will. God's will was already clearly revealed. (3) It was testing God, not trusting God. (4) God did not treat it as sinful but weakness. Christ told the disciples who thought they would drown in the storm that they had "little faith." Christ did not reject the disciples for it, nor did He reject Gideon for it. It's not ideal, but maybe you'll find yourself in that situation. This is not a situation of not knowing the will of God. It's not having the faith to obey the will of God. If you don't know God's will, look to His Word, not a fleece experience. If it's not in His Word, then He has not spoken about it. If it is in His Word, and you don't have the courage to do it, then ask Him for the courage to do what He has commanded you to do. For example, staying married to a bad husband or wife, being honest to a dishonest customer, loving your enemies, etc.

v. 7:1-2—Gideon camps near Herod Springs. God says there is too many of the Israelites because they would become boastful.

v. 3—Let's send home whoever is afraid. 22,000 go home. 10,000 remain.

v. 4—God said, "That's still too many."

v. 5—Bring the people to the water to drink. He doesn't tell them how to drink. But He tells him to separate those who lap from those who kneel. There is nothing in this text to say one way is better than another. If it were, that would be a reason to boast.

v. 6-7—That narrowed the men down to 300. And God said He would deliver with the 300. Formula for ministry: God uses us to do His work. God says, "I will do it with you." Christ said, "I will build My church" (with or without you), but if you are willing, with you.

v. 9—That same night, the Lord said to arise and go against the camp of the Midianites across the valley by Moreh.

v. 10—God knows Gideon is afraid. So tells him to go with his servant across the valley to the camp of the Midianites. God didn't wait for Gideon to ask for any more signs! Instead, He gave him what he didn't ask for.

v. 11—He sneaked into the Midianite camp.

v. 12—The Midianites were as numerous as locusts in the valley.

v. 13-14—They hear a Midianite telling a dream. Another Midianite says the dream means they will lose to Gideon. Observations: God gave the Midianite man the dream and his friend the interpretation of the dream. Barley is the bread of poor people, therefore representing the Israelites. God told Gideon to go to the camp at exactly the right moment. God protected Gideon as he was sneaking into the camp, and God lowered the morale of the soldiers in the Midianite camp. As a result, He gave courage to Gideon.

v. 15—When Gideon hears the interpretation of the dream, he worships God. Observations: (1) True worship came about from the Word of God. Nothing physical had happened yet. Their situation had not changed at all. The odds were still 135,000 to 300. But confidence in the Word of God produced faith which produced worship. Don't call people without confidence in the Word of God to have faith in the Word of God, and don't call people without faith to worship. (2) Faith does not require any particular place. Gideon worshipped right in the middle of the enemy camp. You are always in the presence of God and can worship Him. (3) Worship, which is based in faith, which is based in the truth of the Word of God, motivates others to action for God. Gideon came back to the camp, and his confidence led to victory.

v. 16—Gideon gives instructions. He divides them into 3 groups, gives them torches for inside the pitchers. There is the sovereignty of God plus the strategy of the people.

v. 19—They came in the middle watch (about 10:00 at night). They blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers.

v. 20—A sword for the Lord and for Gideon.

- v. 21—The Midianites went into mass confusion.
- v. 22—They fled to various places (we don't know where these places are, except across the Jordan River from where they are).
- v. 24—Gideon sends messengers to those who had left and re-recruits them. They come down to the Jordan.
- v. 25—They capture and kill the two main leaders of the Midianites.
- v. 8:1-3—A complaint—some from the tribe of Ephraim wanted to be the leading tribe. Not too serious a complaint. Gideon tells them they did good in the clean-up operation. They actually got to kill the two leaders. (At this point, Gideon has not killed anyone.) It satisfied them.
- v. 4—Gideon plus 300 cross the Jordan, just north of the Jabbok, and pursue those who are left of the Midianites.
- v. 7—They are very tired, so they asked the men of Succoth for bread, who won't give it to him. So Gideon says when he comes back, he will thrash them.
- v. 8-9—The men of Penuel answer the same way. So Gideon says he will tear down their tower.
- v. 10—He continues to pursue the 15,000 men who were left.
- v. 11—Gideon attacks the unsuspecting camp. Good strategy. A surprise.
- v. 13—He came back to those who would not help him.
- v. 14—He captured a youth and asks him who the elder leaders were. The lad gives him the names of 77 men.
- v. 16—He drags them through the thorns.
- v. 17—He tore down the tower in Penuel.
- v. 18—He questions the leaders of the Midianites he has captured. What kind of people did they kill at Tabor? They said they looked like Gideon.
- v. 19—They were Gideon's relatives.
- v. 20—Gideon wanted his son to kill them, but the boy doesn't have the courage.
- v. 21—So Gideon kills them himself.
- v. 22—The men of Israel want Gideon and his sons to set up a dynasty to rule over Israel.
- v. 23—But Gideon refused to rule over them.
- v. 24—But he makes a request that each of them give him an earring from the spoil (they were Ishmaelites, who were traders with much gold). Once again Gideon does a right and wrong thing.
- v. 25—They gave him the gold.
- v. 27—The ephod was a garment worn by a priest. He placed it in Ophrah. All Israel played the harlot there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his household. A false worship. No indication of the reaction of God. But we have a statement that it was the wrong thing—a "snare" to he and his household. The right thing was to not be king. The wrong thing was to make this ephod. He made a place and object of worship. It seems like the object of worship (the ephod) was to be an aid to worship. Instead the place of worship became the object of worship, and a snare which made worship into idolatry. "Played the harlot" is generally used of idolatry. It's a phrase used of worshipping some-

thing other than the God of Israel. Here it is used of an object designated to be used to worship the God of Israel. We can conclude that any physical object used for worship, from an icon to a church building, can become an idol which leads the people away from God. Anytime you make a thing or a place, you run the danger of it becoming a snare. The aid to worship becomes the object of worship.

Summary statement about Gideon: He is like many of us. A mixed bag of inconsistencies. (1) He misused his opportunities to lead Israel back to obedience to the Word of God. He began following the Word of God. He ended focusing on what he had made instead of the Word of God. (2) He served God, but he also served his own interests. (3) He was forgiven of his hesitancy, but he was unwilling to forgive the hesitancy of Succoth and Penuel. (4) He told the people God should rule over them, not he or his sons, but he wanted to create a place and object of worship not prescribed in the Word of God.

We have to conclude that Gideon did a lot of good (v. 35, Hebrews 11:32-34), but his good did not result in the next generation worshipping God. His good was that he destroyed the Baals and Asheroth in obedience to God, he served God in battle, he refused to replace God as leader of the people, but instead of teaching people the law, the Word of God, he set up a place and object of worship. He separated worship from faith based on truth. He was not involved in the lives of people. He did not disciple the people, even his own household. He went off and sort of retired. Right when he was in the place of greatest influence in Israel, he backed off.

v. 9:1-3—Gideon had 70 sons. His son Abimelech went to Shechem because his mother was from Shechem. He suggested that he should be a ruler over Shechem, and they agreed because he was their relative.

v. 4—He hired some worthless men to follow him.

v. 5—He went down to Ophrah and killed all his brothers but one, Jotham the youngest, who had hid himself.

v. 6—They made Abimelech king.

v. 7—Jotham stood on top of Mt. Gerizim and tells a story to the men of Shechem.

v. 8-13—The first 3 trees are like Gideon's other sons. They refused to rule over the people. But the trees wanted a king to rule over them. The first three trees claim that in order to be a ruler, they would have to give up some of their natural gifts. To be a king over the people would mean to give up your natural contribution. There is something wrong in someone desiring to be a king unless they do it in providing a service consistent with their gifts, which, of course, they all claim to do, but few, in truth, actually do that. Jotham is not trying to replace Abimelech here. Like Samuel later on, he's objecting to Abimelech being king.

v. 14—The bramble bush is the only one who bears no fruit. It's usually a bush of thorns which doesn't even provide any shade. Jotham is accusing Abimelech of having nothing to offer, that he is like the bramble bush.

v. 16—He asks if they have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king.

v. 17—His proof that they have not done that is that they killed all Gideon's other sons, Jotham's and Abimelech's brothers.

v. 20—He makes a prediction that if they have not done this in sincerity, which they have not, then fire will consume Shechem and Abimelech.

v. 22—Jotham escapes, and Abimelech rules for three years.

v. 23—What does God think about all this? God sent an evil spirit (a demon) between Abimelech and the men of Shechem (same as 1 Samuel 16:14). God used a demon to bring about justice against Abimelech and the people of Shechem.

v. 24-25—Abimelech and the men of Shechem ended up at war with each other.

v. 26—The men of Shechem recruit Gaal and warriors for hire.

v. 27-55—Abimelech destroys Shechem and escapes but a woman drops a millstone on his head, crushing his skull. He didn't die, so he asked his armorbearer to kill him so he wouldn't have the disgrace of being killed by a woman.

v. 56-57—“Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech which he had done to his father in killing his 70 brothers. God also paid back all the wickedness of the men of Shechem.

Lessons from the life of Abimelech:

- (1) One wicked person can destroy the work of many people. The story of the history of the world.
- (2) A desire for power on the part of a certain person usually destroys that same person.
- (3) Jotham's parable: be yourself and bear fruit. Don't seek a position of power. If you find yourself in a position of authority, then do your job for the glory of God, like you would do any job.
- (4) God usually delays His judgment—at least it seems so from our perspective—but He never neglects judgment. One way or another, every act will be brought to judgment.

Chapter 10

Tola, the Sixth Judge

v. 1—After Abimelech died, Tola of Issachar arose to save Israel. He lived in hill country of Ephraim.

v. 2—He judged 23 years, died, and was buried there.

Jair, the Seventh Judge

v. 3—From Gilead (transJordan area, south of the Sea of Galilee and north of the Dead Sea). He judged 22 years.

v. 4—He had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys, and had 30 cities in Gilead.

v. 5—He died and was buried.

Conclusions about these two judges: (1) Since they were called judges, we can assume they determined the judgment of God in some way. (2) Since no enemy is mentioned, they probably kept Israel pretty much from idolatry. (3) But like the other judges, they failed to disciple the next generation.

Jephthah, the Eighth Judge

v. 6—Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the 7 different kinds of gods: Baals, Ashtaroth, etc. They forsook God.

v. 7—The anger of God was against Israel. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines (from the West) and the Ammonites (from the East), two disconnected oppressors.

v. 8—The oppression was first in Gilead, for 18 years.

v. 9—The Ammonites crossed Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.

v. 10—“We have sinned against You, God, and served the Baals.”

v. 11-12—God spoke to them, probably through a prophet, telling how He delivered them from many peoples.

v. 13—But Israel forsook God. So He will deliver them no more.

v. 14—“Go ask those gods to deliver them.”

v. 15—But the people cried out to Him, and He changed His mind. Sovereignty and free will. (1) They say, “We've sinned,”

v. 16—(2) They put away the foreign gods, (3) they served the Lord. God could then bear the misery of Israel no

longer. It was because His own soul grieved, lit. His soul was grieved with the misery of Israel. Repentance: they admit they sinned, they put away the idols from among them, and served God.

v. 17-18—The sons of Israel gathered at Mizpah. Who will become the head over us?

Different condition of v. 13 than v. 16. We've got to learn the character of God from the Word of God. Don't separate the two, as legalists do. Legalists do with the law what the heathen do in Romans 1 (worship the creation rather than the Creator).

Chapter 11

v. 1-3—Background note about Jephthah. He was from Gilead, a valiant warrior, the son of a harlot (illegitimate son), therefore, his brothers ran him out of the house. He fled from them. Worthless fellows gathered around him. He lived in Tob, NE of Gilead. (Gilead is a descendant of Manasseh.)

v. 4—Ammon fights against Israel.

v. 5—The elders of Gilead want Jephthah to fight against the Ammonites.

v. 7—But they hadn't helped Jephthah when they drove him out of his father's house.

v. 9—If God gives me the victory, will I become your leader?

v. 10—The elders agreed.

v. 11—They go to Mizpah and make him their head.

v. 12—Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon. Why are you fighting against us?

v. 13—They said that Israel took away their land (from the Arnon to the Jabbok) when they came up from Egypt. Return their land peaceably.

v. 14—You're wrong. Israel did not take the land of Moab or Ammon.

v. 15-26—He explains what happens. Israel took the land from the Amorites, who are not related to the Ammonites. God forbid Israel from taking land from the Ammonites because they were relatives of Lot (Deuteronomy 2:19). God drove out the Amorites before Israel. Supposedly the Ammonites possess the land their gods drove out before them, so why complain what Israel's God did? When God drove away the Amorites, the land was given to Israel. Are you better than Balak, king of Moab, who did not fight against Israel for that land? For 300 years the Israelites lived in this land, and you never disputed their ownership of the land before.

v. 27—His conclusion—I've not sinned against you. And you are doing wrong by making war against me. So may the Lord be the judge between us and you.

v. 28—The King of Ammon disregarded the message. There was no reasonable answer for it, so just ignore it.

v. 29—The only mention of God in this section, when the Spirit of God comes upon Jephthah.

v. 30—Jephthah makes a vow (which Jesus said you shouldn't do). He says if God gives him victory over the Ammonites, whatever comes out of the door of his house, he will give to God.

v. 31—He would offer it as a burnt offering.

v. 32-33—He defeated the Ammonites with a great slaughter.

v. 34—When he came back home, his only daughter came out to meet him.

v. 35—He is brought low because he vowed to God and cannot take it back.

v. 36-37—The daughter said, Be it as you said, but let me go 2 months with my friends to mourn my virginity.

v. 39—She had no relations with a man.

v. 40—The daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate this four days a year.

Why make such a vow? You only have one child, and it's likely she would be the one coming out to greet him. I don't think she was offered as a burnt offering. Why?

(1) One inter-linear translates v. 31 as "whatever comes out of my door I will offer instead of a burnt offering." It was common to offer several animals as burnt offering after a victory, so he was saying he would offer whatever came out his door instead.

(2) The Mosaic Law strictly prohibits human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10).

(3) Sacrifices had to be carried out at the tabernacle by a Levite priest, who would not carry out a human sacrifice.

(4) Human sacrifice was unheard of in Israel, even by Baal worshippers, until the reign of King Ahab (2 Kings 16 and 21).

(5) A human sacrifice would be completely out-of-step with Jephthah's dedication to God.

(6) v. 37 and 39 sounds like her sacrifice was to remain a virgin. If she was going to be put to death, she would mourn that, not her virginity.

Therefore, I think Jephthah had his daughter in mind in the first place. It seem like "whoever comes out" would be his daughter. He didn't want his daughter to get married, so he made that part of the vow. Marriage was up to the father. The "burnt offering" was a figure of speech. Since the common thing was to offer an animal sacrifice, what would be the purpose of the vow to do what was already common to do?

Chapter 12

v. 1—The Ephraimites complain they weren't allowed to fight the Ammonites.

v. 2—When Jephthah called, they would come.

v. 4—Jephthah gets the men of Gilead together to fight against Ephraim (a civil war), not just over the insults but who would rule over Israel. The Ephraimites didn't want someone from Gilead ruling over Israel.

v. 5-6—They captured the fords of the Jordan. When anyone crossed the Jordan, they had to pronounce a word. If they had the wrong accent, they were killed.

v. 7—Jephthah judged Israel six years and was buried in Gilead.

Ibzan, the Ninth Judge

v. 8—From Bethlehem.

v. 9—Had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He tried to marry his children to Gentiles—a sin. He judged 7 years.

v. 10—He died and was buried in Bethlehem.

Elon, the Tenth Judge

v. 11-12—From Zebulun. He judged Israel 10 years and was buried in Zebulun.

Abdon, the Eleventh Judge

v. 13-15—He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, who rode on 70 donkeys. He judged Israel 8 years. He died and was buried in the hill country of Ephraim.

Chapters 13-16

Samson,, the Twelfth Judge

v. 1—The sons of Israel again did evil in the eyes of the Lord, not necessarily in their own eyes or the eyes of their elders. So God gave them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years.

v. 2—There's a man from Zorah, who is a Danite, and his name is Manoah. His wife had no children.

v. 3—The angel of God appeared to her (the third and last appearance in the book). He said she would now conceive and give birth to a son. This was God's initiative.

v. 4—Do not drink strong wine or eat anything unclean.

v. 5-7—And do not cut his hair. He'll be a Nazirite from the womb. Numbers 6:2-5 says the Nazirite Vow was 3 things: don't touch anything unclean, don't drink wine, and don't cut hair. Was to be voluntary, but in Samson's case it was not voluntary. It was from his birth. It was to be life long, but by his death, Samson broke every part of this vow. He would deliver Israel from the Philistines. Samson started it, Saul continued it, and David finished it. The man behind all this was Samuel. Samuel was born sometime when Samson was a young man. So they lived at the same time. While Samson was killing Philistines, Samuel was growing up in the tabernacle at Shilo. After Samson's death, Samuel anointed Saul and then later David, who eliminated the Philistine control over Israel. Samson will be a Nazirite to Elohim (God). The woman tells her husband all about it.

v. 8—Then Manoah prays and asks God to send the angel of God to them again to teach them what to do.

v. 9-11—God listened and sent the angel of God again to the woman while she is sitting in the field. She runs and gets her husband.

v. 12—He asks the angel of the Lord what the boy's vocation will be.

v. 13-14—The angel of the Lord did not answer the question. He just repeated the commands He previously made to the woman.

v. 15—Manoah wants to prepare food for Him.

v. 16—He will not eat the food, but you can make a sacrifice.

v. 17—Manoah wants to know His name.

v. 18—He says it is "Wonderful."

v. 19—The angel of God performed a miracle while Manoah and his wife watched.

v. 20—Then the angel of God ascended up in the flame of the altar.

v. 21-22—Manoah says they have seen God (Elohim) and is afraid they will die.

v. 23—But his wife said if they lived this long, they wouldn't die from seeing the angel.

v. 24—She conceives, and Samson is born. God blesses him.

v. 25—The Spirit of God began to stir him.

v. 14:1—Samson went to Timnah, across the Sorek Valley. He saw a girl he liked there, a daughter of the Philistines. This was part of the territory given to Dan. The Danites were to drive the Philistines out (Joshua 19:43).

v. 2—He tells his parents he wants this girl for a wife.

v. 3—They object because she is not an Israelite.

v. 4—The parents did not know it was of the Lord. This breaking of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 7:3, repeated in Joshua 23:12) was of the Lord so that He could begin the end of the Philistines. We have the greater good of God eliminating the Philistines and breaking His own law to do it.

v. 6—On the way to Timnah, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson, and he kills a lion but doesn't tell his parents.

v. 7—Samson went down to talk to her about the marriage.

v. 8—When Samson returned later, apparently for the wedding, the carcass of the lion had a beehive in it. He took some honey, ate some, gave some to his parents. He didn't tell them where it came from. (Perhaps not breaking Nazirite Vow because the Vow reads "human bodies." Most extend it to all dead bodies.)

v. 9—Samson's wedding took place a year or more before the Ark of the Covenant was lost to the Philistines in Aphek.

v. 11—A wedding party. Samson makes up a riddle about the honey in the lion. If they could tell him the answer to the riddle within the 7 days of the feast, he would give them 30 changes of clothes.

v. 15—On the fourth day, they come to Samson's wife and threaten her. If she doesn't tell them the answer to the riddle, they'll burn her father's house.

v. 16—She wept before Samson. "You only hate me, you do not love me."

v. 17—She wept before him the seven days of the feast.

v. 18—On the seventh day Samson told her the answer, and she told the Philistines. So they know the answer.

v. 19—The Spirit of the Lord came on Samson, he went down to Ashkelon and killed 30 other Philistines and took their garments to give to the Philistines at the wedding party. It was of God that these murders took place. God wants to get rid of the Philistines.

v. 20—Samson's wife was given to a companion, Samson's friend.

v. 15:1—Maybe a month or so later, during the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife. (Perhaps he had not seen her because he was angry about her telling the Philistines the answer to the riddle. He should have taken her with him to begin with. She was his wife. But he was driven by sexual desire, not to be a husband of a wife.) He came with a gift.

v. 2—Her father said he thought Samson didn't want her, so he gave her to someone else.

v. 4—He was really angry now. So he caught 300 foxes, turned them tail to tail, put torches inbetween them.

v. 5—He set set the foxes loose into the standing grain, vineyards, and groves of the Philistines.

v. 7—He would take revenge on Philistines and then he would quit. But revenge never quits. Samson's whole life was a series of revenges. Revenge destroys everyone involved as well as a lot of innocent people who are not involved. The only way to stop that is to love your enemy.

v. 8—Samson goes to the rock of Etam in Judah.

v. 11—3000 men of Judah come down to Samson. They are mad at him because the Philistines are over Judah, and they worry about what the Philistines will do to them now.

Applications: Many Christians today are similar to the men of Judah. Some observations:

(1) They assume they are under the world's system and need to co-operate with that. (2) They assume that the enemy of the world is an enemy of themselves.

(3) They agree with the world that the one who is opposing the world is the problem.

(4) For the men of Judah, peace with the world was more important than righteousness

(Jeremiah

6:14-16, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

v. 13—They want to bind Samson and give him back to the Philistines. He said okay, but just don't kill him.

v. 14-15—The Spirit of God came upon him, and he killed 1000 Philistines.

v. 18—Then he became thirsty, and he called on God. This is the first instance of Samson praying to God. He admitted he needed God after the battle as well as during the battle.

v. 20—He judged Israel for 20 years.

v. 16:1—Now, after the 20 years, he went to Gaza and saw a harlot there and went in to her. As with Samson, so with most of us. Samson had a problem controlling his sex life from the beginning to the end. Learn to go to war with your sin and Satan's world system. Don't expect the problems, or war, to go away. Although they can't be erased, they can be dealt with. To deal with them effectively is to realize that they cannot be eliminated. You can have success in dealing with them but you cannot eliminate them.

v. 3-4—The Philistines surrounded Gaza, but Samson took the doors of the city up somewhere near Hebron (about 20 miles away, all uphill).

v. 4—He finds another woman in the Sorek Valley, named Delilah. Satan will always go for your weakness. Ask yourself, What would it take for me to leave the path of discipleship? Would it be sex, the security of having more money, a bad marriage, disease or physical suffering, bad parents or children? If there is anything that would get you to leave the path of discipleship, no matter what it is, you are an accident looking for a place to happen. It's just a matter of time before you fall.

v. 6—The Philistines come to Delilah to get her to find out the secret to Samson's strength. He was probably not a big man because they are surprised at this strength. It was a supernatural strength.

v. 7-17—It took Delilah four tries to get to the truth. He told her 3 lies first. Samson finally tells her the truth about cutting his hair. Some things should be kept just between you and God.

v. 20—They cut his hair. She said, "The Philistines are upon you." Saddest phrase, "But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him." When we come to the place where we can sin and think it won't affect us, that is the saddest place. We think God won't leave, and we don't know when He has (God no longer using you). In 15:18, Samson gave God the credit for victory. In v. 20, Samson thinks he is the victor.

v. 21—The Philistines capture Samson and put out his eyes, and he became a grinder in the prison.

v. 22—The Philistines made a crucial mistake. They didn't keep his hair cut. So it grew long again.

v. 23—One day the Philistines have a party in the house of the god Dagon.

v. 28—After being tied to the pillars, Samson prays to God for strength one more time. He realizes that his strength comes not from his hair but from God. Nevertheless, God did not renew his strength until the conditions were restored (long hair). Also notice that Samson, to the very end, never departed from the course of revenge. He wanted to be avenged of the Philistines for his two eyes. He did not commit suicide. He gave his life in the destruction of the enemy. But revenge drove him.

Chapters 17-18

v. 1-4—A man in the hill country of Ephraim stole 1100 pieces of silver from his mother. She put a curse on whoever took it. He confessed. She's happy. She made a silver graven image from it.

v. 5—Numbers 3:5-10, Aaron and his sons were to be the priests. Any others who tried it were to be put to death. But Micah made one of his sons into a priest.

v. 7-8—A Levite from Bethlehem wanders through the country and comes to the house of Micah.

v. 9-12—Micah asks him to come and be a priest for Micah. He would give the Levite money, clothes, and place to stay. The Levite agrees.

v. 13—Micah says that now God would prosper him because he had a priest. Micah was a very religious man—had his own shrine, his own idols, and his own priest. In contrast to David, who refused to determine the will of God by

circumstances, the word of other people, or opportunity, Micah followed all three of those things.

v. 18:1—Reminds us there is no king in Israel. We begin the story of the migration of the Danites. Joshua gave them plenty of land (Judges 1:34) in northern Philistia, in the Sorek Valley up to Joppa. The area was occupied by the Amorites, who forced the Danites to live in the hills, so they were confined to a few towns, like Samson's home town of Zorah. Instead of fighting the Amorites and Canaanites and Philistines, they tried to find other land they could take more easily.

v. 2—The Danites sent 5 men out to see what they could find. "Go search the land."

v. 3—They come to the house of Micah and recognize the voice of the Levite (probably his accent). They asked him how he got there.

v. 4—Micah hired him to be a priest.

v. 5—They ask him to ask God whether their way will be prosperous.

v. 6—The priest said that God said it would be prosperous. How would you know if what you wanted to do was right or wrong if you ask a priest or pastor and they said it was okay to do? (such as divorcing your wife, marrying an unbeliever). You can only know from the written Word of God. The authority has to be in the Word of God, not the clergy. Notice the difference between this prayer request and that of Judges 1:1. This is in the context of a manmade worship center that violated the law. It had a graven image, idols, ephod, and a false priest. Here they were asking approval for what they wanted to do rather than what God wanted them to do. They were looking for approval rather than direction. They were looking for the approval of a religious leader not the word of God.

v. 7—They went up to Laish (near Mt. Hermon) and find a peaceful people of the Sidonians. They were isolated from other people.

v. 8-10—They came back home and told the Danites that this land is very good and we need to get up there quick and take it. It is a secure land, a prosperous land, therefore, it's God's will for us to be there!! Prosperity is the test.

v. 11-13—The Danites send 600 armed men out.

v. 14-15—They came to Micah's house.

v. 16-20—They want to take Micah's idols with them to Laish. So they steal them. The priest tried to stop them, so they bribe the priest with more money to come with them. They have a bigger congregation. Better to be priest to a whole tribe than to just one house!

v. 21—The priest's heart is glad, and he goes with them.

v. 22-25—Micah comes after them, but the Danites persuade him to go home because there are more Danites than Micah's men.

v. 26—So Micah went home empty-handed.

v. 27—The Danites continued on to Laish with the idol and priest. There they killed the people of Laish, all in the name of God.

v. 29—They renamed the city "Dan." Instead of fighting the Canaanites as God had commanded them, they took the easy way and killed the Laishites.

Applications:

(1) When you plan to disobey God, Satan will pave the way of your disobedience. Even if he didn't, you'd find one on your own. And you'd find someone to confirm it as being the right plan (maybe even a clergy!).

(2) Your conscience can no longer be your guide. As soon as your focus changes from the glory of God to your own goals, your conscience begins to weaken.

(3) Most departures from God are done in His name. Doing it in the name of "Jesus" doesn't make it right.

(4) Be careful and suspicious of a plan or a lifestyle where you only have to take care of yourself and don't have to trust God to take care of you. God told the Danites to take the territory He assigned and that He would take care of them. The Danites said they had a better idea—they'd find a territory that would take care of them. God's plan required them to go to war. And it wasn't easy.

(5) Be wary of fighting easy battles. The battles God has for you will probably be hard ones (because then you have to trust Him). Someone will always try to make those easier.

(6) Idolatry is to create a religion that gives you control, which gives you what you want.

(7) Don't situate yourselves far away from the Word of God and the people of God. The Danites put themselves up where they did not have contact or fellowship with either the rest of the Israelites or the temple of God.

Chapters 19–21

v. 1—“Those days” was near the time when Joshua died because in 20:28 it says it was the time of Eleazar, Aaron's son, was priest. There was no king in Israel. When there was a king in Israel (1 Kings 12:25-33), there was no improvement. A certain Levi was living in the hill country of Ephraim. He took a concubine from Bethlehem. Usually a concubine and her children had no inheritance unless given one by the man, compared to the wife who did.

v. 2—She played the harlot, so he sent her home to Bethlehem.

v. 3-7—Then the Levite goes there to get her. The father-in-law convinces him to stay.

v. 8-10—On the fifth day, they start back up north. They come to Jebus (Jerusalem), but they won't stay there because they are Gentiles.

v. 11-14—They come to Gibeah, and it is dark, and Gibeah belongs to the Jews, so they stayed there.

v. 15—They sat in the open square of the city, looking for someone to take them in.

v. 16-20—A man from the hill country of Ephraim invites them to stay with him. But the men of the place were Benjaminites. But he warns them about the people of the place.

v. 21—He feeds them.

v. 22—While they were eating, worthless men from the city come pounding on the door of the house because they want to have sexual relations with the man.

v. 23—The old man tries to convince them not to do that.

v. 24—He gives these men the concubine.

v. 25—They rape her all night.

v. 27—In the morning, they find her by the door. Dead. Why didn't the Levite object to this? Obviously he objected in the morning. Two possibilities: (1) He may have been too drunk to know what was going on. (2) It may have been there was nothing he could do about it.

v. 28—He took the body to his home.

v. 29-30—He cut the body of the concubine into 12 pieces, and sent the pieces throughout the territory of Israel (assumed to be with some sort of explanation). Nothing like this rape and murder has happened in Israel before.

v. 20:1—All the chiefs of Israel (from Dan to Beersheba, from Gilead across the Jordan also) came to Mizpah.

v. 2—400,000 soldiers. Tell them the story.

v. 3-5—So the Levite tells them the story. They wanted to kill the Levite but instead ravished and killed the concubine.

v. 6-7—What should we do?

v. 8-9—No one will go home until they take care of this thing. They draw lots to choose 10% of them to go against Gibeah.

v. 12—They send a message to give the wicked men (sons of the devil) who did this act to the Israelites.

v. 13—But the Benjaminites would not give up the wicked men.

v. 14—So Benjamin gathered to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

v. 15—26,700 men of Benjamin go to battle, 700 of these were left-handed (like Judge Ehud), and could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Why did thousands of people die in this conflict?

(1) Instead of dealing with this problem as a spiritual problem, the Benjaminites dealt with it as a physical problem.

(2) Instead of dealing with their sin, they tried to destroy the ones pointing out their sin.

(3) Instead of dealing with it internally, they dealt with it externally.

(4) Instead of dealing with it individually (the specific men who committed the act), they dealt with it corporately, with the whole tribe.

(5) Instead of realizing they were spiritually and morally weak, they believed they were physically strong, they thought they could win. They believed they had better warriors.

v. 17-21—Three days in a row the Benjaminites win the the battle. Day #1, the Israelites go to Bethel and inquire of God. They ask who should go up first. God says, "Judah." They lose 22,000 men.

v. 22-25—The next day they weep before the Lord. Shall we battle again? God says to go. That day they lost 18,000 men.

v. 26-27—This time they offer offerings, weep, fast before the ark of the covenant. They had a legitimate priesthood, ark, fasting, etc.

v. 28—Shall we yet battle again? Or should we stop going? Are they about to give up? God said, "Go, for tomorrow I'll deliver them into your hand."

v. 29— "So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah." Hadn't done that other days.

v. 30-31—It looked like they were doing what they had done before, so the Benjaminites went out against them as before. Killed 30 of them.

v. 32—Israel pretended to flee to draw the Benjaminites out.

v. 33-34—The battle was fierce. "but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them."

v. 35-48— "And the Lord struck Benjamin before Israel," so 25,100 Benjaminites died. So there were only 600 left.

v. 21:1-6—They almost had wiped out the tribe of Benjamin.

v. 7—What should we do for wives for the 600 men left? The Israelites had all taken an oath that they wouldn't give them any of their own daughters as wives.

v. 9-15—Jabesh-Gilead had not come to the meeting and did not take the oath, so they sent 12,000 warriors over there and found 400 virgins. But still 200 without wives.

v. 19—There is a feast every year at Shilo (possibly the feast of Deuteronomy 14:22-26).

v. 20—The men of Benjamin hid in the vineyards.

v. 21—Then they captured 200 virgins who were dancing in the feast.

v. 22-24—If the fathers complained, the Israelite chiefs would explain it to them.

Applications:

(1) Oaths are a bad idea because they make you a slave to circumstances. Oaths destroy a hierarchy of values because something more valuable may have to be sacrificed because of the oath. Evil may even have to be performed in order to keep the oath, or something not known at the time the oath was taken.

(2) Sin usually makes some innocent person suffer, and inevitably the younger people will suffer for the sins of the older people.

(3) When you refuse to deal with the evil in your life, those of us around you will one way or another have to deal with it. If we live with you, we'll have to live it, or as a community of believers if you don't live with us. Nearly every day, nearly every problem we deal with, is because of someone's sin they refused to deal with.

v. 25—If God is not king, people exist only to be used by other people.

