

2017

# The Book of Judges

Despicable People Doing Deplorable Things





# Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION .....	7
The Title of the Book	
Historical and Religious Background	
The Composition of the Book	
Theme and Purpose of the Book	
PART ONE: THE FAILURE OF THE ISRAELITES TO CONQUER CANAAN (1:1 – 3:6)	
I. Prologue: Israel’s Failure to Possess the Land (1:1 – 2:5)	
A. Half-hearted Discipleship (1:1-36) .....	15
<i>Promise-keeping God</i>	
<i>Brave Spirituality</i>	
<i>Successes and Failures of Judah</i>	
<i>Common Sense</i>	
<i>Failures of the Remaining Tribes</i>	
B. Forgetting Who God Is (2:1-5) .....	21
<i>God Assessment of Israel</i>	
<i>Israel’s Disobedience Exposed</i>	
<i>The Tension of Judges</i>	
II. Second Prologue: Summary of the Cycles of Sin and Salvation (2:6 – 3:6)	
A. Living among Idols (2:6-19) .....	27
<i>A Life Well Lived</i>	
<i>Another Generation</i>	
<i>The Repeated Cycle</i>	
B. Spiritual Prostitution (2:16-3:6) .....	33
<i>Married Prostitute</i>	
<i>The Judge or the Idols?</i>	
<i>Gods, Plural</i>	
<i>The Mercy of Judgment</i>	
PART TWO: THE SIX-FOLD CYCLE OF SIN AND SALVATION (3:7 – 16:31)	
III. The Aram-Naharaim and Othniel Cycle	
Remembering Who God Is (3:7-11) .....	39
<i>Heart-Forgetfulness</i>	
<i>How God Brings Revival</i>	

IV. The Moab and Ehud Cycle

Unexpected Deliverer (3:12-30) ..... 45  
*A Left-Handed Rescuer*  
*The Right (Left) Man*  
*Ehud: God's Type of Leader*  
*Think of What You Were*

V. Parenthesis 1: The Governorship of Shamgar (3:31) ..... 51

VI. The Canaanite and Deborah/Barak Cycle

Godly Ruler and Rescuer (4:1 – 5:31) ..... 53  
*A Godly Ruler*  
*A Godly Rescuer*  
*Death by Tent Peg*  
*God Wins*  
*Living with Two Perspectives*

VII. The Midianite and Gideon Cycle (6:1 – 9:57)

The Weak Mighty Warrior (6:1-16) ..... 59  
*Sermon before Salvation*  
*If God Is with Us*

The Uncertainty of the Leader (6:16-40). ..... 65  
*Two Altars*  
*The Famous Fleeces*

Triumph in Weakness (7:1-25) ..... 71  
*You Need Fewer Men*  
*My Weakness, His Strength*  
*The Loaf of Barley*  
*The God Who Reassures*  
*The Mighty Warrior*  
*Victory*

Ruling as Kings (8:1-31) ..... 79  
*Teaching a Lesson*  
*The Danger of Success*  
*King Gideon?*

Abimelech's Conspiracy and Downfall (9:1-57) ..... 83  
*Grasping for Power*  
*The Thornbush King*  
*The Fire of the Thornbush*  
*Is God Absent?*

VIII. Paranthesis 2: The Governorships of Tola and Jair (10:1-5) .....	89
IX. The Ammonite and Jephthah Cycle (10:6 – 12:7)	
The Outcast (Judges 10:6 – 11:11) .....	90
<i>Sold into Slavery</i>	
<i>I Will No Longer Save You</i>	
<i>The Crime Boss</i>	
Failed Diplomacy (Judges 11:12 – 12:7) .....	95
<i>The Pen before the Sword</i>	
<i>A Terrible Vow</i>	
<i>War within Israel</i>	
X. Paranthesis 3: The Governorships of Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8-15).....	101
XI. The Philistine and Samson Cycle (13:1 – 16:31)	
Miraculous Birth and Monastic Life (13:1-25).....	102
<i>Whose Eyes Matter?</i>	
<i>You Will Have a Son</i>	
Vindictive, Self-absorbed, Emotionally Immature, Sexually Addicted Man (14:1 – 15:20).....	107
<i>A Philistine Woman</i>	
<i>God at Work through Sin</i>	
<i>A Lion, a Bet and a Woman</i>	
<i>Leadership without Peace</i>	
The Weak, Defeated Victor (16:1-31) .....	113
<i>Destructive Pattern of Behavior Continues</i>	
<i>Dangerous and Deceitful Delilah</i>	
<i>The Final Showdown: Yahweh vs. Dagon</i>	
<i>Samson: A Picture of Christ</i>	
PART THREE: THE DEGENERATION OF ISRAEL (17:1 – 21:25)	
XII. The Religious Degeneration of Israel (17:1 – 18:31) .....	121
XIII. The Moral Degeneration of Israel (19:1 – 21:25) .....	127



# INTRODUCTION

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## The Title of the Book

“The English name for the Book of Judges derives from the Vulgate [the late fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible], which called this biblical composition *Liber Iudicum*... [this represents] literal translations of the Hebrew name *Sopetim*, traditionally rendered ‘judges.’”<sup>1</sup> This name was chosen because of the activities of the central characters of the book. However, this name can be misleading. What’s more, it leads to the question...

### *If this is the Book of Judges, who are they judging?*

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The first reason this name is misleading is because none of these individuals functioned in the way that we normally attribute as the work of a judge. “Indeed the title ‘the Judge’ is only used of a specific individual once, in Jephthah’s speech before the Ammonite delegation (11:27), where it applies not to Jephthah but to Yahweh. Before these foreigners, the Israelite leader presents the God of Israel as a universal divine judge who settles disputes between nations.”

### *So why do we call this the ‘Book of Judges’?*

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In Judges 2:16, the Bible describes the leaders of Israel as judges. It says, “<sup>16</sup>Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.” This role was primarily a leadership role, rather than a judicial one. “Of those usually considered to be ‘judges,’ only Deborah is said to have served in what might be understood as a judicial capacity (4:4-5). But even here it is doubtful the verb should be understood in the common judicial sense.”<sup>2</sup>

The judges functioned more as deliverers than judicial arbiters in Israel. This is evidenced in Judges 2:16-19—the only place in the Book of Judges where the noun is used to refer to the leaders of Israel. The Bible says,

<sup>16</sup>Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. <sup>17</sup>Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. <sup>18</sup>Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. <sup>19</sup>But whenever the judge died,

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<sup>1</sup> Block, Daniel. *The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth*. (Unites States: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 22.

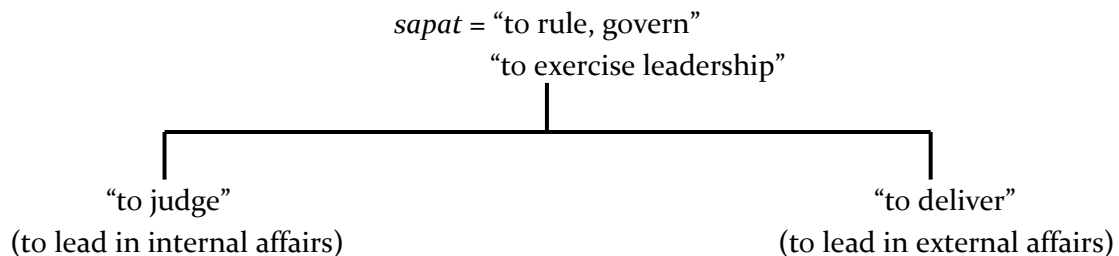
they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. (ESV)

### *Did the judges do more than judge?*

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Daniel Block notes that these verses reveal some important facts<sup>3</sup> about this group of people we refer to as ‘judges.’ First, Jehovah God is the source of the authority and power of the judges. And second, Jehovah God appointed them to this leadership position not for the purpose of judging internal affairs of the nation, but for delivering the nation from their enemies. Block further explains,<sup>4</sup>

In light of this evidence, our English term ‘judge’ obviously fails to capture the nature of the activity and role of Israel’s leaders in the Book of Judges. How then can they be called *sopetim*, which derives from the verb *sapat*, usually adequately represented by ‘to judge’? The problem is best answered by recognizing that the Hebrew root *spt* bears a broader sense than simply the notion of acting judicially. In contrast... the root *sapat* means ‘to govern, administer, exercise leadership,’ and its derived usage may be diagrammed as follows:



Dr. Duane Lindsey summarizes, “The English title ‘The Book of Judges’... is appropriate as long as the English concept of legal arbitration is expanded to general administrative authority including military deliverance from Israel’s enemies.”<sup>5</sup>

## Historical and Religious Background

### *Where does the ‘Book of Judges’ fit in relation to the rest of the Bible?*

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The *historical time frame* for the Book of Judges is set within the book itself. Judges 1:1 tells us that Joshua has died and now the Israelites are looking for new leadership. “Just as the death of

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<sup>3</sup> Block 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Walvord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. (USA: Victor Books, 1985) 373.



the immediate sons of Jacob had marked the end of the patriarchal era (Exodus 1:5-6) and the death of Moses had marked the end of the period of exodus and wanderings (Joshua 1:1), so the death of Joshua signaled the transition from the period of conquest to the period of settlement in the land of Canaan.”<sup>6</sup> The events surrounding Joshua’s death are further described in 2:6-10. Notice in verse 10 how the next generation of Israelites is described. It says, “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.”

As for the end of the period of the judges in Israel, once again the book reveals this information within its text. Several times at the end of the book (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), the author proclaimed, “In those days there was no king in Israel.” Based on this evidence, the period of the judges ended with Samuel when he crowned Saul as the king of Israel.

So the period of the judges serves as a bridge between the period of conquest under Joshua and the monarchical period of Israel. “Scholars agree that the period of the Judges began with the death of Joshua and ended with the coronation of Saul and the beginning of the monarchy. But scholars differ on how much time elapsed between these two events. Since most scholars agree that the monarchy began under Saul in 1051 B.C., the debate centers on the date of Joshua’s death. The problem concerns particularly the date of the Exodus under Moses which many conservative scholars place at 1446 B.C. while most liberal scholars maintain a later date (1280/60 B.C.)... Scholars who follow the later date of the Exodus consequently date the period of the Judges from about 1220 to 1050 B.C., whereas many who accept the early date of the Exodus say the period of the Judges began about 1390-1350 B.C. and ended about 1050 B.C..”<sup>7</sup>

### *What did worship look like during the time of the judges?*

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The *religious condition in this time period* was ambivalent—indecisive and of two minds. “Theoretically and officially the term ‘Israel’ denoted more than just the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel; ‘Israel’ was ‘the people of God.’”<sup>8</sup> The author of Judges recognizes that Israel’s relationship to Jehovah God was based on three important pillars:

- (1) His status as the God of the patriarchs (2:12);
- (2) His role as Israel’s deliverer from the bondage of Egypt (2:10, 12);
- (3) And his covenant with Israel at Sinai (2:20).<sup>9</sup>

Israel repeatedly acknowledges their position as the *people of God* in the Book of Judges; but as we stated earlier, their true religious condition was ambivalent, indecisive and of two minds. “The narrator’s evaluation of Israel’s true spiritual condition is reflected in the sevenfold repetition of

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<sup>6</sup> Block 25.

<sup>7</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* 373.

<sup>8</sup> Block 37-38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* 38.

variations of the refrain, ‘The descendants of Israel did evil in the eyes of the LORD, they forgot the LORD and served the Baals and the Asherahs.’ (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).”<sup>10</sup> “According to the Book of Judges the religious picture of Israel in the centuries preceding the establishment of the monarch was confused and syncretistic.”<sup>11</sup>

### *What is syncretism?*

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Syncretism refers to the merging of two or more religious systems and attempting to make them one (i.e. the merging of true religion with a false religion thus creating a hybrid religion which skews the truth).

Timothy Keller summed it up this way:

So despite the gap of over three millennia, there are many parallels between our situation and the time of the book of Judges... This was a time of spiritual pluralism. The society of Canaan—the land God had promised to give his people, and where they were now living intermingled with other nations—was a mixture of believing and pagan people. It was a time when God’s people daily faced the choice between looking to God as their Lord, or following the spirit and preferences of their age. It is mainly the story of how they failed in this task—of how they constantly turned from knowing, loving and obeying God to do “what was right in [their] own eyes.”

And so Judges can be described as “despicable people doing deplorable things” and as “trashy tales about dysfunctional characters.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Composition of the Book**

“A discussion of the composition of the Book of Judges is best begun by considering the genre of the work. The individual pieces that make up the book represent a variety of easily identifiable literary genres...”<sup>13</sup> Some of the genres in the Book of Judges include conquest annals, narratives containing advice or instruction, theological teaching, “hero” stories and more. “But how is the composition as a whole to be classified? It has become fashionable among literary specialists to speak of the Book of Judges, along with many other biblical narratives, as fiction... with little or no historical value... But is such a negative evaluation of Hebrew narrative necessary? Does the term “fiction” accurately describe what the author of the Book of Judges perceived himself to be writing?... what is the relationship between the historical events experienced by the Israelites in the premonarchic period and the accounts left us by the biblical author”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Block 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 41.

<sup>12</sup> Keller, Timothy. *Judges for You*. (USA: The Good Book Company, 2013), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Block 50.

<sup>14</sup> Block 50-51.

## *Is the Book of Judges historically true or a work of fiction?*

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“The records preserved for us in this book of the Judges are, of course, historically *true*; yet manifestly they do not intend to constitute a scientific *history* of the period with which they deal; for the first characteristic of a scientific history is a careful attention to chronology—a characteristic which is markedly missing from the book of Judges. The emphasis here is on the spiritual significance of selected events, not on mere chronological continuity. What we have is a collection of narratives selected because of their bearing on the main design of the book; and it is this purposeful selectivity which explains why such space is devoted to the episodes connected with Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, and the shameful lapse of Benjamin, while long stretches are passed over in silence... In a word, this book of Judges is not so much concerned with forging a historical chain as with driving home a vital lesson.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Theme and Purpose of the Book**

“We live and work among a great variety of gods—not only those of other formal religions, but also the gods of wealth, celebrity, pleasure, ideology, achievement. Our era can be characterized by the phrase which sums up the book of Judges: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25, ESV).”<sup>16</sup>

As you read through the Book of Judges, it is sometimes difficult to believe that these stories are even included in these holy pages. As we said earlier, Judges can be described as “despicable people doing deplorable things.”<sup>17</sup> Keller explains:

As the history unfolds even the ‘heroes,’ the judges, become increasingly flawed and failing. They do many appalling things, and their efforts have less and less redemptive effect. It is a dismal story—and it is all history. So the reader will be led to ask, again and again: *What in the world is this doing in the Bible?*

The answer is an important one—it is the gospel! The book of Judges shows us that the Bible is not a “Book of Virtues;” it is not full of inspirational stories. Why? Because the Bible (unlike the books on which other religions are based) is not about following moral examples. It is about a God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through us despite our constant resistance to his purposes. Ultimately, there is only one hero in this book, and he’s divine. When we read this part of Scripture as a historical recounting of how God works to rescue his undeserving people through, and out of, the mess their sin brings them into, then it comes alive to us in our heads and hearts, and speaks into our own lives and situations today. Judges is not an easy read. But living in the times we do, it is an essential one.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Baxter, J. Sidlow. *Explore the Book – Judges*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 10.

<sup>16</sup> Keller 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Keller 9-10.

## *What are the lessons/truths to be learned from the Book of Judges?*<sup>19</sup>

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1. *God relentlessly offers his grace to people who do not deserve it, or seek it, or even appreciate it after they have been saved by it.*  
This is not a biblical ‘Book of Virtues,’ nor a series of stories portraying heroes as our role models. The truth of this book is that there is only one true Savior and he offers grace to sinners—no matter how stupid they are or how many times they disappoint Him.
2. *God wants lordship over every area of our lives, not just some.*  
God’s instructions were clear. They were to conquer all of Canaan. They started out strong, but for whatever reason, they did not complete the task given to them by God. The problem with this was that they were surrounded by idol worshipers and they became complacent about it. They were half-hearted in their commitment to the Lord. God wants all of our lives, not just part.
3. *There is a tension between grace and law, between conditionality and unconditionality.*  
There seems to be a contradiction within this book. On the one hand, God expects His people to obey Him because He is holy. But on the other hand, God makes promises of commitment and loyalty to His people. When people read the Bible, they usually fall into one of two categories—the liberal view or the conservative view. The liberal view believes that God will bless us so long as we feel sorry for what we’ve done. The conservative view believes that God will bless us only if we obey Him. The Book of Judges leaves us with a tension—that both are true, but neither is fully true—and it does not resolve the tension. Only the New Testament reconciles how both of these are true.
4. *There is a need for continual spiritual renewal in our lives here on earth, and a way to make that a reality.*  
So long as we are living in our sinful, fleshly bodies, spiritual renewal is a continual need. Some of the elements of spiritual renewal include repentance, prayer, destruction of idols in our lives and godly men/women to lead us. This is the best book in the Old Testament to teach us about spiritual renewal. The best book in the New Testament that teaches this truth is the Book of Acts. Something interesting to note about these two books is the difference in the cycles of spiritual renewal. In the Book of Judges, the revival cycles grow weaker and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 10-12. These are paraphrased summaries of Dr. Keller’s main themes of the Book of Judges.

weaker as time goes on. This is not true in the Book of Acts. Each revival cycle in Acts helps the apostles to grow wider and stronger.

5. *We need a true Savior, to which all human saviors point, through both their flaws and strengths.*

As we mentioned earlier, the Book of Judges does not provide us with role models, but rather points us to our need for deliverance. This book also demonstrates the inadequacies and failures of any human savior. In Othniel we learn that God can save through all, in Deborah that he can save through many, in Gideon that he can save through few, and in Samson that he can save through one. God shows us that He will save by sending the One.

6. *God is charge, no matter what it looks like.*

This might possibly be the most prevalent lesson to be learned from the Book of Judges, but because it is easily missed since it permeates the entirety of the book. Oftentimes, God seems absent in the Book of Judges, but He is always there. He works out His will through weak people, and in spite of weak people. His purposes are always being accomplished, no matter how things appear.



# PART ONE: THE FAILURE OF THE ISRAELITES TO CONQUER CANAAN

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As we look at the Book of Judges, we find that the author has written what is best described as two introductions to this book—each with its own purpose. The first introduction sets forth the military context of the book, while the second focuses more on the theological context. “In the combination of these two parts, the reader encounters the typical Hebrew view of history. Historical events always have two dimensions: the earthly, where humans act with genuine freedom, and the heavenly, where the sovereign Lord exercises full control. When human beings fail to take the theological dimension into account, disaster is inevitable.”<sup>1</sup>

“Here [in chapter 1] the narrator offers no evaluative comments, only a matter-of-fact reporting of the tribal military adventures...”<sup>2</sup> So as we consider this assessment of the military conquests thus far, let us not lose sight of the spiritual implications of these things.

## I. Prologue: Israel’s Failure to Possess the Land (1:1 – 2:5)

“The book of Judges begins by looking backwards, and ends by looking forwards. This period of Israel’s history opens: “After the death of Joshua” (1:1); its final words strain toward the age of monarchy, of Saul, David, Solomon and their successors: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (21:25). To understand and appreciate the great peaks and troughs, the triumphs and (more often) the tragedies of the time of the judges, we must begin by looking over our shoulders, as 1:1 encourages us to do.”<sup>3</sup>

### A. Half-hearted Discipleship (1:1-36)

#### Promise-Keeping God

##### *What do we learn by looking back at the Book of Joshua?*

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1. Joshua was Moses’ chosen successor to lead the people of Israel (Numbers 27:12-23).
  - When presented with the option of obeying God by going into the land to conquer it, they remained faithful and trusted that God would give them victory.
  - No one else trusted that God would deliver the land into their hands, so for the next 40 years, they wandered in the desert until that generation died.
  - Joshua and Caleb were the only two men who survived the desert wanderings.

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<sup>1</sup> Block 78.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Keller 15.

2. The Book of Joshua chronicles the work of God in and through His people in conquering the land that was promised to their ancestors. It is a book that teaches us that the people of God can bravely obey and worship Him because God keeps His promises.
- God describes the Promised Land in Joshua 1:2-4:  
<sup>2</sup>“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.  
<sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.”
  - God describes the promised victory they will enjoy in Joshua 1:5-6:  
<sup>5</sup>“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”
  - God reminds them of them of the conditions for the promises in Joshua 1:7-9:  
<sup>7</sup>“Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. <sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”
    - “...he reminds them that their Lord-dependent military advances must be accompanied by a close and humble spiritual life—a walk with God.”<sup>4</sup>
    - “Victory and rest will come because they are the dependent, obedient people of God; they will not become the people of God through achieving victory and rest for themselves. They are not to expect success if they do not accompany all their work with obedience to God as they meditate on his word and trust in his promises.”<sup>5</sup>
3. For the most part, the Israelites obeyed and trusted God in the conquest of Canaan during the life of Joshua, but there was still much that was left undone at the end of his life.
- By the end of the book, God reaffirms His promise to His people (Joshua 23:2-6).  
<sup>2</sup>Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, “I am now old and well advanced in years. <sup>3</sup>And you have seen all

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. <sup>4</sup> Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. <sup>5</sup> The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left...”

## Brave Spirituality

### *What was God’s call for His people in regard to the Promised Land? Why?*

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1. Joshua 23:4-5 is a clear call to annihilate all those who were living in Canaan.
  - This call was reiterated in Judges 1:1, “Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?”
  - “The purpose for driving out the Canaanites is not vengeful or economic but spiritual. They are to be removed so that Israel will not fall under their religious influence—“you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now” (v 7). They were to build a home country to serve God in, a land where surrounding nations would be able to see the true God through the lives of his people.”<sup>6</sup>
2. “God call to his people (then and now) is to combine spirituality with bravery. True discipleship is radical and risk-taking, because true disciples rely on God to keep his promises to bless them, and not on their own instincts, plans, or insurance policies.”<sup>7</sup>
3. There are two kinds of bravery: true bravery and adventurism (or macho heroism).
  - “Faith in God’s promises means not always following the expected, rational path.”<sup>8</sup>
  - Think about the battle plan for overthrowing the city of Jericho. Was that rational?
  - God called the Israelites to go to battle against each and every people group that were not followers of Jehovah God, and drive them out of the land of Canaan.
    - If the opponent was stronger, they were to still go into battle. This goes against normal military strategy.
    - If the opponent was weaker, they were to still drive them out of the land—even if they posed no threat to the Israelites.
    - When they conquered an enemy, God instructed them to not enslave or plunder any of these people groups.
  - “Who Israel chooses to fight, and how Israel responds to victory, will show whether they are truly trusting in the promises—whether they are really obeying the LORD.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## Successes and Failures of Judah

Judges 1:2-20 provides us with the battle chronicle of the Israelites after the death of Joshua. “The fact that the tribes seek the mind of God speaks not only of their early dedication to the divine mission—after the death of Joshua God is still recognized as the commander-in-chief for the nation—but it also speaks of the freedom of the tribes to operate independently... Israel is sensitive to the will of God, and God responds to the overtures of his people.”<sup>10</sup>

### *As Judah goes to battle, in what ways are they faithful and in what ways are they flawed?*

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- Verses 2-3 – “Having received the divine mandate to attack the Canaanites, the tribe of Judah immediately accepts its leadership role. However, instead of priding itself in its superior position, this tribe invites Simeon to share the campaign and promises to assist the smaller tribe in conquering its allotted territory.”<sup>11</sup>
  - Faithful = they immediately accepted their leadership role.
  - Flawed = they failed to trust God to provide deliverance and asked Simeon to help.
  - Their discipleship is half-way!
- Verse 4 – God blessed the attack and delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand—even though they had not fully trusted the Lord for the victory.
- Verses 5-7 – “They rout the inhabitants, and capture and kill Adoni-Bezek (“the Lord of Bezek”), who recognizes the rightness of this judgment on him (“God has paid me back for what I did to them,” v 7).”<sup>12</sup>
  - What had Adoni-Bezek done to kings he had conquered in the past?  
*He cut off their thumbs and big toes, and forced them to eat the scraps that fell from his table.*
  - How many times had he done this?  
*70 times.*
  - “It is notable that, while many 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers have many qualms about Israel’s conduct in Canaan, this defeated Canaanite did not. God’s judgment throughout history is to give people over to the consequences of the life they have chosen... Adoni-Bezek, it appears, accepts this.”<sup>13</sup>
- Verses 8-11 – The men of Judah fought against Jerusalem, the Canaanites in the Negeb and in the lowland, those living in Hebron, and also the inhabitants of Debir.
- Verses 12-15 – In these verses, the author “narrows the focus to one spiritually brave family in Israel—the family of faithful Caleb. Here in miniature is what all Israel should be like.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Block 87.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>12</sup> Keller 18.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

- What did Caleb do? Caleb offered his daughter to the man who was willing to attack and capture Kiriath-sepher.
- What was the result of his offer?
  - Othniel, his nephew, accepted the challenge.
  - “What he [Caleb] wants for Acsah [his daughter] is the life he has chosen for himself; one of covenant faithfulness, or courageous obedience in response to God’s promises.”<sup>15</sup>
- What was it that Othniel and Acsah wanted from Caleb? What did this symbolize?
  - Verse 14 – a field
  - Verse 15 – springs of water
  - These requests display “her desire to take, settle in and enjoy the blessings of the promised land. Caleb, Othniel... and particularly Acsah each show us whole-hearted discipleship.”<sup>16</sup>
- Verses 16-18 – the people of Judah and Simeon—with the help of the Kenites, the family of Moses’ father-in-law—defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, as well as Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron and their territories. However, this is still half-hearted discipleship as they settled among the people there.

### Common Sense

“If chapter 1 finished with verse 18, it would be almost completely encouraging, and bode well for the rest of Judges. But verse 19 jars... [Read verse 19.] ...Judah does not trust in God’s strength, so they measure their own strength against their enemies’, and fail to push the chariot-owning plain-dwellers out of the land.

“Common, but faithless, sense, begins to prevail here. Judah doesn’t trust God; and so they don’t secure their inheritance so that they can worship God without compromise. The remaining Canaanites will prove to be a thorn in their side for centuries to come.”<sup>17</sup>

### *What is it that keeps us from whole-heartedly enjoying the promises of God?*

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- It is not a lack of strength on our part—it is a lack of faith in God’s strength.
  - Othniel attacked a city in God’s strength and prevailed.
  - The tribe of Judah decided that they could not attack a city with iron chariots—that is just common sense! Right?
  - It is half-hearted discipleship—that’s what it is!
- In verse 20, we read the account of Caleb [the oldest man in Israel] driving out the sons of Anak [giants living in this area]. What’s the difference between verses 19 and 20? It is the difference between brave spirituality and adventurism. It’s where they place their faith!

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<sup>15</sup> Keller 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Failures of the Remaining Tribes

“The contagion of half-hearted obedience, of half-belief in God’s promises, spreads.”<sup>18</sup>

### *What happened with the rest of the tribes and their conquests?*

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- The Tribe of Benjamin (21) – “did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem.”
- The House of Joseph (22-26) – made a deal with an inhabitant of the city of Bethel to “show us the way into the city” rather than trusting God to provide the victory.
  - They let the man and his family go, and they settled in the land of the Hittites.
  - Joshua 1:4 tells us that all the land of the Hittites was promised by God to be given to the children of Israel; thus, they did not drive them out as God commanded.
- The Tribe of Manasseh (27-28) – “did not drive out the inhabitants” but instead “put the Canaanites to forced labor.”
- The Tribe of Ephraim (29) – “did not drive out the Canaanites” and let them live among them.
- The Tribe of Zebulun (30) – “did not drive out the inhabitants” and put them in “forced labor.”
- The Tribe of Asher (31-32) – “did not drive out the inhabitants” and notice that it says they lived among the Canaanites, not that they allowed the Canaanites to live among them.
- The Tribe of Naphtali (33) – “did not drive out the inhabitants” and put them in “forced labor.”
- The Tribe of Dan (34-36) – were forced to live in “the hill country” because the Amorites did not allow them to come down to the plain.
  - “What matters in verse 36 is not the borders of the allotted inheritance of Israel, but the border of the Amorites, the areas where they ‘were determined... to hold out’ (v 35).”<sup>19</sup>
  - It appears, according to verse 35, that the Amorites were just more determined than the Danites. They had “superior will-power and tenacity—superior courage.”<sup>20</sup>

*The issue with each and every one of these situations was that the people were depending more upon their own common sense instead of obeying God’s commands. Do we ever have that problem?*

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<sup>18</sup> Keller 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## B. Forgetting Who God Is (2:1-5)

“When read through the lens of the book of Joshua, we can see the halfway discipleship on display in Judges 1. But when read in isolation, there do seem to be very plausible reasons for why the Israelites did not succeed in their campaign—inferior military might, sensible compromise, economic convenience. How could they drive out iron chariots when they had none (1:19)?

“Taken on its own terms, chapter 1 reads a little like a collection of Israel’s press releases about their campaign. It’s their ‘spin’ on why they weren’t as successful as we (and God) might have expected. The readers are lulled into sympathy with the Israelites. When we are told that they ‘could not drive out’ (v 19, ESV) the Canaanites, we are inclined to agree. They did their best.”<sup>1</sup>

### God’s Assessment of Israel

*Judges 2:1-2*

#### *Why does the angel of the LORD come up from Gilgal?*

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- Who is the angel of the LORD?
  - According to Daniel Block, he believes that this expression should be understood as a “messenger/envoy of the LORD... he is God’s official spokesman.”<sup>2</sup>
  - I believe that the angel of the LORD is referring to the pre-incarnate Christ (also known as a theophany)—the second member of the Trinity.
  - Some have proposed “that the present messenger is a human prophetic figure... [based on] the fact that this figure is said to come from Gilgal rather than from heaven.”<sup>3</sup>
- Did the pre-incarnate Christ live in Gilgal? Of course not! So why is this significant?
  - “The route the angel takes is important... Because it was in Gilgal in Joshua 5 that the people made a covenant with God... This was the place where God had forgiven their sin, bound them to himself as his people, and entered into relationship with them by grace, motivated by his own loving kindness.”<sup>4</sup>
  - So this serves as a reminder to the Israelites of the redemptive work of God.
    - The angel of the LORD reminds them of these things in 2:1.  
“And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you,”
    - The Lord is “a rescuing, promise-keeping, faithful God.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 22.

<sup>2</sup> Block 110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Keller 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 23.

## *What was God's assessment of Israel's performance in obeying His commands?*

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- His assessment was quite simple. He said, “You have not obeyed my voice.”
- What were His commands?
  - “you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land”
  - “you shall break down their altars”
- A review of the last half of chapter 1 reveals the obvious ways they had disobeyed.
- We must not forget that these commands were not motivated from prejudice or power—the “purpose is to cleanse Canaan from idols, so that Israel is able to live in covenant faithfulness to the LORD. By allowing the Canaanites to continue to live in the land or by making covenant agreements with them— for whatever reason— the end result is that idols are being worshiped in the midst of the Israelites.”<sup>6</sup>

*God wants all of me, not pieces. He wants to be the LORD over every aspect of my life, not just some. “Ultimately, either all of our life is given to God in grateful, loving obedience; or none is.”<sup>7</sup> Partial obedience is disobedience!*

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## **Israel's Disobedience Exposed**

*Judges 2:2-5*

### *How do we reconcile the apparent discrepancy between Judges 1:19 and 2:2?*

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- Verse comparison:
  - 1:19 – “And the Lord was with Judah... but he could not drive out the inhabitants...”
  - 2:2 – “... you have not obeyed my voice.”
  - Basically, Judah said that they ‘could not’ while God was saying they ‘would not.’
- “Israel’s failure to obey was based on what they saw as good reasons—God said they were flimsy excuses.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Much of the book of Judges shows how God is faithful to us despite our disobedience—that is comforting. But Judges also shows us that God in his grace will insist on removing our self-deception about our motives and actions.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## *What are some common reasons for justifying one's disobedience?*

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- Inability to Forgive

*"I can't forgive this" or "I cannot forgive him/her" but God commands forgiveness."*

  - Essentially, when we say this, we are really saying that we do not want to let this go; we want to hang on to our bitterness and hope for the opportunity to get even.
  - Matthew 18:21-22 says, <sup>21</sup>"Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."
  - After sharing the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus said, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).
- Unwillingness to Tell the Truth

*"I just can't tell him the truth. It would destroy him" but God tells us to speak the truth in love."*

  - Twice in his letter to the Ephesians Paul tells them to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 25).
  - Our 'inability' or unwillingness to tell the truth may be rooted in cowardice.  
*If I tell him that, he may not like me anymore.*
  - Our 'inability' or unwillingness to tell the truth may be rooted in pride.  
*I would be humiliated if I say that.*
  - Our 'inability' or unwillingness to tell the truth may be rooted in misplaced virtue.  
*I won't risk hurting him—I would just rather lie about it.*
- Inability to Resist Temptation

*"I know it's wrong but I just can't stop doing this" but God gives us a way of escape.*

  - We cannot dismiss the addictive power of sin in our lives, because "we may not be able, through sheer willpower, to stop doing something by ourselves. But we can get help, admit our problem, humble ourselves, cry out to God for mercy... God always gives us a way out... no sinful thought or action is inevitable and irresistible."<sup>10</sup>
  - The church of Corinth was full of people who were caught up in sin. In his first letter to the church (1 Corinthians 10:12-13), Paul said:  
<sup>12</sup>Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."
  - If we choose to continue in sin, it is because that is what we want to do. We are simply excusing it by saying we are unable to resist.

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<sup>10</sup> Keller 25.

### *How do we cure a bad case of 'I don't wanna'?*

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- Failure to obey is a failure to remember!  
“God is the God who rescues—‘I brought you up out of Egypt’ (Judges 2:1); and God is the God who remains faithful—‘I will never break my covenant with you.’ The root of our disobedience is essentially failing to remember who he is.”<sup>11</sup>
- Remember who God is!  
“As long as we remember who God is, we will serve him radically and joyfully.”<sup>12</sup>

### *What was God's response in relation to their disobedience?*

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- In Judges 2:3, God revises His covenant with the people of Israel.  
“So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.”
- “This reaction on God’s part is neither impulsive nor arbitrary nor capricious; it reflects his own [devotion] to past pronouncements, the most recent being Joshua’s warning in 23:13.”<sup>13</sup>
- Joshua 23:11-13 says, “<sup>11</sup> Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. <sup>12</sup> For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, <sup>13</sup> know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you.”

### *How did the Israelites respond to this indictment?*

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- They responded in obedience! They lifted up their voices, wept and offered sacrifices.
- Even though we find a positive reaction to God’s assessment and response, the people have failed to fully obey Him.
- They are truly ‘half-hearted disciples’ who have forgotten the LORD—and “this leaves them and their children surrounded by thorns and snares, by the constant temptation to compromise in their love for and obedience to the rescuing, faithful God. The scene is set for the book of Judges—the people of God seeking, and more often failing, to live holy lives which please him, in the middle of an idolatrous culture.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Keller 25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Block 115.

<sup>14</sup> Keller 26.



## The Tension of Judges

“[T]his text reveals the tension within Yahweh’s own heart. He who swore never to break his covenant now announces that his past warning is about to be fulfilled: he will stop driving out the Canaanites before Israel. Instead of delivering the Canaanites into the hands of Israel, repeatedly this book will describe Yahweh selling the Israelites into the hands of their hunters. With ever-increasing intensity, the reader will learn that if anything positive ever happens in Israel, it arises from the gracious heart of Yahweh.”<sup>15</sup>

### *What is God really saying when He asks, ‘Why have you done this?’*

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- “God is saying to his people: *You have put me in an impossible situation. I have sworn to bless you as my beloved people, and sworn not to bless you as disobedient people. How am I to solve this dilemma?*”<sup>16</sup>
- God is holy and just and cannot reward those who do evil.
- God is gracious and loving and wants only the best for His people.
- “This is a tremendous, seemingly irresolvable tension in the narrative—and also in the whole Bible.”<sup>17</sup>

### *How are we able to resolve this tension?*

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- “It is only on the cross that we can understand how God is able to resolve the tension. On the cross, our sin was given—imputed—to him, so that his righteousness could be imputed to us.”<sup>18</sup>
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

### *Where are you saying to God: I cannot? Are you really saying: I will not?*

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<sup>15</sup> Block 117.

<sup>16</sup> Keller 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## II. Second Prologue: Summary of the Cycles of Sin and Salvation (2:6 – 3:6)

As was mentioned in the introduction to this portion of the book of Judges, there are two introductions to this book—each with its own purpose and design. The first introduction sets forth the military context of the book, while the second focuses more on the theological context.

“Chapter 2:6 – 3:6 is a second introduction to the book of Judges, which is best read parallel to 1:1 – 2:5. But it is not only an introduction: it is a summary of the whole book. In it, the narrator lays out the cycle of Israelite spiritual experience which we will see repeated through the book.”<sup>1</sup>

### A. Living among Idols (2:6-19)

#### A Life Well Lived

*Judges 2:6-9*

Just like the first introduction, the second introduction begins by looking back to the life of Joshua. In verse 6, we have returned to the time (just before Joshua’s death) when all of Israel has gathered together after being summoned by Joshua. This story is recorded in Joshua 23, where Joshua instructs the Israelites to complete the work of driving out the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. Listen to his instruction and encouragement to the children of Israel:

<sup>5</sup>The Lord your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you. <sup>6</sup>Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, <sup>7</sup>that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, <sup>8</sup>but you shall cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day.

Now as we look back to Judges 2, we find in verse 6 that Joshua is dismissing the people to return to their inheritance to obey the instructions of the LORD.

#### *How did the Israelites respond to Joshua’s challenge to obey the LORD?*

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- Verse 7 – They continued in obedience until Joshua and all his contemporaries died. “<sup>7</sup>And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.”

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 29.

- This generation of people had seen the amazing work and deliverance of the LORD through His servant Joshua.
- Joshua was a good leader and described as “the servant of the LORD” (verse 8). When he died at the age of 110 years, he was buried “within the boundaries of his inheritance.”

### *What happened among the Israelites after the death of Joshua?*

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- Verse 10b – “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.”
- The first chapter of Judges has already chronicled the ‘half-hearted commitment’ to God; and yet this generation is almost celebrated in comparison to the next generation.

### **Another Generation**

*Judges 2:10-11*

### *How is it possible that this next generation “did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel”?*

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- “The word ‘knew’ probably does not mean that they did not know about the Exodus, the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan, and the walls of Jericho falling, but rather that the saving acts of God were no longer precious or central to them.”<sup>2</sup>
- In short, they had not embraced the ‘gospel’ as their story! They had forgotten the work of God in delivering them out of slavery.
- Aren’t we all guilty of this? How many times have you seen a banner that says, “We will never forget!”? Why do they make those banners? It’s because we too easily forget!
  - Feelings fade and grief is eventually replaced with everyday life.
  - Examples: 9/11 terror attacks (2001), Space Shuttle Challenger (1986), assassination of President Kennedy (1963), Pearl Harbor (1941), the Great Depression (1930s), and the War to End All Wars (1917).
  - There is a period of 100 years between the Exodus and the end of the time of the Judges.

### *What was the result of the people forgetting the story of their deliverance?*

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- Verse 11 says, “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals.”

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<sup>2</sup> Keller 30.

- They stopped worshiping God and started worshiping mini-gods made with human hands.
- “It is striking that this happens within a generation. Their parents, though flawed and sometimes half-hearted, had faith—they ‘served the Lord.’”<sup>3</sup>

### *Who is to blame for this collapse of true worship from one generation to the next?*

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- “It is always impossible to lay blame neatly when one generation fails to pass its faith on to the next one. Did the first generation fail to reach out, or did the second generation just harden their hearts? The answer is usually both. Mistakes made by a Christian generation are often magnified in the next, nominal, one. Commitment is replaced by complacency and then by compromise.”<sup>4</sup>

### *How are we to counteract the tendency toward complacency and compromise?*

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- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 20-25 explain the necessary steps to passing our faith on to the next generation. It says:

<sup>4</sup>“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup>You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

<sup>20</sup>“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ <sup>21</sup>then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. <sup>22</sup>And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. <sup>23</sup>And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. <sup>25</sup>And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.’

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Keller 31.

- We must love God whole-heartedly—not hypocritically. Our walk must be authentic. “Younger people are sensitive to any inconsistency. That is the first reason that a younger generation can turn from the faith of an older one.”<sup>5</sup>
- The gospel must be immensely practical—not just an academic exercise.
  - Deuteronomy 6:7 describes a very practical method for training the next generation.
  - “Instruction in God’s truth then is not to be so much a series of lectures and classes. Rather, we are to ‘impress’ truths about God by showing how God relates to daily, concrete living.
- We must make the connection between our faith and God’s work in our lives (Deut 6:20-25).
- “We think that if we instruct our children in true doctrine, shelter them from immoral behavior and involve them in church and religious organizations, then we have done all we can. But youth are turned off not only by bad examples, but also by parents who are not savvy about the lives and world their children are living in, or who cannot be open about their own interior spiritual lives.”<sup>6</sup>
- The Bible is silent as to what the first generation did to instruct their children so we cannot draw any concrete conclusions. All we know for sure is that the second generation turned away from worshiping the true God to worshiping idols.
- “However, when a whole generation turns away, we have to expect that the parents have to model real faith and disciple their children.”<sup>7</sup>

*If you are a parent:*

*How are you passing your faith on to your children? What has encouraged you and what has challenged you today?*

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*If you are not a parent with children living at home:*

*How are you praying for and sharing your faith with younger generations in your church?*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Keller 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 33.

## The Repeated Cycle

*Judges 2:10-19*

*Describe the cycle that repeats itself in Israel's history throughout Judges.*

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*How have you seen the “Judges Cycle” in your own Christian life? How does the reality of your sin and of God’s grace prompt you to praise and thank Him today?*

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## B. Spiritual Prostitution (2:16 – 3:6)

In the previous section, we were introduced to the idea of a ‘Cycle of Sin’ that plagued the children of Israel. The people would rebel against God and worship the gods of the surrounding people groups. This would cause God to become angry, similar to the way a parent would become angry when his child is disobedient. This anger is an outworking of His love for His people. As a means of getting their attention, God would then allow one of their enemies to oppress the Israelites. When that oppression became more than they could bear, they would cry out to God in repentance and God would deliver His people through the leadership of one of the judges. The people would then live in peace and obedience until the death of that judge. Then they would return to living even more corrupt lives than their predecessors. “We will see as Judges progresses that the rebellion becomes worse, the oppression heavier, the repentance less heartfelt, the judges more flawed, and the salvation and ‘revivals’ they bring weaker.”<sup>1</sup>

We want to take some time examining God’s point of view of man’s predisposition toward idolatry. Mankind was created with the need to worship something. When we are not allowing God and His Word to guide us in this life, then we are worshipping other gods. In essence, we are prostituting ourselves. Judges 2:17 says:

... they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so. (ESV)

Did you see what that verse said? They “*whored after other gods.*” They prostituted themselves. This is a difficult image for us to imagine. “Prostitutes then (and often now, too) are people whose lives are out of control, who are desperate, and who are giving themselves without getting any real pleasure or love in return. The use of the word ‘prostituted’ here tells us that when we serve an idol, we come into an intense relationship with it, within which it uses us, but does not truly care for us. We become completely vulnerable to it, little more than a slave to it.”<sup>2</sup>

### Married Prostitute

*Judges 2:16-17*

#### *How does God see our idolatry?*

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- God sees our idolatry as adultery—not just the sin of adultery—but all our sin is like adultery in the eyes of God.
- The husband/wife relationship is often used as a picture of our relationship with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 35.

- “He does not merely want us to know and obey him as a citizen obeys a king, or merely to follow him as a sheep follows a shepherd. He wants us to know him and love him as a wife loves a husband.”<sup>3</sup>
- “A marriage is an exclusive legal commitment, but it is not *only* that; real marriage involves deep intimate, selfless love.”<sup>4</sup>
- When we sin, we are unfaithful to God—we are acting selfishly instead of selflessly.
- Realizing that God sees all sin as adultery helps us to understand why responds to the Israelites in the way that He does.

### *How does God respond to the Israelites and their idolatry?*

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- God viewed Israel as a ‘married prostitute.’
  - The book of Hosea is a picture of God’s love for Israel.
  - God instructs Hosea to go and marry a prostitute named Gomer.
  - In Hosea 3:1-3, the Bible says:  
*And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”<sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. <sup>3</sup> And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”*
- God became angry with Israel’s unfaithfulness.
  - “His anger is not opposed to his love; it is the expression of it.
  - “It is because he loves his people, and cares about his relationship with them, that he responds with right anger when they turn from him and prostitute themselves.
  - “His anger is that of the innocent, jilted love; his love is that of the wonderfully forgiving husband.
  - “The relationship God wants us to enjoy with him—and the only relationship which will avoid idolatry—is a passionate, personal relationship of love.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Keller 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 36.

## The Judge or the Idols?

*Judges 2:18*

### *What was God's purpose and plan when raising up judges in Israel?*

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- God wanted the Israelites to listen to the judges, thereby expressing their love for God and not prostituting themselves to unfaithfulness and idolatry.
- God provided salvation/deliverance to the people through the judges.
- The Israelites had to “choose where to look for salvation—to the judge God raised up to save them (v 18), or a false god (see 10:14).”<sup>6</sup>
  - In verse 18, the Bible says, “For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.”
  - But in Judges 10:14 God says to the disobedient people, “Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.”
- God's response was dependent upon Israel's choice!

## Gods, Plural

*Judges 2:19*

### *What happened when God's appointed judge died?*

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- The Israelites turned back to their old, disobedient ways!
- In verse 19, we notice that each generation was worse than the previous.
- They served and bowed down to other gods.
- They stubbornly continued to do what was right in their own eyes.

### *Who did the Israelites serve instead?*

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- It's not that they decided to swap one god for another—they were following other gods.
- “Israel's spiritual life, then, was more complex than a simple decision to stop worshipping the LORD, and start worshipping a different god. In fact, what the Israelites did was to combine the worship of the LORD with idols.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 36.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 37.

### *Who were these other gods? And why were there so many?*

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- “The pagan world-view was that there were many gods (e.g. of agriculture, business, love, music, war), each of whom had a particular area of influence, and none of whom demanded lordship over every single area of life.
  - “In this view, everyone had his or her own god(s), chosen or discarded on the basis of one’s interests and needs.
  - “It was a ‘mix and match’ religion in which the worshipper appeared sovereign.”<sup>8</sup>
- “Paganism therefore could accept the existence, but not the exclusive sovereignty of the LORD.
  - “He could be one of many.
  - “He could even be first among equals.
  - “But he could not claim that he was the one true God; that his worshipers give him absolute lordship over every square inch of their lives; that ever to worship another god was spiritual prostitution.”<sup>9</sup>

### *Think back to God’s instructions to His children entering into the Promised Land. What did He instruct them to do? (Deuteronomy 31:1-8)*

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- Verse 3 – destroy the nations living there; take the land away from them;
- Verse 4 – God will destroy them;
- Verse 5 – the Lord will give them over to you;
- Verse 6 – do not be afraid because God is with you and will not leave you;
- Verse 7 – be strong and courageous; you will conquer the Promised Land;
- Verse 8 – do not be afraid because God is with you and will not leave you;
- “The Promised Land was meant to be a place of worship of the LORD alone; it became the land of worship of the LORD plus.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Why is it so dangerous to worship the LORD plus?*

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- When the Israelites were unable or unwilling to remove the pagan nations from the land of promise, they formed a new syncretistic religion that removed God as sovereign.
- “The greatest danger is not atheism, but that we ask God to co-exist with idols.”<sup>11</sup>
- We live in a world that offers a vast array of alternative ‘gods.’ If we are not wholly devoted to the one true God, we are asking God to co-exist with our idols.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 38.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### *What can we do to guard against this tendency toward syncretism?*

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- First, identify ALL the alternative ‘gods’ in our society today.
  - Statues of fertility idols are probably not a temptation in Western society.
  - What are some ‘functional’ gods that we worship today?
    - Job/Money/Career – “the danger is that the Christian maintains his or her doctrinal beliefs and ethical practices, but divides heart worship between the LORD and money/career.”<sup>12</sup>
    - Fame/Prestige
    - Materialism
- Second, take an honest look at every area of our lives—family, career, ambitions, time, possessions, recreation, etc.—and ask two questions:
  - 1) Am I willing to do whatever God tells me to do in this area of my life?
  - 2) Am I willing to accept whatever God sends my way in this area of life?

### **The Mercy of Judgment**

*Judges 2:2:21 – 3:6*

At this point, God has had all the ‘half-hearted’ spirituality and spiritual prostitution that He can stand. But His judgment and wrath against the Israelites was not motivated by a vindictive anger—on the contrary, it was motivated by love and mercy.

### *According to Judges 2:21-22, what was God’s purpose in no longer driving out the nations that inhabited the Promised Land?*

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- God uses the remaining nations to “test Israel” to see if they would be dependent upon the LORD and obey Him as their fathers before them.
- “Tests can be failed; but tests can also be passed! A test forces us to learn and study and become disciplined and rise up to meet it. The presence of an enemy which stood opposed to God and his people forced Israel to think about their relationship to God; their own failures; the wisdom of his ways; the distinctiveness he calls his people to.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Keller 38.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 39.

*In Judges 3:1-2, what were the purposes of God in these verses?*

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- The text tells us that these nations were left “to test Israel” and “all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan.”
- Again, the goal behind this was God’s desire to develop their dependence upon Him first in war, and eventually in everything else.

*Did the Israelites pass or fail these tests? (Judges 3:5-6)*

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- They failed!
- They lived among the nations and became like the other nations, even intermarrying with those who practiced the pagan religions.
- “They gave in to their sinful desires, and lived lives indistinguishable from the pagans around them, doing evil and glorifying idols. The challenge to us as God’s people today is to do the opposite: to recognize that we are ‘aliens and strangers in the world,’ and so to ‘abstains from sinful desires’ and ‘live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God’ (1 Peter 2:11-12).”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Keller 40.

# PART TWO: THE SIX-FOLD CYCLE OF SIN AND SALVATION

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We have come to the end of the long, two-part introduction and we are now being introduced to the first of the twelve judges of Israel—Othniel. This is not the first time we have been introduced to Othniel in the Book of Judges. In the first introduction (1:11-15), we find that Othniel—the younger brother of Caleb—was the one who accepted Caleb’s challenge to attack and capture Kiriath-sepher. Now, here in chapter three, God chooses to use Othniel once again to accomplish His purposes.

Othniel was a man of noble character and undaunted courage. Othniel was unique among the judges because the author does not share any of his character flaws with us. In fact, “Many have noted that the narrator writes nothing negative about this man.”<sup>1</sup> The ESV Study Bible notes: “The judges did little to arrest the downward cycle of apostasy; if anything, they accelerated it. Major judges such as Gideon (8:24-27), Jephthah (11:30-31, 34-40) and Samson (chs. 14-16) were guilty of *significant sin* (Emphasis mine).”<sup>2</sup> All of the judges had their issues, but these three were guilty of what the Bible refers to as ‘significant sin.’

Before we move forward to consider the Israelites’ first cycle of sin in the Book of Judges, it would be prudent to note some general information about all of the judges. For some of these judges, we have almost no information; while for others, we have multiple stories in various situations. Here is a simplification of the judges of Israel—including the biblical reference, oppressor, period of oppression, and period of rest.

JUDGE	OPPRESSOR	PERIOD OF OPPRESSION	PERIOD OF REST	BIBLICAL REFERENCE
Othniel	Cushan-rishathaim, king of the Mesopotamians	8 years	40 years	Judges 3:7-11
Ehud	Eglon, king of Moab Moabites	18 years	80 years	Judges 3:12-30
Shamgar	Philistines			Judges 3:31
Deborah	Jabin, king of Canaan Canaanites	20 years	40 years	Judges 4 - 5
Gideon	Midianites	7 years	40 years	Judges 6 - 8
Tola	Abimelech (not killed by Tola)	3 years	23 years	Judges 10:1-2
Jair			22 years	Judges 10:3-5
Jephthah	Philistines and Ammonites	18 years	6 years	Judges 10:6 - 12:7
Ibzan			7 years	Judges 12:8-10
Elon			10 years	Judges 12:11-12
Abdon			8 years	Judges 12:13-15
Samson	Philistines	40 years	20 years	Judges 13 - 16

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<sup>1</sup> Block 149.

<sup>2</sup> *The ESV Study Bible*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008) 436.

As we mentioned in a previous section, over and over again in the Book of Judges the Israelites follow a certain pattern—a cycle if you will—that many theologians refer to as the ‘Cycle of Apostasy<sup>3</sup>.’ The story of Othniel and his dealings with the king of Mesopotamia—King Cushan-rishathaim—is the most perfect representation of this cycle in all the accounts in this book because it has each step of the cycle represented in the account. Daniel Block notes that Othniel serves as a paradigm or model “against which the rest must be interpreted.”<sup>4</sup>



This cycle stresses “the dramatic ‘tension’ between God’s holy commands and his loving, faithful promise. God demands obedience, yet he has promised to save his people.”<sup>5</sup> Keller continues his explanation saying, “the children of Israel go into a cyclical pattern of decline, caused by their idolatry, and revival, brought by God’s saving mercy. God continually chastens them for their sin, but he then delivers them from their peril. He never casts them off, but continues graciously and severely to work for their growth.”<sup>6</sup>

As we study through the events surrounding each of these judges, we must always remember that God continues graciously and severely to work for **our** growth as well! We too live in cycles of apostasy and reconciliation—between sin and repentance. So let us not be too quick to judge, lest we miss the log that is in our own eye (Matthew 7:3)!

### III. The Aram-Naharaim and Othniel Cycle

#### Remembering Who God Is (3:7-11)

Have you ever told your child to do something and then—an hour later when you ask if it is completed—your child tells you, “I forgot.” Do you remember the level of frustration you felt as a result? Quickly, in your mind, you recount all the times he/she has used this excuse. You are indecisive as to which lecture you will respond with but you are certain that a lecture is forthcoming in the very near future. You struggle to understand how it is that the brilliant child in front of you—one who can remember the most obscure details about movies, games and pop culture—cannot remember to do a simple task that you mentioned just one hour earlier! Why?

If you have ever experienced that, then you have seen a glimpse of what God must have felt as He was dealing with His children—the Israelites! What does it mean to ‘forget the Lord’?

<sup>3</sup> *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* defines APOSTASY as “Defection from the faith, an act of unpardonable rebellion against God and his truth. The sin of apostasy results in the abandonment of Christian doctrine and conduct. With respect to the covenant relationship established through prior profession of faith (passive profession in the case of baptized infants), apostates place themselves under the curse and wrath of God as covenant breakers, having entered into a state of final and irrevocable condemnation. Those who apostatize are thus numbered among the reprobate.” (Accessed January 7, 2017: Source - <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/apostasy.html>)

<sup>4</sup> Block 149.

<sup>5</sup> Keller 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



## Heart-Forgetfulness

*Judges 3:7*

***When the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and forgot Him, did they really forget God? Or does this mean something else?***

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- “As we have already seen, what God calls evil is a twofold decision: to turn away from him, or to ‘forget’ him; and to serve mini-lords, false gods—here, the Baals and the Asherahs.”<sup>7</sup>
- There is great spiritual significance associated with the terms “remembering” and “forgetting” in the Bible.
  - “When people in the Old Testament asked God to ‘remember... your great mercy and love’ (Psalm 25:6) or to ‘not remember our sins’ (Isaiah 64:9), they did not believe that God could literally forget what he is like, or what someone has done!”<sup>8</sup>
  - “When God is asked: ‘Remember your great mercy and love,’ he is being asked to act according to his character. When someone asks God to ‘remember not [my] sins,’ he or she is asking that God would not act on what he knows.”<sup>9</sup>
- “Therefore, to say that the Israelites ‘forgot’ God is to say that they no longer were controlled by what they knew... Though they knew who God was and what he wanted, those things were not real to them.”<sup>10</sup>

***What’s the difference between knowing something in your ‘head’ and knowing something with your ‘heart’?***

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- “What we know with our heads is not ‘real’ to our hearts and our whole beings. We may acknowledge intellectually that something is true, but in our heart of hearts it does not grab us or penetrate us or control us. So the reason that the Israelites (like all of us) continually needed revival was because truths about God which were once vibrant and real to them eventually became unreal.”<sup>11</sup>
- When we give more attention to ‘other things’ than the truths about God, we will become desensitized to God’s Word and work in our lives. These other things—our personal idols—will become more real to us than God Himself.
- When this happens, we may know God in our heads, but our hearts will have ‘forgotten’ Him.

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<sup>7</sup> Keller 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## How can we keep from 'forgetting' God?

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- 2 Peter 1:5-8 says:  
*<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Peter explained that these godly character traits will keep a person from “being ineffective or unfruitful.” But noticed what he says in verse 9...  
*<sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*
- Peter does not say that a person lacks these character traits because they did not try hard enough! He says that this person has “forgotten” who he is!
- We need to be reminded of who we are in Christ as a result of his grace and mercy! That is why Peter says that he “intend[s] always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have” (2 Peter 1:12).
- “Peter is saying that, if the forgiveness and salvation of Christ is real to you, you will live it out in your character and life. You need to be reminded of what you already know; you need these truths to work in your heart as well as being understood in your head.”<sup>12</sup>

## How can we be sure to remember God?

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- Here are three suggestions of things that will help us remember:<sup>13</sup>
  - Bible Study
    - When we read the Bible, we should not be reading just to learn information.
    - We must read and reflect on God’s Word to experience transformation.
  - The Lord’s Supper
    - The Lord’s Supper is a visual reminder of what Jesus did for us through His death, burial and resurrection.
    - Luke 22:19-20 tells us, “<sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”
    - Paul added one additional thought in 1 Corinthians 11:25 when he said, “Do this, *as often as you drink it*, in remembrance of me.” (Emphasis mine)

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<sup>12</sup> Keller 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 43.

- Community Engagement
  - “Jesus intended the Lord’s Supper to be a community event. We need to be reminded of and study and apply God’s truths in groups.”<sup>14</sup>
  - Hebrews 10:25 is often quoted as a mandate to attend church regularly. While this is an accurate application of this text, I do not believe that it is the original intention of the author of Hebrews.
  - Consider this verse within its immediate context (verses 24-25):  
<sup>24</sup> *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,<sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* (Emphasis mine)
  - We cannot become the person that God wants us to be apart from His Word and His people! How will we make sure that we remember in our heart what we know in our head?

## How God Brings Revival

*Judges 3:8-11*

In the previous section, we learned that ‘forgetting’ or ‘remembering’ is in reality an act of the will, not a lapse in memory. Understanding this, verse 7 concentrates on the Israelites idolatrous actions in serving and worship the Baals and the Asheroth.

### *What does God do in these verses to bring them to revival?*

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- Verse 8 – God became angry with them and allowed the Mesopotamians to rule over them.
- Verse 9 – God sent a deliver to them when they cried out for help.
- Verse 10 – God’s Spirit was upon Othniel.
- Verse 10 – God gave the Mesopotamians into the hands of the Israelites.

### *What role does God’s anger and wrath play in bringing about revival?*

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- “Even in judging his people, God is acting kindly. If he had not brought about suffering and difficulty, the people would not have seen their true position.”<sup>15</sup>
- “He sends the Israelites suffering not simply to pay them back, but to redeem them—he still does this for his people (1 Corinthians 11:32).”<sup>16</sup>  
<sup>32</sup> *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

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<sup>14</sup> Keller 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

- This was a long, drawn-out process because it took eight years before the Israelites were willing to cry out to the Lord to deliver them.

### *What does it mean here when they ‘cried out to the Lord’?*

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- Timothy Keller says that “This implies that they reversed their previous allegiance, turning away from the idols and back to the Lord as their God—they repented. Repentance is crucial for renewal and restoration.”<sup>17</sup>
- However, Daniel Block states, “This outcry is not to be interpreted as a penitential plea; it is simply a cry of pain, a cry for help.”<sup>18</sup>
- Whenever I read different sources that seem to contradict one another, I have three sources I trust that I always check to see how they interpret the passage. None of those sources address this issue!
- So what can we conclude? I do not know if the cry of the Israelites was repentant or not! I do know, however, that God sent a deliverer as a result which makes me lean more toward Keller’s point of view than Block’s.

### *What were Othniel’s qualifications to serve as deliver/judge?*

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- Othniel “is a Judean hero (the last one in the book) of noble... stock... one already distinguished for his courage and prowess (1:11-15). But none of these features is said to have qualified him to take on this foreign emperor. Indeed he had only two... qualifications for the ‘deliverer’ role: he was raised by Yahweh and empowered by Yahweh’s Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>
- The Holy Spirit is the “agent through which God’s will is exercised, whether it be in creation, his dispensing of life, his guidance and providential care, the revelation of his will, his renewal of unregenerate hearts, or his sealing of his covenant people as his own.”<sup>20</sup>
- “In the Book of Judges when the... ‘Spirit of the LORD’ comes upon individuals, it signals the arresting presence and power of God, often of individuals who are unqualified for or indisposed to service for him... [Here,] the Spirit of God transforms this minor Israelite officer from Debir into the ruler of Israel and the conqueror of a world-class enemy.”<sup>21</sup>
- In much the same way, God calls and empowers people today to accomplish His will through the power of the Holy Spirit! The individual may not be highly qualified according to the world’s standards, but that doesn’t matter to God. How has He called you?

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<sup>17</sup> Keller 44.

<sup>18</sup> Block 153.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 154.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 155.

## IV. The Moab and Ehud Cycle

### Unexpected Deliverer (3:12-30)

With the death of the first judge, Othniel (3:11), the Israelites once again enter into a cycle of sin. Judges 3:12 says, “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” As a result of their sin, God “strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel.”

“Although the narrator attributes Eglon’s rise to Yahweh, the Moabite king seems to have been unaware of his role as the agent of the God of Israel. On the contrary, he appears to operate quite independently, forging an alliance with the Ammonites and Amalekites, marching out against Israel, defeating them, and occupying the ‘City of Palms.’ [This] reference is undoubtedly to Jericho.”<sup>22</sup> “This was the place where, supremely, God had given his obedient people victory over their enemies (Joshua 6); now this is the place where God ‘gave’ Eglon victory over them. Further, the subjection is a decade longer (Judges 3:14).”<sup>23</sup> “Either Eglon was oblivious to the curse that Joshua had invoked upon the city in Joshua 6:26 or his occupation of this site represented a deliberate act of defiance against Israel and their God.”<sup>24</sup> Understanding that the Moabite people are distant relatives of the Israelites (they are descendants of Abraham’s nephew, Lot), it is most likely that Eglon was aware of the curse but chose to defy the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Eglon, the king of Moab, is characterized in the text as “a comic figure, a buffoon.”<sup>25</sup> Not only does it describe him as an extremely obese man, it also seems that he is not very smart which will become apparent as the story unfolds. It is somewhat ironic that God strengthened this man to overthrow the Israelites only to destroy him in almost a comical way.

### A Left-Handed Rescuer

*Judges 3:12-15*

#### *Why did it take so long for God to send a deliverer to Israel?*

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- The LORD did not send a deliverer until the Israelites cried out to Him.
- Again, there is debate and disagreement as to whether this is a cry of repentance or a plea for forgiveness; or if it is simply a cry of pain or a plea for divine help.

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<sup>22</sup> Block 158.

<sup>23</sup> Keller 47.

<sup>24</sup> Block 158.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

### *Who did God send to rescue them? What is significant about him being left-handed?*

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- God sent Ehud, a left-handed man.
- What's wrong with being left-handed?
  - Throughout the history of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, the right hand was almost always associated with good and the left hand with evil.
  - “The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century were particularly hard on left-handers, and discrimination against them became engrained and institutionalized... deliberate and sometimes brutal attempts to suppress left-handedness and impose conformity in the education system were endemic during this time... [the] 19<sup>th</sup> Century physician Cesare Lambroso... identified left-handedness as a mark of pathological behavior, savagery and criminality.”<sup>26</sup>
  - “If you look up the references in the Bible to ‘right hand,’ you will find that they are all quite positive. God swears by his right hand, he has pleasures by his right hand, and his chosen One sits at his right hand (Isaiah 62:8-9; Psalm 16:11; 110:1).”<sup>27</sup>
- “Since most people were right-handed, the right hand was a symbol of power and ability. You fought with your sword in your right hand.”<sup>28</sup>

### *What kind of man does God choose to use?*

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- Characterization of Othniel
  - He was your typical leader type.
  - He was a warrior from a family of faithful men—the younger brother of Caleb.
  - He was from the tribe of Judah, the most prominent tribe.
  - He was chosen by God.
- Characterization of Ehud
  - “Judges 3:15 literally says that Ehud was ‘unable to use his right hand.’ It is very possible that Ehud’s right hand was paralyzed or disabled in some way.”<sup>29</sup>
  - He was a social outcast. Keller notes that “in a society which was even more cruel than our own to people who were physically handicapped, he would have been considered ineffective.”<sup>30</sup>
  - He was from the tribe of Benjamin. Ironically, the name Benjamin means “son of the right hand.”
  - He was not a natural leader, but he was chosen by God!

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<sup>26</sup> Accessed on January 13, 2017. [http://www.rightleftwrong.com/history\\_recent.html](http://www.rightleftwrong.com/history_recent.html).

<sup>27</sup> Keller 47.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 47-48.

## The Right (Left) Man

*Judges 3:15-30*

### *What is the plan for delivering Israel from Moabite oppression?*

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- Ehud was “an exceptionally clever and resourceful man, a master of deceit, and the antithesis to Moabite dull-wittedness.”<sup>31</sup>
  - Funny saying – “It is unfair for me to go into a battle of wits with an unarmed man.”
- The plan is for Ehud to go to the king of Moab on behalf of Israel who sent tribute to Eglon. This tribute was most likely a payment made to Eglon similar to taxes.
- Ehud fashioned a short, double-edged sword or long dagger and he bound it to his right leg underneath his clothing. He planned to use this dagger to kill King Eglon.
- Keller states, “This introduces tension into the story. Right-handers carried their swords on the left. Will Ehud’s sword, hidden on his right side, go undetected? Can he get close enough to Eglon to use it?”

### *What happened when Ehud went to the king to present the tribute?*

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- The Bible says that he presented the tribute, but nothing else happened immediately.
  - He either did not get close enough to be able to use his dagger, or
  - He had another plan all along.
- After giving the tribute and leaving, Ehud returned to the king and proclaimed, “I have a secret to tell you.” So the king sent everyone away so that Ehud could share his secret.
- It is noted “that Eglon does not expect a handicapped man to be in any way dangerous.”<sup>32</sup>

### *What was the secret that Ehud had for Eglon?*

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- It was a message from God—his reign was over.
- “The narrator makes very clear in verse 21 that it is Ehud’s left-handedness that allows him to strike down the tyrant who has demanded payment—tribute—from God’s people.”<sup>33</sup>
- Ehud killed the king with the short sword he had made. When he struck him and thrust it into his belly, verse 22 says that “the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade... and the dung came out.”

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<sup>31</sup> Block 161.

<sup>32</sup> Keller 48.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

### *What can we learn about Eglon from this story?*

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- He was a man of indulgence!
  - He is residing in “The City of Palms” (aka Jericho) which was perhaps his summer residence.
  - He is grossly obese which indicates both a lack of activity and overindulgence when it comes to food.
  - His curiosity was easily aroused by the possibility of hearing a secret.
- He was not very smart!
  - He completely underestimated Ehud because of a deformed right hand.
  - He sent away all of his attendants so that Ehud would divulge his secret.

### *Why was it possible for Ehud to get away so easily?*

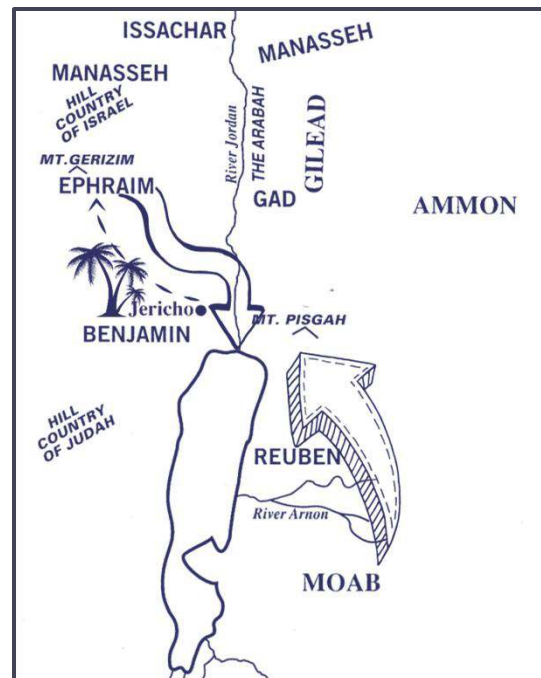
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- There were two main reasons that Ehud was able to get away so easily: 1) he locked the door behind him and 2) the smell coming from inside made the servants think that the king was “relieving himself” (remember verse 22c).
- The servants waited an embarrassing amount of time until they found the key, opened the door and found Eglon dead on the floor. By that time, Ehud had already escaped.

### *Where did Ehud go and what happened next?*

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- He returned to the hill country of Ephraim to rally the Israelites to follow him and subdue the Moabites. He said in verse 28, “Follow after me, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand.”
- The men in the tribe of Benjamin had been decimated, so Ehud went to the next tribe to the north—Ephraim.
- The narrator explains that they secured the “fords of the Jordan” meaning that they had cut off any possibility of the Moabites retreating to or calling for reinforcements from Moab.
- Ehud and the Ephraimite warriors defeated the “strong, able-bodied” Moabites, not allowing one to escape.





## Ehud: God's Type of Leader

*Isaiah 53:2-3*

Starting with the story of Ehud, each of the judges (for whom we have a full story) is what the world would describe as an 'unexpected' leader. In relation to the judges while speaking of Jesus, Keller notes, "When the Judge came, "he had... nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:2-3). He achieved his victory all alone, on behalf of his people but not helped in any way by them. And he crushed his people's enemies through his own weakness, like Ehud."<sup>34</sup>

*From Ehud onward, all of the judges point to Christ's salvation of mankind. In what ways were the judges inferior to Jesus?*

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- Ehud – he used deception to deliver the people.
- Deborah – she needed help (Barak) to deliver the people.
- Gideon – he displayed selfish ambition.
- Jephthah – he displayed rashness in his promises.
- Samson – he was overcome with sexual weakness.

*Why would God choose to use such flawed individuals?*

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- God is showing the world that His deliverance would not come in a perfect 'wrapper.'
- "It will come from an outsider born in a manger; through weakness, not what the world calls strength; through defeat, not what the world calls victory; through folly, not what the world calls wisdom."<sup>35</sup>

## Think of What You Were

*1 Corinthians 1:26-29*

"Ehud points us to Jesus: he also points us to ourselves. God uses a 'left-handed' deliver... to save 'left-handed' people! 'Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God

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<sup>34</sup> Keller 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

chose the foolish things...’ (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).”<sup>36</sup> When we think about who we were before Christ, it is amazing that He chooses to use us at all!

*“Paul says that God tends to choose and use people who are weaker socially, physically, and even morally. Why?”<sup>37</sup>*

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- 1 Corinthians 1:28-29 says, “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”
- “He takes and uses people who are at the margins of society—in order to show that salvation is from him, not from our own human ability.”<sup>38</sup>

*“Think of what you were...” How are you “left-handed”?  
How does this humble you?*

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<sup>36</sup> Keller 50-51.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 51.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

## V. Parenthesis 1: The Governorship of Shamgar (3:31)

“Shamgar’s judgeship appears to have transpired after Ehud’s deliverance but before his death (the historical notice in 4:1 continues after Ehud’s death rather than after Shamgar’s). The name Shamgar is Hurrian, but this may infer more than Hurrian influence on his parents, not that he was a non-Israelite. That he saved Israel marks him out as a judge though the only item recorded is that he struck down 600 Philistines with an ox goad. Whether this tally was a lifetime total or the number in a single episode is not indicated. His weapon was a sharp metal-tipped stick about 8 or 10 feet long used to direct animals. The other end usually had a chisel-like blade for cleaning a plow.”<sup>39</sup>

In the *New American Commentary* on Judges and Ruth, Daniel Block makes an argument that Shamgar is a foreigner, not from Israel. This is based off the fact that his name is Hurrian and he is designated as the “son of Anath,” which “probably refers to the Canaanite warrior goddess Anath. If so, it is ironic that God used a non-Israelite warrior to deliver Israel from its enemies.”<sup>40</sup> Block concludes that “the lack of detail and the primitive plot development may also reflect the author’s embarrassment over Israel’s dependence on a foreigner for their deliverance.”<sup>41</sup>

Since there is so little information available about Shamgar, some commentators, such as Daniel Block, read much more into this passage. However, it is my understanding that we should take this description of the third judge of Israel as it is in its simplicity. Shamgar was “a ‘deliverer,’ rather than ‘ruler’ of Israel.”<sup>42</sup> He delivered them from oppression from the Philistines with an ox goad.

Finally, the use of an ‘ox goad’ as a weapon is interesting in that throughout the book of Judges, the weapon choices of the God-chosen deliverers were unique. Here is a chart that shows the weapon used by some of the judges:

<u>JUDGE</u>	<u>ENEMY</u>	<u>WEAPON</u>
Ehud	Moabites	Two-edged Dagger
Shamgar	Philistines	Ox goad (Cattle Prod)
Deborah (Jael)	Canaanites	Tent Peg
Gideon	Midianites	Pitchers, Torches & Trumpets
Samson	Philistines	Jawbone of a Donkey Columns & Roof of a Building

<sup>39</sup> Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. (United States: Victor Books, 1985) 387. (Hereafter designated as *TBKCOT*)

<sup>40</sup> *ESV Study Bible* 444.

<sup>41</sup> Block 175.

<sup>42</sup> Block 174-175.



## VI. The Canaanite and Deborah/Barak Cycle

### Godly Ruler and Rescuer (4:1 – 5:31)

After the death of Ehud, the “people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” Chapters 4 and 5 of the Book of Judges are interesting because they describe the same events from different perspectives. Chapter 4 is an historical accounting of the story of Deborah, Barak and Jael; while chapter 5 relates the events through the eyes of a poet or song writer. We will “spend most of our time in chapter 4, and then notice how the flavors and emphases in the next chapter’s song provide us with a richer, deeper perspective.”<sup>1</sup>

#### A Godly Ruler

*Judges 4:1-5*

So the cycle of apostasy begins again! This time, the Israelites found themselves under the oppression of Jabin, king of Canaan. If the Israelites had trusted God back in the first chapter, the Canaanites would not have been a problem. But Judges 1:27-33 tells us that the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of their inheritance and therefore lived among the Canaanites. Now God uses the Canaanites to bring repentance and revival among His people.

#### *Who was the commander of the Canaanite army? And why were the Israelites so afraid of him and his army?*

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- Verse 2 tells us that the commander of the Canaanite army was Sisera.
- Verse 3 says that “...he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.”
- “They oppression is worse than either Cushan-Rishathaim’s or Eglon’s; it is ‘cruel,’ and it lasts twenty years (v 3). And so Israel ‘cried to the LORD for help.’”<sup>2</sup>

#### *Who did God send to judge His people at this time?*

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- Deborah – “a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth”
- She led the people in the hill country of Ephraim by ‘holding court sessions.’

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Keller notes, “This is not a queen’s court; rather, it is an actual courtroom, where Israelites would come to have their ‘disputes decided’ (v 5).”<sup>3</sup>
- It seems that the Israelites trusted Deborah to make wise decisions, since they came to her with all sorts of social, legal and relational disputes.
- “Deborah is very different from all the other judges before and after her. She led from wisdom and character, rather than sheer might. Where Othniel ‘went to war’ (3:10) and Ehud made his assassination plan (3:16), Deborah counseled and guided the people. So she comes closest to being a godly leader of the people, instead of simply a general.”

## A Godly Rescuer

*Judges 4:6-16*

The fact that Deborah is not a warrior becomes apparent in these next few verses. God used her as His voice of leadership, but rather than leading the Israelites herself, she asks another to be the ‘rescuer’ of Israel to go up against the oppression of Jabin and his commander, Sisera.

### *Who did Deborah call upon to be the godly rescuer of Israel? How did he respond to this call?*

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- Deborah calls Barak (read 4:6-10)
  - Deborah asked Barak, “Didn’t God already tell you to go get an army together and go fight the Canaanites and deliver Israel from their oppression?”
  - She also provides him with the battle plan.
- Barak’s response to Deborah, and Deborah’s reply to him, have been read in two ways:
  - The Pessimistic View – “The more pessimistic view sees Barak asking Deborah to go with him, and refusing to go if she doesn’t (4:8), as a timid lack of faith... Barak then summons the troops and prepares to fight, but only because Deborah is with him (v 9, 10). It’s not until verse 14... that Barak charges down Mount Tabor with his men. It’s only at that point that he shows the faith he is commended for in Hebrews 11:32; and so the withholding of honor in Judges 4:9 is a rebuke to Barak for his lack of obedient, radical faith in verse 8.”<sup>4</sup>
  - The Optimistic View – “The more optimistic view rests on the fact that... Deborah is not rebuking Barak, but simply telling him that though he will have to charge down the hillside into the teeth of nine hundred iron chariots, he will not get the honor for it! It’s a prophetic statement of fact, not a verdict on his faith.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Keller 53-54.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

*In Hebrews 11:32, Barak is listed among others as a “hero of the faith.” What evidence do we find here of his heroism?*

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- Read Judges 4:12-16.
- He shows faith by listening to God in all situations.
  - “His desire to take Deborah with him is not disobedience, but done out of a recognition that Deborah is a godly woman who speaks God’s words.
  - “Why wouldn’t he want her with him?!”<sup>6</sup>
- He shows faith by facing overwhelming odds.
  - “An iron chariot could cut through foot-soldiers like a hot knife through butter.
  - “Nine hundred chariots would beat 10,000 men every time. But Barak still fights.”<sup>7</sup>
- He shows faith by obeying no matter who receives the honor.
  - “Faith is humble and not honor-seeking.
  - “He obeys God and leads his men down the mountain, knowing that the victory will be given to another, and that the rule will not be his afterwards.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Death by Tent Peg**

*Judges 4:11, 17-22*

There is a “break in the narrative of Barak’s victory over Sisera in Judges 4:11. 10,000 men stand ready for battle (v 10)...Sisera is about to summon his charioteers (v 12-13)... and the narrator tells us that ‘Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law, and pitched his tent’ near the battleground (v 11). We’re not told why he did this, and he plays no part in the battle. His wife, however, suddenly becomes integral to the plot.”<sup>9</sup>

*After the army of Sisera fell (v 16), what happened to Sisera?*

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- Sisera ran away from the battlefield and hid inside Heber and Jael’s tent.
  - Sisera went to “the tent of Jael,’ which means safety, because Jabin and Heber were allies (v 17).”<sup>10</sup>
  - Jael welcomed him (v 18) into the tent, telling him, “...turn aside to me; do not be afraid.”
  - Sisera conspired with her to hide him (18-19) and avert anyone from searching the tent that might come by (20). Trusting that he was safe, Sisera fell asleep.

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

- Jael slipped in quietly to where he was sleeping and drove a tent peg through his temple into the ground (21).
  - In case we were unsure, the end of verse 21 clarifies what happened next— “So he died.”
  - “The method of Jael’s attack on Sisera deepens the irony of the passage even further. Setting up and taking down tents was considered the work of women. Therefore, the tent peg and hammer were essentially a woman’s household appliance! In that age, death at the hand of a woman was particularly humiliating, of course. All this was probably designed by Jael to make Sisera’s death the most devastating defeat possible.”<sup>11</sup>

### *What did Deborah prophecy concerning the death of Sisera?*

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- In verse 9, Deborah told Barak that “the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”
  - Barak most likely assumed that Deborah was speaking of herself.
  - But as Barak passed by Jael’s tent in pursuit of Sisera, Jael said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” He went inside to discover Sisera lying there in the floor of the tent with a tent peg in his temple... dead.
- Keller summarizes this passage by saying:
 

“Humanly speaking, the honor has been shared. But really, the honor goes to no human at all. It was the LORD who spoke to, and through, Deborah; the LORD who went ahead of Barak and then gave him victory (14-15); and the LORD who handed Sisera over to Jael (9). It is a fair conclusion to say that ‘on that day, God [not Deborah, Barak or Jael] subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites’ (23).”<sup>12</sup>

### **God Wins**

*Judges 4:24 – 5:31*

“With Jabin destroyed (4:24), we should expect to read of peace for Israel in the land. And we do (5:31); but not until we have read of the same events from a different angle. The foundational difference in chapter 5 is that this is a song, and the approach is more theological. It looks beneath the surface of the history and reveals that God’s hand, hinted at in chapter 4, was behind it all.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Keller 61.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 62.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



*What insights do we gain from Deborah's Song in chapter 5 about the story of God's deliverance in chapter 4?*

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- Concerning “God” (4:6, 9, 14-15)
  - The Lord is only mentioned four times in chapter 4, but He is mentioned eight times by name in just the first five verses.
  - Read Judges 5:1-5.
  - The rest of the chapter recounts His hand at work against the Canaanites.
- Concerning “the Tribes of Israel”
  - Life in Israel had changed because of their decision to follow false gods. “Under idol-worship, Israel fell under oppression but also into social decay. The cessation of ‘village life’ meant it was every family, even every man, for themselves.”<sup>14</sup>
  - Because of this self-seeking mentality, we find that many of the tribes are listed here as not being willing to participate in the battle against Sisera’s army (5:13-18).
    - “Some from the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin did, as did Issachar (14-15).
    - “But Reuben carried on herding sheep (15-16);
    - “and Gilead, Dan and Asher stayed home, too (17).
    - “The greatest honor goes to Zebulun and Naphtali; to those who ‘risked their very lives ... on the heights of the field’ (18).”<sup>15</sup>
- Concerning “the battle”
  - Deborah’s Song gives greater detail as to what happened during the battle.
  - “The imagery suggests that the forces of nature fought on God’s side (and thus Canaanite deities, who supposedly ruled over these forces, were powerless to help against the true God).”<sup>16</sup>
  - “The highly poetic language—from the heavens the stars fought... against Sisera—does not imply a belief that the stars caused rain, but simply affirms divine intervention in the battle. As implied in verse 21, God’s intervention took the form of an unseasonable rain (the Canaanites would never have risked taking their chariots into marshy territory in the rainy season) which turned the dry riverbed of the Kishon into a raging torrent.”<sup>17</sup>
  - “God, through Deborah, told Israel just where to fight (4:6), luring Sisera’s army to the place where he would destroy them (v 7, 5:21-22).”<sup>18</sup>
- Concerning “the victory”
  - “What is the lesson for God’s people? That God wins—and so blessing is to be found in fighting for and with him, putting ourselves in his service whatever the odds or likely cost. Conversely, there is a curse for those who do the opposite—

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<sup>14</sup> Keller 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *ESV Study Bible* 447.

<sup>17</sup> *TBKCOT* 390.

<sup>18</sup> Keller 63-64.

who stay at home (v 23). It is not that the LORD requires help (the song has shown that beyond doubt!) but that the LORD allows his people to ‘help.’”<sup>19</sup>

- Jael is a recipient of God’s blessings because of her actions toward Sisera (5:24-27).
- This idea of blessings and cursings is reiterated in 5:31. “It is appropriate for a hymn describing Yahweh’s victory over idolatrous enemies to conclude with a curse on evil enemies and a blessing on those who are faithful to Yahweh.”<sup>20</sup>
- Concerning “the character of Sisera”
  - In verses 28-30, Deborah envisions Sisera’s mother sitting at home—waiting on her son to return from battle.
  - As the mother discussed his delay with her ladies-in-waiting, one of the ladies reminds Sisera’s mother of his normal activities following a battle.
  - “We learn that Sisera likes to steal and rape and enslave women (v 28-30), which they think accounts for his delayed return.”<sup>21</sup>
  - “After making the lives of many women hellish nightmares, it is two women who bring him down. There is great irony that the man who used women as objects is killed by a womanly object.”<sup>22</sup>

## Living with Two Perspectives

“Setting Judges 4 and 5 alongside one another, the narrator encourages us to have a chapter 5 perspective on our own lives, as well as a chapter 4 one. Chapter 5 sees God’s hand behind all things; celebrates success and honors him supremely; and has a continual note of praise.

“We can, and should, live our lives and order our memories not only historically but theologically—not simply recollecting what happened, or what we did, but searching out what God was doing. This keeps us from over-honoring ourselves in success, or despairing in our struggles. Part of the key to enjoying peace is to be continually praising the Lord for what he has done, and is doing, for us, because the story we tell of our lives is not so much about us, as about Him.”<sup>23</sup>

*What happens if we only have an historical perspective on life?  
What difference would it make to maintain both an historical  
and theological perspective on life?*

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<sup>19</sup> Keller 64.

<sup>20</sup> *TBKCOT* 390.

<sup>21</sup> Keller 64.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 65.

## VII. The Midianite and Gideon Cycle (6:1 – 9:57)

### The Weak Mighty Warrior (6:1-16)

As we begin reading Judges 6, we see the telltale evidence that the Israelites are descending into yet another ‘cycle of apostasy.’ The first verse tells us that they “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” The phrase ‘did what was evil’ means that they have forgotten the Lord—who He is and what He has done—and have returned to worshiping idols (the Baals and Asherahs).

Notice the description of the beginning stages of this cycle of sin in **Judges 6:1-6**. God chose to use the Midianites this time to bring oppression upon Israel (1). This was the worst oppression yet during the period of the judges. The Israelites were run out of their homes and forced to live in dens and caves in the surrounding mountains (2). The Midianites were not just interested in political control—they wanted control of everything. They plundered all of Israel’s crops and livestock (3-4)—and they left “no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey.” As a result, the people of Israel were starving and the land of Israel lay in waste (5). After reaching an all-time low, the Israelites finally “cried out for help to the Lord” (6).

“So far, though more oppressive, the cycle is following its normal route. Now we expect God to raise up a deliverer, a judge... But instead, ‘when the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet’ (6:7-8).<sup>1</sup>

### Sermon before Salvation

*Judges 6:7-10*

Up to this point, each time the Israelites cried out to God, He sent a deliverer; however, this time He first sent a prophet to proclaim the message from the Lord before sending a savior to deliver them from the hand of the Midianites. “Before they can appreciate the rescue that will come, the people need to understand why they need rescuing.”<sup>2</sup>

#### *What was God trying to communicate to Israel through His prophet?*

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- God is trying to convict the people of their sin so they would truly repent before God sends a judge to deliver them from the hand of the Midianites.
  - Each time we have discussed the phrase “they cried out to God” we have addressed the question about whether or not they were truly repentant.
    - In the Othniel cycle we considered the ideas of ‘forgetting God’ and ‘crying out to God’ in more detail. We determined that:

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 68.

- To “say that the Israelites ‘forgot’ God is to say that they no longer were controlled by what they knew... Though they knew who God was and what he wanted, those things were not real to them.”<sup>3</sup>
- I do not know if the cry of the Israelites was repentant or not! I do know, however, that God sent a deliverer as a result which makes me lean more toward Keller’s point of view than Block’s.
  - Timothy Keller says that “This implies that they reversed their previous allegiance, turning away from the idols and back to the Lord as their God—they repented. Repentance is crucial for renewal and restoration.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Daniel Block states, “This outcry is not to be interpreted as a penitential plea; it is simply a cry of pain, a cry for help.”<sup>5</sup>
- This “suggests that the ‘crying out’ of verses 6-7 is not a sign of real repentance. Their history, after the deaths of Othniel, Ehud and Deborah, is strong evidence that their sorrow was skin-deep, not heartfelt.”<sup>6</sup>
- God was trying to communicate that two main things:
  - What He has done...
    - He delivered them out of Egyptian slavery.
    - He drove out all the inhabitants of the Promised Land.
  - What they have done...
    - They have not obeyed Him.
    - In 2 Corinthians 7:8-10, Paul distinguishes the difference between worldly sorrow and repentance:
 

<sup>8</sup>For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. <sup>9</sup>As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. <sup>10</sup>For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

### *What can we learn about repentance from 2 Corinthians 7:8-10?*

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- When we feel sorrow for our words or actions, we need to check what we are sorry about: the consequences of our sinful words and actions, or the sin itself; the loss of the pleasure that we get from the sin or the harm that has been done to our relationship with God.

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<sup>3</sup> Keller 42.

<sup>4</sup> Keller 44.

<sup>5</sup> Block 153.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- We need to be able to determine “the difference between normal lapses on the road to increasing Christian maturity and getting ‘stuck’—a repeated pattern of lapses which is a sign of no real progress.
  - “If you are continually falling into the same spiritual pit, and your falls are not decreasing in numbers or intensity, then you may be responding in regret rather than repentance.
  - “In other words, you may be simply regretful for the troubles of your sin, but unwilling to identify and reject the idol under the sin which is still attractive to you.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Do the Israelites ever show any signs of true repentance?*

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- There are no signs of it!
- “God is commissioning his judge—even though the people have not repented.”<sup>8</sup>

### **If God Is with Us**

*Judges 6:11-16*

The scene changes and we find Gideon, the son of Joash the Abiezrite, threshing wheat in the winepress so he would be hidden from the Midianites. This is just a hint as to how bad the oppression of Midian had become. Their only hope of even having food to eat is to harvest the food under cover. It was in this context that the angel of the Lord came to visit Gideon.

### *Who is the angel of the Lord?*

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- “We meet the angel several times in Judges (2:1-3; 13:3-21 and here), and throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 18; Exodus 3; 34; Joshua 5:13-15)... It is not until the miracle of Judges 6:21 that Gideon is sure that this is a divine figure. So this is a very human-appearing figure.”
- In Judges 6:14-16, we find the first indication that the angel of the Lord is divine.
  - The angel of the Lord and the Lord are one and the same.
  - We believe this to be the pre-incarnate Christ. Jesus Christ is eternal—past, present and future.
    - He existed in eternity past long before He was born in Bethlehem.
    - He is present in creation.
    - He makes Himself known to various people throughout the Old Testament.

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<sup>7</sup> Keller 70.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*What did the angel of the Lord convey to Gideon in this conversation?  
How did Gideon rebuff the Lord's assertions?*

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- “The Lord is with you...”
  - Gideon openly disagrees with the angel of the Lord in verse 13.
  - It is apparent that Gideon had been taught the history of his people—the stories of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.
  - Based on his point of view, God has abandoned His children—which is evidenced by the oppression of Midian upon them.
  - “God’s point has already been made, in verses 9-10, through his prophet: *I have not abandoned you, but you have abandoned me.*”<sup>9</sup>
- “You, [Gideon, are a] mighty man of valor”
  - God tells Gideon that **HE** is the deliverer that is being sent to save Israel from Midian. **HE** is God’s mighty warrior. **HE** is the Moses of this generation.
  - “Do Something” by Matthew West

Verse 1:

I woke up this morning  
Saw a world full of trouble now  
Thought, how’d we ever get so far down  
How’s it ever gonna turn around  
So I turned my eyes to Heaven  
I thought, “God, why don’t You do something?”  
Well, I just couldn’t bear the thought of  
People living in poverty  
Children sold into slavery  
The thought disgusted me  
So, I shook my fist at Heaven  
Said, “God, why don’t You do something?”  
He said, “I did, I created you”

**Chorus:**

**If not us, then who  
If not me and you  
Right now, it’s time for us to do something  
If not now, then when  
Will we see an end  
To all this pain  
It’s not enough to do nothing  
It’s time for us to do something**

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<sup>9</sup> Keller 73.

- “Go in this might of yours and save Israel”
  - God’s plan was to use Gideon’s abilities—coupled with God’s almighty power—to save Israel from the hands of the Midianites.
  - Gideon responded to the Lord with several different excuses:
    - “I’m from the tribe of Manasseh.”
    - “My clan is the weakest in our tribe.”
    - “I am the weakest in my whole family.”
  - God’s responses: “Am I not sending you?” & “I will be with you.”
- “Gideon is correct to suggest that he cannot save Israel—in his own strength. God is correct to tell him that he will save Israel—using his own strength, combined with knowing that God has called him to this task, and is with him in it. As God’s people today, we need the same attitude in the areas of service to which God has called us.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Keller 74.





## The Uncertainty of the Leader (6:16-40)

### Two Altars

*Judges 6:16-35*

Once God had spoken these things to Gideon, he said to God, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you” (Judges 6:17-18). Gideon is trying to determine if this was really God Himself that he had been talking to.

*What does Gideon decide to do to determine once and for all that he is speaking with God? How was this confirmed by God?*

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- He decides to bring an offering to God and set it before Him.
  - Verse 19 – description of all that he prepared for the Lord.
  - Verse 20 – instruction for what to do with the offering.
  - Verse 21 – reception of the offering; it became a burnt offering.
- After the offering was consumed, the angel then disappears confirming once and for all that the angel he was talking with was God Himself.  
<sup>22</sup>Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.” (Judges 6:22)
- Gideon realized that he should not have survived a ‘face-to-face’ meeting with the Lord so in verse 23, the Lord reassures him that he will not die. God was gracious toward Gideon, so now Gideon is at peace with God and built an altar to commemorate it (24).

*“Before they can throw off the enemies around them (the Midianites), they have to throw off the enemies among them (the false idols of Canaan).” What did Gideon do to make this happen?*

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- He obeyed God by destroying his father’s altar to Baal and the Asherah pole beside it.
  - “It is no surprise that Joash has an altar and a pole for the worshiping of Canaanite deities. While he had clearly taught his children about the exodus from Egypt and the Lord who had rescued their forefathers (v 13), he had also chosen to serve Baal and Asherah (v 25). The Israelites had not abandoned worship of God *for* idols. They had combined the worship of God *with* idols.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Verse 25 – he used his father’s bulls to destroy these shrines to false gods.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 76.

- Verse 26 – he built an altar to the Lord in its place, then sacrificed the 7 year old bull on the altar using the wood from the Asherah pole as firewood.
- Interesting Fact: the people of Israel had been under Midianite oppression for 7 years; and God told Gideon to sacrifice the 7 year old bull.
- Gideon accomplished this task overnight with the help of 10 men (or servants).
  - Verse 27 – he did these things at night because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it during the day.
  - We cannot forget how Gideon described himself to God in verse 15:
    - “My clan is the weakest in our tribe.”
    - “I am the weakest in my whole family.”
    - Even still, Gideon’s obedience is immediate!
  - “Gideon’s obedience to God’s command should not be minimized by his use of 10...servants (dismantling a Canaanite altar was a massive task), or by the fact that he did it at night (the Baal-worshippers would obviously have prevented it if he had tried to do this during the day).”<sup>3</sup>

*In what ways does this story reflect the struggle that believers have in their lives in regard to their personal, spiritual growth?*

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- Before a believer is able to throw off the obvious oppressions in their life, he must first rid himself of the false idols he has propped up in his life.
- “God will not help us out of your obvious, visible problems (money problems, relationship problems, etc.) until we see the idols that we are worshiping right beside the Lord. They have to be removed first. Gideon is essentially being told here to make God the Lord of every area of life. We are not to add anything to Jesus Christ as a requirement for being happy.”<sup>4</sup>

*How did all the people react when they saw what Gideon had done?*

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- The townspeople were furious!
  - When they saw the broken altar, the Asherah pole cut down and the sacrificed bull on the new altar, they probed to see who was responsible (29).
  - Their investigation discovered Gideon was responsible, so they called for his death (30).
- Joash—Gideon’s father—defused the crowd with some sage wisdom.
  - Perhaps Joash was “repentant and inspired by his son’s remarkable actions.”<sup>5</sup>
  - He pointed out (in verse 31), “If he (Baal) is a god, let him contend for himself, because his altar has been broken down.”

<sup>3</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* 392.

<sup>4</sup> Keller 77.

<sup>5</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* 392.

- In other words, Joash said, “Baal doesn’t need us to defend him if he really is a god; but if he is not, do we want to find ourselves on the wrong side of this?”
- The townspeople gave Gideon the nickname *Jerubbaal* which means “Let Baal contend against him.”
  - “Though they apparently applied the name derogatively, it might have later assumed an honorable signification as a witness against Baal’s inability to defend himself.”<sup>6</sup>
  - This nickname apparently stuck with Gideon because it is still being used at the end of his life (Judges 8:29 – 9:1).

*After this incident with the two altars, what happened to Gideon?  
How did he begin to emerge as a leader in Israel?*

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- Gideon was *clothed* in the power of the Spirit of the Lord!
  - Verse 33 – the Midianites and Amalekites moved across the Jordan River and camped in the fertile Valley of Jezreel. This is similar to Judges 6:3-4 that describes the oppression of the Midianites and Amalekites against Israel.
  - Verse 34 – the Holy Spirit came upon Gideon providing him with a divine empowering to accomplish that which God called him to do.
- Gideon “sounded the trumpet” (34) for his countrymen to come together to battle against the Midianites.
  - The Abiezrites were Gideon’s clan (11).
  - He also called out men to follow him from the nearby tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali.

*In what ways is the work of the Holy Spirit different today  
than it was in the time of Gideon?*

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- The Holy Spirit did not indwell believers in the Old Testament like He did with the believers in the Book of Acts and even believers today.
  - In Acts 2:16-21, Peter quotes the prophet Joel to explain the prophecy of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit inside every believer has not been fulfilled.
  - “We are initiated into the Christian life through the Spirit’s activity in our conversion and regeneration.”<sup>7</sup>
  - “The work of the Spirit is not completed when one becomes a believer; on the contrary, it is just beginning.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid 393.

<sup>7</sup> Erikson, Millard J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001) 279.

- He empowers believers (John 14:12; Acts 1:8).
  - He indwells believers (John 14:16-17).
  - He teaches believers (John 14:26).
  - He intercedes for believers (Romans 8:26-27).
  - He gives gifts to believers (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
- The Holy Spirit functioned very differently in the Old Testament. In relation to His empowering of an individual, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was not necessarily permanent in the life of a person.
  - “The Spirit of God sovereignly grants gifts to various leaders. Among these gifts are craftsmanship, prophecy, and leadership. The Lord fills Bezalel ‘with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship’ (Exod. 35:31). ‘Skillful persons’ are ‘endowed with the spirit of wisdom’ for the task of adorning the tabernacle (Exod. 28:3; 31:1-11; 35:30-35).”<sup>9</sup>
  - “The Spirit comes upon the kings of Israel at their anointing and to enable them to do God’s will but departs from the disobedient. When Saul is anointed by Samuel, the Spirit comes upon him mightily: Saul is changed and begins to prophesy (1 Sam. 10:1-10). After Saul’s disobedience at Gilgal, Samuel anoints David, and the Spirit comes upon David. Concurrently, the Spirit of Yahweh departs from Saul and ‘an evil spirit’ is sent to terrorize the fallen king.”<sup>10</sup>
  - “The Old Testament depicts the Holy Spirit as producing the moral and spiritual qualities of holiness and goodness in the person upon whom he comes or in whom he dwells. We should not, however, that while in some cases this internal working of the Holy Spirit seems to be permanent, in other cases, such as in the Book of Judges, his presence seems to be intermittent and related to a particular activity or ministry which is to be carried out.”<sup>11</sup>

## The Famous Fleeces

*Judges 6:36-40*

Many people are familiar with this last portion of Scripture in Judges 6. It is often misunderstood and its connotation misapplied. It is important for us to identify the purpose behind Gideon’s unusual requests for the fleece; as well as recognize what his goal is not!

### *What is Gideon asking God to do with the fleece?*

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- The first time, Gideon asked God to let the ground be dry and the fleece wet.
- The second time, Gideon asked God to let the fleece be dry and the ground wet.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Akin, Daniel L. *A Theology for the Church*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2007) 608.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 609.

<sup>11</sup> Erikson 277.

- In both situations, God affirmed the request of Gideon.
- “Many people have criticized Gideon for this action. If, however, it was so wrong and sinful, why did God respond?”<sup>12</sup>

### *What was Gideon trying to discern by asking God to do this?*

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- It is first important to note what he was NOT trying to discern.
  - He was not trying to discern God’s will; he already knew God’s will.
  - Gideon already knew what God wanted him to do. God revealed that to him back in verses 11-14.
  - Verse 14 says, “And the Lord turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?”
  - “Others have imitated Gideon in this action. They say: *Lord, if you want me to take this job, let me get a phone call from them today.* But we must be careful. When Satan asked Jesus to ‘test’ God by asking for a ‘sign,’ Jesus rebuked him (Matthew 4:5-7).”<sup>13</sup>
- Gideon was “asking God to show him that he was not one of the forces of nature (like the other gods), but was sovereign over the forces of nature. Gideon, then, was not looking for ‘little signs’ to help him make a decision. He was really seeking to understand the nature of God.”<sup>14</sup>
- “The sign related to a confirmation or assurance of God’s presence or empowerment for the task at hand. God condescended to Gideon’s weak faith and saturated the wool fleece with dew, so much that Gideon wrung out... a bowlful of water... [Then] he requested the opposite—This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew. God patiently did so, and Gideon was reassured to continue his assignment.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Why should we not use this model to determine God’s will in our lives?*

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- This is NOT what Gideon was doing! Gideon “was asking for supernatural revelation from God to show him who he really is. This therefore is not about how to make a decision. This is about how we need to ask God to give us a picture of who he is.”<sup>16</sup>
- This is NOT the plan of God for us to determine His will for our lives.
  - Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”
  - God reveals Himself to us through His Son and through His Word.

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<sup>12</sup> Keller 77.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 77-78.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 78.

<sup>15</sup> *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* 393.

<sup>16</sup> Keller 78.

### *In regard to the fleece, what was Gideon really asking for?*

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- “Gideon’s request was for help to build up his faith. God, in his grace, responded (twice!).
- “When we make the same request, God graciously responds: by pointing us to the fullest, final revelation of his character and his purposes—the Lord Jesus.
- “When we, like Gideon, find ourselves doubting God’s promises, or God’s presence, we can ask him to point us again to his Son, saying: ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’ (Mark 9:24). This is what Gideon needed, and received. God will do the same for us.”<sup>17</sup>
- Remember Hebrews 1! If there are parts of your life that need you to exercise more faith, look to Jesus—the One through whom God is speaking to us.
- Remember Hebrews 11! By faith, Gideon conquered kingdoms. What will we do by faith?
- Remember Hebrews 12! Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith!

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<sup>17</sup> Keller 78-79.

## Triumph in Weakness (7:1-25)

I found a quote online the other day that was categorized on Pinterest as a “Scripture Study Quote.” The quote said this: “Invest in yourself first. Expect nothing from no one and be willing to work for everything.” Now besides the bad grammar here, this is bad theology as well! Another pithy statement from an online *treasure trove* of wisdom (I hope you can hear my sarcasm!) is this quote from Patricia Sampson: “Self-reliance is the only road to true freedom, and being one’s own person is its ultimate reward.”<sup>1</sup>

It is this “Me First” attitude that sabotages the work of God in the life of a believer. Every leader who has a goal of being a godly leader will come to a place in his/her life when God will attempt to teach them a lesson in dependence. For some leaders, this is a lifelong learning process; for others, it is a condensed intensive course that impacts their life forever. Whether it is a lifelong process, an intensive time of testing, or a combination of both, God’s desire for leaders is to learn humility and dependence upon Him!

As we continue to look into the life of Gideon, we find that God is teaching this lesson to him. Gideon has confirmed in his heart that God is sovereign over all creation—the incidents with the fleece—now God wants him to learn that God cares for him and has a plan for giving him victory.

### You Need Fewer Men

*Judges 7:1-8*

#### *What did God tell Gideon concerning the number of soldiers? Why?*

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- God said that there were too many!
  - Gideon had done a good job recruiting soldiers for the battle.
  - There were 32,000 men encamped with him beside the spring of Harod.
- God said there were too many because the Israelites would not have given Him the glory for the victory had they gone up against the Midianites with 32,000—or even 10,000—men.
  - “God’s people will either praise him for this victory; or they will praise—boast in—themselves. Gideon will either give the honor to his Lord, or he will seek it himself. Human nature is such that, if there is the tiniest opportunity to boast in our own work, we will.”<sup>2</sup>
  - “This is the greatest spiritual danger there is—that we should believe that we can save, or have saved, ourselves. The lesson we always need to learn is that salvation is by God’s gracious action, not by earning it with our actions.”<sup>3</sup>
- We have already seen God deliver through thousands (Deborah and Barak) and we will see later how that God is able to deliver through just one (Samson). What God wants us to see is that deliverance always and only comes through Him!

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<sup>1</sup> <http://quoteaddicts.com/i/159272> accessed on March 3, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Keller 81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 82.

### *What did God tell Gideon to do to reduce the number of soldiers?*

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- First Reduction ⇒ 32,000 down to 10,000
  - Gideon told the people to go home if they were afraid of going into battle—22,000 men were willing to publicly admit their cowardice and returned home as a result.
  - “The reason it was good to send them home is a practical one. Fear is contagious, as we can often see in Judges. When any significant body of soldiers panic and flee, it can sap the determination of everyone and lead to a rout. Though it was surely discouraging to lose these numbers, it was still very practical to let them go. This move was concerned for the morale of the army. God’s command and human logic line up here.”<sup>4</sup>
  - Even with this vast reduction, God said, “The people are still too many” (7:4).
- Second Reduction ⇒ 10,000 down to 300
  - God instructed Gideon as to how he would go about reducing the number again.
    - In verse 4, God said, “Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there...”
    - In verse 5, God gives Gideon the test, “Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink.”
  - “Gideon obeys, separating the 9,700 who knelt down to put their mouths to the water to drink from the 300 who used their hands to scoop up water... And it is only the 300 who lapped who are to remain.”<sup>5</sup>
- “He had started the day with 32,000 men at his back. Now there are 300—a reduction of over 99%! Notice what great faith Gideon shows in verses 3-8, trusting God and not numbers. This is the faith for which he is commended in Hebrews 11:32-34: ‘I do not have time to tell [fully] about Gideon... who through faith conquered kingdoms... whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.’”<sup>6</sup>

### *Why did God instruct Gideon to reduce the number of soldiers?*

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- God knew that if the 32,000 Israelites fought and defeated the Midianites then they would boast in what they had done rather than giving the glory to God.
- After the battle is over, God wanted the soldiers to say, “It was impossible for us to win, few as we were—this victory must have been given by God. The glory is his, and the privilege is ours, for being allowed to be part of what he was doing.”<sup>7</sup>
- Biblical Principle – ***God does not save in the way we expect—He saves through weakness!***

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 82.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 83.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 84.



## My Weakness, His Strength

*2 Corinthians 12:5-10*

Paul explains this principle further in his second letter to the Corinthians. We are unsure as to what this 'thorn in the flesh' actually is, but that is inconsequential to understanding the overriding, biblical principle. ***God works through weakness!***

### *Why is it important to God to work through our weakness?*

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- “First, this principle is the basis for salvation itself.
  - “We cannot be saved if we think we are good or able. God’s saving power only works on us when we admit that we have no worthiness or goodness in ourselves.”<sup>8</sup>
  - Romans 5:6 (NLT) says, “***For while we were still weak***, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Emphasis added)
- Second, this principle is the underlying concept for repentance. It is not until we truly see our weakness and our depth of sin that grace and mercy become precious to us.
- Third, this principle is the pattern by which God brings spiritual maturity in a believer’s life.
  - God sends trials into our lives to undermine the ‘idols’ we are trusting in and to make it easier to be dependent upon Him.
  - Romans 5:3-5 (NLT) says, “<sup>3</sup>We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. <sup>4</sup>And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. <sup>5</sup>And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”
- When we enter our daily battles recognizing our utter weakness, it is then that we are depending upon God and He then shows His power and strength.

*Have there been times in your life that God weakened you so that you could see his hand at work?*

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*Have there been times in your life that God weakened you and then worked through that weakness?*

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<sup>8</sup> Keller 85.

## The Loaf of Barley

*Judges 7:9-14*

Once the Israelite army was reduced to 300 men, God knew that Gideon would be struggling once again with confidence to go up against the Midianites. For this reason, God reassured Gideon of his impending victory and allowed him to see the battle from a different and unique perspective. God instructed Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp.

### *How did Gideon describe the Midianite and Amalekite camp?*

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- Verse 12 gives the description of what Gideon discovered.
  - It describes the people like “locusts in abundance.”
  - It describes the number of camels “as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.”
- God intended this excursion into the enemy camp to be an encouragement to Gideon, but the initial assessment only brought more fear into his heart.

### *What did Gideon discover that brought him encouragement?*

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- When Gideon went down into the camp, he overheard a man telling his friend about a dream that he had (Judges 7:13-14).
- These men concluded that this dream could mean nothing other than their defeat at the hand of Gideon son of Joash.
- “When we know we are weak, we need to remember that God is strong. We also need to be reminded of the truth that those things which stand opposed to us are not as strong as they often appear. Satan cannot force us to sin; the power of idols can be broken; those who mock or persecute us are often conflicted and broken beneath their confident exterior. God graciously gives Gideon the opportunity to see this...”<sup>9</sup>

## The God Who Reassures

*Judges 7:15*

### *How did Gideon respond when he gained new perspective on the battle?*

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- Gideon responded in worship!  
“As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped.”

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<sup>9</sup> Keller 88.

- “God has gone ahead of him in every way. All he can do is praise him. His trust in God to give victory spurs him into action: he returned to the camp of Israel and called out, ‘Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands’ (v 15).”<sup>10</sup>

### *What does this encounter teach us about the work of God in our lives?*

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- God takes the initiative in giving us reassurance in our calling.
  - The book of 1 John is replete with reassurances of our position in Christ.
    - 1 John 2:3 – “And by this we know that we have come to know him...”
    - 1 John 3:10 – “By this it is evident who are the children of God...”
    - 1 John 3:19 – “By this we shall know that we are of the truth...”
    - 1 John 3:24 – “And by this we know that he abides in us...”
    - 1 John 4:2 – “By this you know the Spirit of God...”
    - 1 John 4:13 – “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us...”
    - 1 John 5:13 – “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”
  - Romans 8:16 tells us that the Holy Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
- “God may ask us to take risks on the way to assurance.
  - “Going into the enemy camp is dangerous for Gideon and his servant. But it is the place where God gives him confidence, leads him to worship, and stirs him to action.
  - “God often gives us what we need as we do what he has asked us to do.”<sup>11</sup>
- “We, like Gideon, are in repeated need of assurance. He cannot sustain his direction of energy without repeated lessons and lots of confirmation of God’s presence, guidance and power.”<sup>12</sup>
- Summary of the story of Gideon (thus far):
  - Hiding in a wine press to thresh wheat...
  - Needed the Lord to consume his offering before he believed who He was...
  - Miraculous fleece incident...
  - Second miraculous fleece incident...
  - The Midianite dream and interpretation...

### *Are we any different? How do we receive God’s assurance?*

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- Through His Word! (Jeremiah 29:11)
- Through His people! (Hebrews 10:25)
- Through circumstance in life! (Gideon is in the right place at the right time!)

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<sup>10</sup> Keller 88.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 89.

## The Brilliant Strategy

*Judges 7:16-19*

### *What is Gideon's battle plan for defeating the Midianites?*

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- Verse 16 – “he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars.”
- Verse 17 – do what I do when I do it;
- Verse 18 – “When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”
- Verse 19 – They would approach the camp and “attack” at the changing of the guard.

### *Why is this considered a ‘brilliant’ plan?*

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- “First, it negates the size disparity between the armies. The Israelites appear and sound far greater in size than they really are.
- “Second, it negates the difference in strength. It makes the camels a non-factor (in fact, they may have increased the confusion and mayhem in the camp).
- “Third, it takes advantage of the time when the enemy are weakest. The night was probably divided into three watches of four hours each, a third of the army taking each watch. At the changing of the guard, one third of the army would have been walking back to their tents, while another third would have been asleep. So, when those who were asleep heard the noise and rushed out of their tents, they would have discovered their camp full of armed men walking towards them. In the dark, the truth that they were fellow Midianites would have been unclear until it was too late.”<sup>13</sup>
- There is no record of God instructing Gideon in this battle plan.
  - God led Gideon to reduce his army from 32,000 to 300; and God allowed Gideon to hear the fear that existed in the Midianite soldiers.
  - “God gives us gifts to use in his service, such as Gideon’s previously unseen military genius. But he also gives us the circumstances which allow us to use them. Even in our successes, we can, and should, praise God for giving us both the means and opportunity to be successful.”<sup>14</sup>
  - “His actions and instructions in vv. 16-18 demonstrate great concern for detail; but like Yahweh’s instructions to Joshua before the storming of Jericho (Josh 6:1-5), the strategy appears totally absurd.”<sup>15</sup>
  - God used the absurd and foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He continues to do this even today.

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<sup>13</sup> Keller 90-91.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 91.

<sup>15</sup> Block 281.

## Victory

*Judges 7:19-25*

“The outcome of the battle, of course, is a foregone conclusion, since God has already announced its result (6:16; 7:7). Gideon’s plan works perfectly; all the Israelites need do is hold their position... In the end, even the three hundred kill no enemy soldiers! None of them could return home singing of what they had done, but only of what the Lord had done as they watched.”<sup>16</sup>

### *How did God bring about victory against the Midianites?*

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- Daniel Block summarizes the elements of the battle this way:
  - (1) at the darkest hour of night Gideon and the hundred men with him approached the enemy camp;
  - (2) they blew their horns;
  - (3) they smashed their jars;
  - (4) they held high the torches that had been concealed in the jars;
  - (5) they shouted at the tops of their voices, “A sword belonging to the LORD and to Gideon!”

... No less amazing than Gideon’s personal transformation was the response of his troops. Not only did they immediately follow this timid fellow from Ophrah but they obeyed his absurd instructions to the letter. Each one stood in his place around the enemy camp while the enemy troops frantically tried to escape.<sup>17</sup>
- According to verse 22, in the confusion and darkness, the Lord caused the Midianites to slay one another. It was bedlam! People were running around, shouting wildly and fleeing from the mayhem. Gideon’s battle plan could be described as psychological warfare!
  - “This is the natural response of those who have been awakened from the deepest of sleep (at midnight) to the sound of horns blowing, jars smashing, people shouting, and the sight of three hundred blazing torches around the camp.”<sup>18</sup>
  - There is no doubt that only God could orchestrate a battle such as this.
- Keller concludes, “There is a wonderful circularity to this section of the Gideon narrative. We first met him sheltering from the Midianites in a winepress (6:11). The first reassurance of God’s presence with him took place at a rock, when the angel of the Lord burned up his offering. Now, the kings of the enemies God used Gideon to defeat are killed at a rock and at a winepress (7:25). The enemies of God’s people are truly not as strong as they may appear!”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Keller 91.

<sup>17</sup> Block 282.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 283.

<sup>19</sup> Keller 92.



## Ruling as Kings (8:1-31)

After the deliverance of each of the previous judges (with the exception of Shamgar), the text immediately shares how long the Israelites experienced peace under that judge's leadership. This is not the case with Gideon. In fact, chapters 8 and 9 expound on the time following Gideon's deliverance from the hand of Midian.

This time frame—post-Midianite oppression—is also different from previous judges in way of obedience. “Israel is on a general downward spiral. And we see two things for the first time in the career of Gideon: the people beginning to ‘back-slide’ during, rather than after, the rule of a judge-savior; and there are deep flaws in the judge-savior's rule.”<sup>1</sup>

## Teaching a Lesson

*Judges 8:1-21*

### *Why were the men of Ephraim upset with Gideon? How did Gideon respond?*

- Ephraim is upset because they were not invited to go to battle with Gideon against the Midianite army.
  - “Ephraim is one of the more powerful tribes in Israel... it's unlikely that they would have been willing to march under Gideon's command: they were one of the strongest tribes, economically and militarily, and he was from the weakest clan in the tribe of Manasseh.”<sup>2</sup>
  - The Ephraimites were jealous of Gideon because they ‘missed out’ on receiving glory from the victory, which proves God to be right in his reduction of the army.
- “Gideon's response to them is respectful and diplomatic. He points out how much more powerful their tribe is than his clan (8:2)—and that they (unlike him) have already captured and killed two Midianite leaders (v 3). Ephraim's snub and scolding must have been hard to take, but he holds his tongue—and, with their desire for glory and praise satisfied, ‘their resentment against him subsided.’”<sup>3</sup>
- It seems that Gideon diffused a difficult situation with humility and peace, good traits of a godly leader; but the next encounter shows his true character.

### *Why did Gideon become angry with the people of Succoth and Penuel?*

- Gideon asked the people of each town to feed his tired and hungry soldiers. They refused.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 94.

- Gideon explained that they were pursuing the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, and needed the nourishment, but that only caused more contention between them and Gideon because they basically told him, “Go finish your job and then you can eat!”

### *How did Gideon respond to them? Why is his response so different?*

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- Gideon’s response to Succoth and Penuel was very different from his response to the Ephraimites. Where he was humble with Ephraim; he was proud with Succoth and Penuel. Where he was a peacemaker with Ephraim; he promised pain to Succoth and Penuel when he returned and his task was complete.
- Gideon’s response was different because...
  - He was ‘hangry’—hungry angry!
  - He felt superior to these cities. They did not possess the capability that Ephraim did economically or militarily. This shows that Gideon’s response to Ephraim may have been motivated out of self-preservation rather than humility and peace.
  - He has forgotten God’s power and authority in the battle, and he “feels that he ought to receive admiration and honor for what he has done... [It] shows that he expects to be given glory for his achievements (which he is forgetting were, in fact, God’s).”<sup>4</sup>

### *Did Gideon keep the ‘promise’ that he made to Succoth and Penuel?*

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- Yes. Why? Verse 15 says that he did this because they taunted him about the kings.
- In Succoth, he gathered the officials and elders (77 men) and beat them with thorn briars.
- In Penuel, he not only broke down the tower in the city, he also killed the men of the city.

### *What happened with Zebah and Zalmunna? What does this teach us about Gideon’s character?*

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- Gideon and his 300 caught up to the Midianite army and Gideon questioned them about the whereabouts of his brothers. This reveals that Gideon was really motivated by revenge—revenge on the ones who killed his brothers.
- Gideon tried to get his oldest son to execute these kings as a way to further humiliate them, but he was afraid and would not.
- Gideon killed the kings and plundered their crescent ornaments.
- These events reveal the integrity of Gideon—or lack thereof.

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 95.



## The Danger of Success

“Gideon’s need for respect and honor—and his violent, bitter rage when he fails to be given what he thinks he deserves—shows that his success in battle has been the worst thing for him. He has become addicted to and dependent on his success.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Why can it be spiritually dangerous to experience success or blessing?*

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- “Success can easily cause us to forget God’s grace, because our hearts are desperate to believe that we can save ourselves. God-given victory can easily be used to confirm the belief that, in fact we have earned blessing for ourselves, and should receive the praise and glory for that success.”<sup>6</sup>
- “Back in 7:15, when Gideon knew his own weakness and understood that victory could only be by grace, he worshiped and honored God. But that is the last time we see him doing that. Now, he worships success and the honor it will bring him. He has entirely forgotten who it is that called him, equipped him, reassured him, and won the battle for him.”<sup>7</sup>

## King Gideon?

*Judges 8:22-32*

### *What did the men of Israel ask Gideon to do? Why?*

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- They asked him to establish his family as a monarchy over Israel.
- They wanted him to be the king because of ‘his’ victory over Midian.
- The problem with this is that Israel was a Theocracy—they were ruled by God—and asking for a king was equivalent to rejecting God as their ruler.
  - “Gideon discerns the underlying motive for asking for a king—they want to be ruled by a man, not by God (v 23). With a king, they would not need to look to God for salvation, and wait for him to send them a savior. The desire for a king is actually another effort at self-salvation.”<sup>8</sup>
  - In Judges 8:23, Gideon says, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.”
  - This is the last time that Gideon wholeheartedly obeyed God—giving Him the honor that He is due as the King of kings.

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<sup>5</sup> Keller 96.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 97.

### *Do Gideon's actions in verses 24-27 match with the attitude portrayed in verse 23?*

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- Unfortunately, Gideon almost immediately contradicts himself with his actions.
- He asks the soldiers to give him a portion of their spoils of war—which is customary for a warrior to give to his king (24-26).
- From the gold and crescent ornaments, Gideon made an ephod and placed it in Ophrah.
  - The ephod was the clothing that “was worn by the high priest in the tabernacle, the tent where God was present among his people, which at this point was [located] in Shiloh (18:31)... The ephod designated the true place of God’s dwelling, and was a way to discern God’s will in times of crisis.”<sup>9</sup>
  - “In making his own copy, Gideon essentially sets up his home town as a rival place of worship. He wants to encourage people to come to him for guidance, to see his home town as the place where God can be found. Gideon has used God to consolidate his own position, instead of using his position to serve and be used by God.”<sup>10</sup>

### *What was the result of Gideon's hypocritical actions?*

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- In verse 27, it tells us that Israel once again ‘prostituted’ itself by this false worship.
  - “The judge is supposed to turn people from unfaithfulness to the true God. Gideon leads them into it.”<sup>11</sup>
  - Finally, in verse 28, we find the statement about the number of years that the “land had rest” after the deliverance from Midian—for 40 years.
- In verses 29-31, we see some of the ungodly choices that Gideon made with his life—choices that could be described as characteristic of ancient kings.
  - He fathered 70 sons from many different wives.
  - He fathered 1 son through a concubine—or mistress.
  - “He even calls his illegitimate son “Abimelech” (v 31), which means ‘My father is king!’ What Gideon has rejected in name, he then lives out in reality.”<sup>12</sup>

### *How is it possible for Gideon to turn down being king and then immediately begin acting like one?*

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- We do this all the time! We know something with our head, but not with our heart.
- Galatians 2:14 describes this as “their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.”

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<sup>9</sup> Keller 98.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## Abimelech's Conspiracy and Downfall (9:1 – 9:57)

“Until this chapter, there has been a familiar sequence of events. Sin, oppression, crying out, a judge raised up, victory, peace. But now, we have a complete departure from the sequence. It is a horrendous episode in Israel's history.”<sup>1</sup>

It is important to remember that Abimelech is the illegitimate son of Gideon—born of his concubine that lived in Shechem. “As the story unfolds, we see a man who feels that whatever he will get out of life, he will have to get for himself—and who is utterly determined to get whatever he can.”<sup>2</sup>

### Grasping for Power

*Judges 9:1-6*

#### *What did Abimelech do in an effort to grasp for power in Israel?*

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- He asked his family members (on his mother's side) to spread around the idea in Shechem that he would be a better leader than Gideon's 70 legitimate sons. (1-2)
- At the end of verse 2, he reminded them: “Don't forget... we're family!” He was using their loyalty to the family for his own personal gain. His mother's relatives persuaded the people of Shechem to support Abimelech. And apparently, his plan worked perfectly. (2-3)
- After gaining their support, the people of Shechem gave Abimelech 70 pieces of silver from the temple dedicated to Baal-berith. (4-5) “His rise to power is facilitated not by obedience to the Lord, but by a false god's funds.”<sup>3</sup>
  - He used this money to hire a small mercenary army of 70 men to kill the 70 legitimate sons of Gideon.
  - This took place at his father's house at Ophrah. The 70 brothers were executed on one stone—all except the youngest brother, Jotham, who escaped and hid.

#### *Did Abimelech's plan to gain power in Israel work?*

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- Once the legitimate heirs were taken out of the picture, there was nothing to stand in Abimelech's way.
- The leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo came together and crowned him king.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 101.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 102.

### *What lessons can be learned from this passage about choosing a leader?*

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- If we're not careful, we can be swayed by arguments that seem logical without considering the moral or spiritual implications.
- Too often, we are impressed by qualities that do not matter to God.
- Our common list of leadership traits (such as outgoing, intelligent, popular, well-spoken and funny) is not how God calculates the value of a leader.
- “He seeks men who hold to his truth, seek to lead their family rightly, are patient and self-controlled (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).

### **The Thornbush King**

*Judges 9:7-21*

“Only one half-brother escapes—Jotham. While Abimelech means *My father is king*, Jotham means *Yahweh (i.e.: the Lord) is perfect/blameless*. So as Jotham call out to the men of Shechem, there is a battle for hearts and minds between human self-reliant power (Abimelech) and reliance on and worship of the Lord (Jotham.)”<sup>4</sup>

### *What is Jotham trying to communicate to the people with his story in 9:7-15?*

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- The story is designed to demonstrate the absurdity in choosing Abimelech as their king.
- Read Judges 9:7-15 from the New Living Translation.

<sup>7</sup> When Jotham heard about this, he climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted,

“Listen to me, citizens of Shechem!

Listen to me if you want God to listen to you!

<sup>8</sup> Once upon a time the trees decided to choose a king.

First they said to the olive tree,

‘Be our king!’

<sup>9</sup> But the olive tree refused, saying,

‘Should I quit producing the olive oil

that blesses both God and people,

just to wave back and forth over the trees?’

<sup>10</sup> “Then they said to the fig tree,

‘You be our king!’

<sup>11</sup> But the fig tree also refused, saying,

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 102.

‘Should I quit producing my sweet fruit  
just to wave back and forth over the trees?’

<sup>12</sup> “Then they said to the grapevine,  
‘You be our king!’

<sup>13</sup> But the grapevine also refused, saying,  
‘Should I quit producing the wine  
that cheers both God and people,  
just to wave back and forth over the trees?’

<sup>14</sup> “Then all the trees finally turned to the thornbush and said,  
‘Come, you be our king!’

<sup>15</sup> And the thornbush replied to the trees,  
‘If you truly want to make me your king,  
come and take shelter in my shade.  
If not, let fire come out from me  
and devour the cedars of Lebanon.’”

#### *Why is it so ridiculous to consider the thornbush as the king of the trees?*

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- “Thornbushes were not at all valuable plants. They were too short and scraggy to provide any shade from the heat, and often caught fire, which spread to surrounding foliage and destroyed more valuable trees.
- “The thornbush points this out in agreeing to become king (v 15), and makes the remarkable claim (given it only grows a foot or two off the ground) that other trees can ‘come and take refuge in my shade.’”<sup>5</sup>

#### *What were Jotham’s warnings to the people in Judges 9:16-20?*

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- Verse 16 – “... if you acted in good faith and integrity...” by making Abimelech the king, then rejoice!
- Verse 18 – “... and if you have dealt well...” with Gideon and his family by allowing them to be slaughtered by Abimelech and his mercenaries because he’s your relative, then rejoice!
- Verse 20 – “But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the leaders of Shechem and from Beth-millo and devour Abimelech.”
- The sarcasm is thick here!
- After saying these things, Jotham went away to hide from the wrath of Abimelech.

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<sup>5</sup> Keller 103.

## The Fire of the Thornbush

*Judges 9:22-55*

### *How could Abimelech's reign be characterized? (Judges 9:22-25)*

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- He ruled over Israel for 3 years before an evil spirit was sent by God to cause hostility between him and the leaders of Shechem.
- The leaders of Shechem set traps for him on the mountaintops, but Abimelech found out about them before they could ambush him.
- “The citizens of Shechem have already shown themselves prone to switch their loyalty, and when ‘Gaal son of Ebed’ moves into Shechem, they ‘put their confidence in him (v 26).<sup>6</sup>”

### *In verses 27-29, what is ironic about Gaal's rise to power?*

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- Gaal worships at the temple of the idol from which Abimelech received the 70 pieces of silver.
- Gaal also uses the same arguments for his rise to power that Abimelech used to convince the leaders of Shechem in verse 2.

### *What are some evidences that Abimelech's reign fulfill the characterization portrayed of him in Jotham's parable?*

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- Abimelech becomes driven by vengeance.
  - Verses 30-41 – he fights Gaal.
  - Verses 42-44 – he conquers Shechem.
  - Verse 45 – he captured and killed the people of Shechem, and destroyed the city.
- Abimelech's vengeance cannot be satisfied.
  - Verses 46-49 – he burned alive more than 1,000 men and women who had taken up refuge in the stronghold of the tower of Shechem.
  - Verses 50-52 – he went to the town of Thebez to do the same thing to it.
  - Verse 53 – as he was approaching the tower of Thebez, a woman threw a millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.
  - Verse 54 – not wanting to die at the hand of a woman, he commanded his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword.

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 103.

## Is God Absent?

*Judges 9:23-24, 56-57*

“Between 8:34 and 10:6 God is not mentioned at all by his personal covenant name, the LORD. This is a picture of a society and ruler who desire to push God out of the picture completely—unworshiped, and unconsidered... But in verses 23-24 and 56-57, the narrator lifts the curtain of human affairs to show us a glimpse of what God was doing.”<sup>7</sup>

### *What were God’s purposes in the events of Judges 9:22-55?*

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- “God may have been silent, but he was not absent. In what seemed like the natural course of events, he was acting in judgment.”<sup>8</sup>
- Romans 1:18 says, “<sup>8</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”
- God is judging the people of Shechem by using Abimelech as His instrument of judgment, and He judges Abimelech through a simple act of an innocent woman.

### *What can we learn from this situation concerning God’s present judgment?*

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- God’s judgment comes unseen.
  - The people could not have known that God sent an evil spirit into the hearts of the Shechemites, and we don’t have a divine narrator letting us know when and how God is judging people.
  - We cannot point to one event and say, “God is judging you for this particular sin that you committed.”
- God’s judgment is not immediate.
  - Three years have passed since Jotham warned that God’s judgment would come against Abimelech and the Shechemites.
  - Abimelech probably thought that he had gotten away with it because it had been so long since everything happened.
- God’s judgment is accomplished by using the “tools of human rebellion against those who rebel.”<sup>9</sup>
  - “Shechem was destroyed because of its disloyalty. Its greatest sin was its downfall.
  - “Abimelech was destroyed because of his desire to maintain his position at any human cost. He had no need to attack Thebez. His greatest sin was also his downfall.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Keller 104.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 105.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.





## VIII. Parenthesis 2: The Governorships of Tola and Jair (10:1-5)

As we have said repeatedly throughout this study, the book of Judges is constructed under a recurring cycle of rebellion, oppression, crying out, deliverance and rest. In Judges 10 – 12, we are introduced to six different judges—each with his own story and circumstance—but only one with any substance in the Scripture narrative.

There are a total of 12 judges identified in this book. Six of those have at least a somewhat detailed account of their story; whereas, the other six are brief interruptions in the narrative to record the names of those who exercised leadership in Israel during their settlement in the Promised Land. We were introduced to the first of these judges in 3:31—Shamgar. The other five judges of this group serve as bookends for the story of Jephthah. These five judges include: Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. Daniel Block noted: “...this does not mean that these governors played a less important role than the rest or that they should be dismissed as ‘minor judges.’”<sup>1</sup>

The reign of Abimelech ended in Judges 9. During his reign, the Israelites had fallen to new lows in spirituality and morality. In the first five verses of Judges 10, we are introduced to two judges (read Judges 10:1-5).

### *Who arose to deliver Israel following the rule of Abimelech? How long did each govern Israel?*

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- Verse 1 – Tola, the son of Puah and grandson of Dodo, and a man of Issachar.
  - Verse 2 – Tola judged Israel for 23 years.
  - “The combination of ‘to arise’ and ‘to save’ suggests a role similar to Othniel, Ehud, Barak, and Gideon; but unlike the earlier accounts, there is no reference to Yahweh having raised the deliverer, and the enemy whom he apparently defeated is not named.”<sup>2</sup>
- Verse 3 – Jair, the Gileadite, who judged Israel for 22 years.
  - A little more information about Jair is divulged in verse 4.
  - It is likely that Jair lived a life similar to that of a king since he had 30 sons (most likely from more than one wife), and those sons were positioned in 30 different cities as the local rulers.
  - “The most likely interpretation is that the image of thirty sons riding on thirty donkeys conveys a picture of peace and prosperity, in contrast to the insecurity and danger that characterized the days of Shamgar and Jael (5:6-10).”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Block 336.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 338.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 340.

### *From what oppressors did Tola and Jair deliver Israel?*

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- The Scripture does not say who is oppressing the Israelites at this time.
- Timothy Keller seems to think that from all we learn in Judges 9, it is safe to say that Israel needed to be saved from itself. He says:

God's people, ultimately, need a leader who will rescue us from ourselves—from the failings and ambitions of our own hearts, and from the divisions and strife among us. It is a great reminder that the church's greatest problem is the church! When we see churches with godly, humble leadership; with gospel-centered unity; which enjoy and pursue and share peace with justice and love—we, unlike Gideon and Abimelech, must give thanks to the God who has, in his grace, given us the Spirit to transform our hearts and restore our relationships.<sup>4</sup>

## **IX. The Ammonite and Jephthah Cycle (10:6 – 12:7)**

With the Ammonite and Jephthah cycle, we once again resume the cycle of sin and apostasy. In Judges 10:6, the Bible says, “The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him.” It seems that this list is growing!

### **The Outcast (Judges 10:6 – 11:11)**

#### **Sold Into Slavery**

*Judges 10:6-7*

#### *Where did all these ‘gods’ in verse 6 come from?*

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- Baals and Ashtaroths – the gods of the native Canaanites;
- The gods of Aram (Syria) – area to the north-west;
- The gods of Sidon – area to the north;
- The gods of Moab and the Ammonites – area to the east;
- The gods of the Philistines – area to the south;
- Keller points out:

Othniel helped Israel against the king of Aram (3:10), Ehud against the Moabites and Ammonites (3:12-13), Shamgar against the Philistines (3:31), and Deborah against the

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 106.

Canaanites (5:19). In other words, every time Israel worshiped the idols of a nation, that nation ended up oppressing them. This time, Israel has added the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines—and in consequence, they are given over to being oppressed by the Ammonites and Philistines (10:7). Idolatry leads to enslavement.<sup>5</sup>

### *If idolatry led to slavery, why did the Israelites continue in idolatry?*

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- “It is easy to see the futility of this in Israel, from our vantage point of a different era and culture. But human hearts have not changed. They still assure us that, when an idol leads to slavery, what we need is more of that idol.”<sup>6</sup>
- Consider these examples:
  - If we sacrifice everything to a marriage that fails, we think we need a new relationship and a better spouse.
  - If we sacrifice everything for our job to make money, we think we need a better, higher paying job to provide us with fulfillment.
  - If we sacrifice intimacy with our spouse for intimacy through affairs or pornography, we think more affairs and more pornography will bring happiness.
- For whatever reason, we do not see the real problem! We see our problem not as worshiping idols, but not worshiping them enough! This is the nature of sin in us!

### *What was the result of the Israelites’ vulnerability to idolatry?*

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- The anger of the Lord was kindled against them (7a).
- God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites (7b).
  - This is the same terminology used in Judges 2:14; 3:8 and 4:2.
  - “When we look back at how God ‘sold’ the Israelites before, we know this does not mean that he abandoned them or nullified his promises to them. It does mean, however, that he stopped protecting them in some way. He let the things they had been serving actually begin to dominate and ‘own’ them.”<sup>7</sup>
- There is a parallel passage found in Paul’s letter to the Romans.
  - Romans 1:18, 22-23 says, “<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth... <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

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<sup>5</sup> Keller 109.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

- What happens to these people who exchange the glory of God for idols?
- Romans 1:24-25 says, “<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the *lusts* of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”
- The word ‘lusts’ is a word that means “an overwhelming drive, and enslaving, uncontrollable desire.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, God has allowed our ‘lusts’ to enslave us.
- “Idolatry and slavery go hand in hand. Idolatry leads to slavery and slavery to idolatry. So God says to the person who worships money: *If you want to live for money instead of for me, then money will rule your life. It will control your heart and emotions. If you want to live for popularity instead of for me, then popular acclaim will rule and control you. If you want another god besides me—go ahead. Let’s see how merciful it is to you, how effective it is in saving and guiding and enlightening you.*”<sup>9</sup>

## I Will No Longer Save You

*Judges 10:8-16*

### *How could the oppression by the Ammonites and Philistines be described?*

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- This is the worst oppression that they have experienced yet! They were ‘crushed’ and ‘shattered’ (8a).
- The oppression was also lengthy—it went on for 18 years (8b).
- The oppression was widespread—it was on both sides of the Jordan River (8c-9).

### *Did the Israelites’ repentance seem sincere—especially when compared to other times when they cried out to God for deliverance?*

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- As we have discussed before, each time the Israelites cried out to God for a deliverer, there is debate as to whether this implies true repentance.
- Here in verse 10, the Israelites acknowledge their sin—and name it specifically.
- This does seem to be somewhat sincere; however, what is true repentance?
  - Repentance is turning to God and away from sin.
  - The problem with the Israelites—and with most people today—is that the repentance is short-lived. It will not take very long for the Israelites to turn back to idolatry.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller 110.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 111.

### *How did God respond to their cries for deliverance?*

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- “God does not immediately forgive them and begin to answer their prayer... God’s response is... surprisingly harsh. He has saved them time and time again (10:11-12); and time and time again they have ‘forsaken [him] and served other gods’—and so, in a crushing line, God tells his people: ‘I will no longer save you’ (13). He will not answer them—they should cry to the gods they have been worshiping (14).”<sup>10</sup>
- This response struck the Israelites! When they respond in verse 15, there seems to be evidence of a change of heart.
  - “Before, they were focused completely on their condition and comfort... now they are willing to admit that God is under no obligation to fix them and take away their trouble. This means they are saying: *We want you, even if it means we are going to keep suffering (though we’d rather not).*
  - There is further evidence of true repentance in verse 16. They rid themselves of the foreign idols and served the Lord.

### *What are the signs of true repentance?*

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- We said earlier that repentance is turning to God and away from sin.
- There are two signs of real repentance:
  - “a sorrow for sin, rather than just for its consequences;
  - “a sorrow over idolatrous motives, not just behavioral change.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The Crime Boss**

*Judges 10:17 – 11:11*

“With the Ammonite and Israelite camps drawn up for battle (v 17), and the men of Gilead searching for the man who will lead them in battle and beyond (v 18), the scene is set for God’s deliverer to arrive.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Why is Jephthah a surprising choice as God’s deliverer? (Judges 11:1-11)*

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- Verse 1 – Jephthah is a Gileadite; a mighty warrior; the son of a prostitute;
- Verse 2 – driven away from his home by his half-brothers;

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<sup>10</sup> Keller 111.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 112.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 113.

- He is definitely from a dysfunctional family and had a rough childhood.
- Verse 3 – he lived in the wilderness where he attracted a group of outlaws;
- Verses 4-6 – he was brought forth to lead Israel in the war against the Ammonites;
- Verse 7 – he questions their motivation for seeking him out;
- Verse 8 – the Gileadites tell him that they need him to go to war;
- Verse 9 – he promised to lead the army, but would also rule over them afterward;
- Verses 10-11 – the Mizpah promise;

## Failed Diplomacy (Judges 11:12 – 12:7)

We must remember that Jephthah “was the illegitimate son of a prostitute who was driven out of his home, probably as a very young person, by his half-brothers (v 2). So he came from (to say the least) a deeply dysfunctional family. Then, in the wilderness, he attracted a band of “outlaws,” men who lived robbery (v 3, NRSV). Jephthah was in organized crime; a kind of underworld boss, or (more romantically) a pirate. He was a complete outcast and criminal from a broken home.”<sup>1</sup>

### The Pen before the Sword

*Judges 11:12-28*

#### *What did Jephthah do when the Ammonites threatened with war? (11:12-13)*

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- “Jephthah does not go to war immediately. First, he seeks a peaceful resolution... [but the] king of Ammon justifies his attack by claiming that part of the land Israel now lives in formerly belonged to the Ammonites (v 13).”<sup>2</sup>
- “... although Jephthah’s intentions in seeking a diplomatic solution were honorable, his tone was far from conciliatory [or ‘peace-seeking’]... Jephthah’s speech is formal and conventional ... [and] contains many features of the ancient Near Eastern *rîb* or lawsuit genre.”<sup>3</sup>
- Have you ever felt that sinking feeling when you open your mail to find a very official letter telling you all the reasons why you were wrong? His methods—while diplomatic—were not effective for peace-making.

#### *What were the three arguments used to refute the Ammonite claims?*

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##### **HISTORICAL ARGUMENT – 11:15-22**

- Jephthah clarifies the historical facts of the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.
- The Edomites and the Moabites would not allow the Israelites to pass through their land in order to get to the Promised Land (16-18), so they wandered through the wilderness.
- They went to the other side of the land of Moab and tried to gain passage through the land of the Amorites to get to the Promised Land—Sihon, king of the Amorites, refused. And because of Sihon’s distrust of Israel, he attacked them and was defeated; thus Israel took possession of their land (19-22).

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 116.

<sup>3</sup> Block 358.

#### THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT – 11:23-24

- “Jephthah uses an assumption held in common by all the peoples of that time and place. The LORD, the God of Israel, obviously gave Israel the land of the Amorites, by enabling them to defeat Sihon (v 23). Surely, the Ammonites would do the same if their god, Chemosh, gave them a victory (v 24). By using their own religious premises, Jephthah argues that the LORD, the God of Israel, gave them the land.”<sup>4</sup>
- There is some debate concerning the mindset of Jephthah in this argument.
  - View #1 – Jephthah is trying to make this argument from an Ammonites world-view—“that each nation’s god ‘gives’ that nation a portion of land”—even though he knows that this is not true because there is only one God and He is the LORD.
  - View #2 – Jephthah is agreeing with and adopting this world-view for himself. That would mean that he agree with the idea that Chemosh and the others gods of other nations actually exist and have power to control circumstances on the earth.
  - The optimist in me believes the former and not the latter; but based on what we see next, the realist sees that Jephthah has adopted at least some pagan points of view.

#### LEGAL PRECEDENT – 11:25-27

- Jephthah decides to close his diplomatic proposal by reminding the Amorite king that the Moabite king, Balak so of Zippor, acknowledged the Israelites’ right to that land (v 25)—nor did the ancestors of the Amorites (v 26).
- If that is true, then why should they be questioning their right to be there now? Why were they ready to go to war? Why now?
- Jephthah entrusts his fate and that of Israel to the LORD to “decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon” (27b).

#### *How effective were Jephthah’s attempts at diplomacy? In your opinion, why?*

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- In verse 28, the Bible says that the king of the Ammonites did not even listen to the messages that Jephthah sent to him. They did not reply. They did not retreat.
- Why do you think the Amorite king would not even listen?
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -
- They maintained the false accusation that the Israelites should not inhabit that land.

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 116.



### *How does the Bible say we should handle false accusations?*

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- 1 Peter 2:19-23 – The example of Jesus.
- 1 Peter 3:16 – Your life is your defense—not words.
- Matthew 5:11-12 – The teaching of Jesus.
- James 1:2-5 – Respond with joy and ask for wisdom.

### **A Terrible Vow**

*Judges 11:29-40*

“With diplomacy exhausted, war is inevitable. ‘Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah’ (Judges 11:29). From this point, the outcome is certain. But as Jephthah advances to meet the enemy (v 29), he ‘made a vow to the LORD.’”<sup>5</sup>

### *What was the vow that Jephthah made? What can we learn from this?*

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- Verses 30-31
- This type of vow was very similar to the type of worship and negotiation that was common among the pagan idolatry that surrounded the Israelites—whether that be the Amorites and their god, Chemosh, or the Canaanites and the Baals and Ashteroths.
- This demonstrated a lack of trust in Jephthah.
  - The Spirit of the Lord had already come upon him.
  - It seems that he felt as if this was a desperate situation that called for desperate measures. Either that, or he was just a fool!

### *What was the result of his vow to God?*

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- Verses 34-36
- “The first thing out of the door is his daughter, his only child (v 34). Jephthah is distraught—he half-blames his daughter, and bemoans the reality that ‘I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break’ (v 35). His daughter, remarkably, insists that her father keep his word (36)...”<sup>6</sup>
- “The despicable behavior of this hero in Israel contrasts with the sensitivity and submissiveness of the child... her logic was simple and resigned.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Keller 117.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 118.

<sup>7</sup> Block 373.

### *Why did Jephthah make this promise to God?*

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- “Deuteronomy 12:31 says that human sacrifice is ‘detestable’ and something ‘the LORD hates.’ There is no doubt about God’s will in the matter.”<sup>8</sup>
- Jephthah became de-sensitized by the pagan cultures that surrounded him.
  - “Because the culture around Jephthah was violent, he let that worldly violence come in and live alongside his other true beliefs.
  - “Today, we are more likely to let worldly attitudes toward sex and money come in and live alongside other true beliefs.”<sup>9</sup>
  - Romans 12:2 – “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...”
- Jephthah was not only influenced by pagan moral codes but also by their theological understanding of righteousness by works.
  - “Human sacrifice was how you could ‘buy off’ a pagan god.
  - “But the God of the Bible wants only one kind of human sacrifice—the self-sacrifice of offering God the lordship of every area of our lives. Even this is not to secure his favor, but in response to it...”<sup>10</sup>
  - Romans 12:1 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

### *What did Jephthah’s daughter request before he carried out his vow?*

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- Verses 37-38
- “A few other well-meaning interpreters have read his daughter’s lament that she would never marry and suggested that all Jephthah vowed was that she would be condemned to perpetual virginity. But the request for a two-month reprieve before the sentence is carried out makes no sense unless he literally sacrificed her life.”<sup>11</sup>

### *Why did Jephthah keep his vow?*

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- It seems that Jephthah’s concept of God is as a capricious ruler, not a God of grace.
- Throughout this story, Jephthah has demonstrated a lack of trust in God. He feared the repercussions of breaking his vow. He is trapped in his mistrust of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller 119.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 118.

### *What can we learn from this terrible episode in Israel's history?*

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- Our culture affects us far more than we realize. In many cases, it influences us far more than our Bible does. Where are our blind spots when it comes to the world's influence in our day-to-day lives?
- People have a hard time seeing God as a God of grace. "Since [the Garden], we have always felt we have to control God, to pay God and deserve God; that we cannot simply trust God to love and bless us."<sup>12</sup> How would my life be transformed if I saw who God truly is?

### **War within Israel**

*Judges 12:1-7*

"As in Gideon's time, the men of Ephraim are angry that they have missed out on the glory of victory. This time they go further than complaining, and threaten the judge's life."<sup>13</sup>

### *What was different between Jephthah's interaction with the Ammonites and his interaction with the Ephraimites?*

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- "Jephthah was careful to be diplomatic and peaceful when his own position was at stake (11:4-11), and when facing the enemies of God's people (v 12-28).
- "But here, he does not hesitate to strike out at those within God's people who oppose him. He treats God's people far worse than he does himself or the world."<sup>14</sup>
- It's been said that Christians are the only 'army' in the world that shoots its wounded!

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<sup>12</sup> Keller 121.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



## X. Parenthesis 3: The Governorships of Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (12:8-15)

Here in Judges 12:8-15, we find the last three of the ‘non-cyclical’ judges—so called because the Scripture does not record the details of the ‘Cycle of Sin’ from which each of these judges delivered the Israelites. In fact, the author does not even say who the oppressors were or how long the Israelites were oppressed—only how long each judge ruled.

JUDGE	OPPRESSOR	PERIOD OF OPPRESSION	PERIOD OF REST	BIBLICAL REFERENCE
Ibzan			7 years	Judges 12:8-10
Elon			10 years	Judges 12:11-12
Abdon			8 years	Judges 12:13-15

### *What can we learn about each of these three judges from the text?*

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- Ibzan –
  - Originally from Bethlehem
  - Judged Israel for 7 years
  - He had 30 sons and 30 daughters and “uses his position to create a familial power base through marriage alliances.”<sup>1</sup>
  - Buried in Bethlehem
- Elon – Judged Israel for 10 years and buried in the land of Zebulun
- Abdon –
  - He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons—all “rode on seventy donkeys.”
  - The donkey was considered the mount of royalty, so it seems that Abdon was attempting to set himself (and his family) up as royalty.
  - Buried in the land of Ephraim after judging Israel for 8 years.

Timothy Keller concludes, “The flaws and failings of the major judges are reflected in these final non-cyclical ones—and none of them are recorded as having ‘saved Israel.’”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 123.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



## XI. The Philistine and Samson Cycle (13:1 – 16:31)

“Samson is the last of the God-appointed leaders in Judges. He is famous for the incident which proved both his downfall and paved the way for his greatest act; the cutting of his hair by his wife, Delilah. But his story is much richer than that. In Samson, we see the flaws of God’s people between the time of Joshua and the God-given monarchy (and, indeed, every other age between Eden and the New Jerusalem); and yet also in Samson, we see wonderful hints of the perfect Judge and Savior to come. Those hints begin even before he is born.”<sup>1</sup>

### Miraculous Birth and Monastic Life (13:1-25)

#### Whose Eyes Matter?

*Judges 13:1*

This is the seventh time in the Book of Judges that we are told the Israelites “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Twice in the last section of the book (Judges 17:6; 21:25), the author proclaims that “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” So in God’s eyes—anthropomorphically speaking—they did what was evil. In their own eyes, they did what was right. Whose eyes matter—God’s or our own? Timothy Keller explains:

The writer is making the point that many of the things the Israelites did were not evil ‘in their eyes.’ In other words, by their perception, most or all of their behavior was perfectly acceptable...

This teaches us two truths about sin. First, *the definition of sin*. This term “the eyes of the LORD,” in contrast with our “own eyes,” teaches us that sin does not ultimately consist of violating our conscience or violating our personal standards or violating community standards, but rather consists of violating God’s will for us.

This flies in the face of modern thinking, of course. It is continually asserted in innumerable forums and venues that “only you can define what’s right and wrong for you.” In other words, “my own eyes”—my heart’s feelings and my mind’s perceptions—are the only way to determine right and wrong.

Common sense contradicts this, even if we didn’t have the Bible... the Bible’s answer is the right one. Sin is defined as violating our relationship with God, as violating the will of God for us. What God sees as sin is sin, regardless of what we feel or the experts say or the culture agrees on.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 123.

Second, these phrases show us *the deception of sin*. They remind us how easily self-deceived we are... In [Israel's] own "eyes" or perception, there was nothing wrong with what they were doing. There was a deep, suppressed knowledge that they were out of touch with God, rejecting his will (Romans 1:18); but at the conscious level, they had no overt guilt and they had lots of explanations for their lifestyles.<sup>2</sup>

*How will your life this week reflect the truth that God's eyes matter more than yours?*

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*What three things, other than God, do you spend most time thinking about; become most excited about; care most about? How could these things become idols to you? How can you spot it happening?*

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*Why are self-defined standards so dangerous?*

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- It is rooted in idolatry! The things that we set up as idols in our lives are not always bad—they're just badly out of proportion. There is a thin line between being a hard-worker and making work an idol—between loving your family and making an idol of it.
  - We even use the Scripture as a basis for our idolatry.
    - 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”
    - 1 Timothy 3:4-5 – “<sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”
  - The Scripture admonishes us to maintain personal and spiritual balance in life.
    - Philippians 4:4-5, 8:
      - <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.
      - <sup>5</sup> Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand...
      - <sup>8</sup> Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true...honest...just... pure... lovely... of good report; if there be any virtue, and... praise, think on these things.
    - Idolatry—at its basic level—is selfish and self-centered. When we think on the things mentioned in verse 8, we are less likely to be given to idolatry.

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<sup>2</sup> Keller 124-125.



- It is perpetuated by rationalization!
  - “This should lead us to be very careful constantly to evaluate ourselves, through reflection on the Bible and through personal accountability to others.
  - “We are always finding ways to rationalize sins such as materialism or worry or bitterness or pride. They don’t look bad in ‘our eyes.’”<sup>3</sup>

## You Will Have a Son

*Judges 13:2-5*

### *What was unique about the circumstances of Samson’s birth?*

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- He was born to a woman who is referred to as “barren and had no children.”
  - “The woman’s barrenness should not be interpreted in light of modern day views of childbearing and family but against ancient Israelite values. In the ancient world barrenness was reckoned as punishment for an offense against the gods whose special domain was that of reproduction. In Israel, children were a mark of the blessing of God, and barrenness was the sign of divine reproach...”<sup>4</sup>
  - When the angel appeared to her to inform her that she was going to conceive and give birth to a son, we realize that “God has begun to act to save his people. Samson is the only judge chosen before he is born, or even conceived.”<sup>5</sup>
- His conception and birth was announced to his mother by an angel.
  - This is reminiscent of other miraculous births in Scripture.
  - Examples: Isaac, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus
- He was to be dedicated as a Nazirite to God from the womb to the grave. Samson’s mother was required to live according to the Nazirite vow during her pregnancy.

### *What is a Nazirite vow? What is its purpose?*

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- “The Nazirite vow to which the angel refers is found in Numbers 6:1-21, and contained the three basic stipulations. A Nazirite was not to cut his hair during the period of the vow; was not to drink any produce from vines, alcoholic or non-alcoholic; and was not to have contact with any dead body.
- “The purpose of the Nazirite vow was to ask for God’s special help during a crucial time. It was a sign that you were looking to God with great intensity and focus...
- “...the Nazirite vow was made voluntarily and for a definite period of time. But Samson was being born into the Nazirite state involuntarily... and he was to stay a Nazirite all his life.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Keller 125.

<sup>4</sup> Block 400-401.

<sup>5</sup> Keller 126.

### *How did Samson's mother react when she was told what would happen?*

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- She accepted the message of the angel. She responded with faith and obedience.
- She went to tell her husband all that had happened, but we are never told anything about her laughing in disbelief (like Sarah with Isaac) or her questioning the possibility of this happening (like Zechariah with John the Baptist).
- She trusted that what the angel had said to her would come to fruition.

### *What difference does it make to our obedience when we act out of faith in God's promises, rather than an unwillingness to obey?*

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### *How did Samson's father, Manoah, react to this news?*

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- He immediately prayed to God asking the messenger to return “and teach us what we are to do with the child who will be born.”
- This is not necessarily a lack of faith, but more likely an old man that has been alarmed by the prospect of caring for a new born child.
- “The LORD graciously sends the angel back (v. 9). Again, he appears to the wife; this time, she fetches her husband (v. 10-11), so that he can repeat his request for more specific information on how God wants this child to be reared (v.12).
- “But the angel will not give them any more specifics. Their son will be set apart, and Manoah's wife ‘must do all that I have told her’ (v. 13); but he will give them no more rules.”<sup>7</sup>
- God answered Manoah's inquiry like this... Life is not about a bunch of rules and regulations to be followed; rather, it is a process of establishing relationships with God and others.

### *Are there ways in which you are not enjoying your relationship with God because you would rather have some regulations to follow?*

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 126.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 130-131.

## Vindictive, Self-Absorbed, Emotionally-Immature, Sexually-Addicted Man (14:1 – 15:20)

Many of us are at least aware of some of the details in the Samson narrative—if for no other reason because of its scandalous subject matter. If we read the account of his life as “part of the whole narrative of the book of Judges, we will find it to be at least perplexing and probably disturbing. As Israel’s spiritual condition grows worse and worse, the scene seems to be set for a great judge/leader, perhaps the greatest of all... Instead, we find by far the most flawed character in the book: a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature and selfish man.”<sup>1</sup>

### A Philistine Woman

*Judges 14:1-3*

#### *Where was Samson going and why?*

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- Samson was traveling down to Timnah, a Philistine city in Canaan.
- It is unclear as to why he was traveling down to Timnah, but it can be surmised that he was ‘up to nothing good,’ why else would a Nazirite from Israel be going into the land of the Philistines

#### *What did he see along the way? How did he react to this sight?*

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- While in Timnah, Samson saw and ‘fell in love with’ a Philistine woman.
- He returned home to his family to tell them the good news, but they did not see it as good news. Samson proclaimed, “... get her for me, for she is right in my eyes (a.k.a. good looking” (3).
- Keller notes:  
“This is the approach to life and morality that we have seen all Israel adopting: doing what was evil God’s eyes, because it was right in their own (13:1; 17:6). Samson is a leader who reflects Israel’s real spiritual state, rather than God’s ideal for his people.”<sup>2</sup>
- Samson’s reaction was completely impulsive and completely sensual. He is being controlled by his sensual desires. He saw a good looking woman and determined that he had to have her.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 135.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 136.

*What were the cultural customs for parent-child relationships? What concern should we have here about how he speaks to his parents?*

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- Samson was unwilling to listen and rudely insists upon getting his way—like a spoiled child throwing a temper tantrum.
- “The book of Proverbs extensively explains how proud and foolish it is to be unwilling to listen to the advice of others. Put in its cultural context, Samson’s pride here is even more extreme. In our day it would be more normal for a son to talk back to his parents, but that was not the case in ancient Israel.”<sup>3</sup>
- Proverbs 12:15 – “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”
- Arthur E. Cundall explains:  
“In Israelite society the father was the head of the family and as such exercised control ... including the choice of wives for sons (e.g. Genesis 24:4; 38:6). It was exceptional for a son to contravene the wishes of his parents...”<sup>4</sup>

*For what reasons were Samson’s parents against him marrying a Philistine? Was this an issue of racial prejudice?*

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- In verse 3, Samson’s parents pleaded with him saying, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the **uncircumcised** Philistines?” (Emphasis added)
- The word ‘uncircumcised’ is the key word for understanding their reasoning.
  - “Circumcision was a sign that a family was in a personal covenant or relationship with God, as part of his people.”<sup>5</sup>
  - This is not a racial issue! The prohibition to marry a Philistine woman is not against **inter-racial marriage**, but rather against **inter-faith marriage**.
- **Inter-faith marriages** are still foolish decisions even today! It really doesn’t work to try to cohabitate in a marital or extra-marital relationship with someone of a different faith or who does not have any religious affiliation. We can’t just...



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<sup>3</sup> Keller 136-7.

<sup>4</sup> Cundall, Arthur E. and Leon L. Morris, *Judges and Ruth*. (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2008) 162.

<sup>5</sup> Keller 136.

*Inter-faith coexistence is becoming more and more prevalent in the world today. It is socially unacceptable to consider Christianity as the Only, True Way to God. What are some examples of how the church has tried to ‘coexist’ with the world, but instead found that she has surrendered to the world?*

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- The overwhelming desire to be relevant!
- Absolute tolerance for liberal agendas/beliefs.
- Unquestioning loyalty to a conservative, moral leader.
- Either extreme is problematic:
  - Replicating the culture in your church.
  - Raging against the culture in your church.

### God at Work through Sin

*Judges 14:4*

*What does God do when his people are losing their identity in the world because they look so much like the world?*

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- God will use our weaknesses to bring about His purposes.
- It is vital that we realize that Samson’s parents were unaware that this desire to marry a Philistine woman was from the Lord.
- This teaches us that “God will use the very weaknesses of Samson—his ‘fraternization’ with the Philistines, his sexual appetite, his vindictiveness and temper ... —to bring about confrontation between the two nations. Samson’s weaknesses result in a ‘blood feud’ that leads to more and more conflict, and finally the division between the two nations that is so desperately needed.”<sup>6</sup>
- “So, strange though it seems, God in his mercy is using his people’s weaknesses to make sure there is not peace between them and the surrounding cultures. God’s people (today as then) need to not be at peace with the world—because ‘friendship with the world is hatred toward God’ (James 4:4). Why? Because if we are like the world, we will love idols and forsake God; we will, as James puts it, be ‘adulterous people.’ It is the mercy of God that he does not allow the world to love the church for very long. It forces his people to recognize that we are not part of the world—that we have a different Lord and Savior—and finally cry out to him to rescue us from ourselves and rule us despite ourselves.”<sup>7</sup>
- Samson is impulsive and unteachable. Israel is impossible to tell apart from the nations around them. And God is going to use who they are to spark the necessary conflict.

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<sup>6</sup> Keller 142.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 143.

## A Lion, a Bet, and a Woman

*Judges 14:5 – 15:8*

***What happened on Samson’s return trip to Timnah (14:5-6)?  
Why did he not tell his mother and father what happened?***

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- Samson was attacked by a young lion, but he killed the lion with his bare hands.
- He did not want his parents to know about this because of his Nazirite vow which included a prohibition against touching anything that is dead.
- Keller notes, “As a Nazirite, he cannot touch a dead animal, and should now go straight to the tabernacle for cleansing. But he is on his way to see the woman he wants—clearly his lust overwhelms his vows...”<sup>8</sup>
- According to verses 8-9, when he was returning from his trip to Timnah, he found honey bees inside the carcass of the dead lion. Once again, he touched the dead animal when he chose to reach inside to get some of the honey that the bees had made. By doing this, he once again made himself unclean. By giving some of the honey to his parents, he also made them ceremonially unclean.

***Read Judges 14:10-20. What happens at the wedding celebration for Samson and the Philistine woman? How does this reveal his true nature?***

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- Verses 10-11 – Samson prepared for the wedding feast.
- Verses 12-14 – Samson wagers that the guests will be unable to solve his riddle. The bet is for 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes—one for each man.
- Verses 15-18 – Not being able to solve the riddle, the 30 men extort Samson’s wife to find out the solution to the riddle. Finally, he relented and told her the answer.
- Verses 19-20 – Samson’s actions in this verse reveal his vindictive and violent nature. He was so angry that he returned to his father’s house and left his wife there to be given to another man—his best man.

***What did Samson discover when he returned to fetch his wife?***

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- Verse 1 – He found out that his wife had been given to his friend to marry.
- Verses 2-3 – The father tried to appease Samson by offering him the younger sister, but he became very angry and promised to get even!

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<sup>8</sup> Keller 143.

- Verses 4-5 – He retaliated against the Philistines by burning their fields in a very cruel and unusual way—tying foxes together with a torch burning between them.
- Verses 6-8 – In retaliation for burning the fields, the Philistines put Samson’s wife and father to death by burning them. As per his usual custom, Samson retaliated by killing a great number of them.
- This did not end well for any of the involved parties!

### *How is Samson able to do all these mighty things? (14:6, 19)*

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- The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power.
- God provided Samson with superhuman strength.
- Timothy Keller asks,
 

“But how can God use such flawed people—people like Samson—to get his work done? Shouldn’t he only work with people who are good, godly men and women? Shouldn’t he only use the people who have the right beliefs, and the right behavior? ...

The amazing truth is that God works through sinners, and through sinful situations. He keeps his promises to bless his people in the dark and disastrous periods of our lives, as well as through the times when things are going ‘right.’ Not even our own sin will stop him saving us, or using us.”<sup>9</sup>
- God wants to use us!

### **Leadership without Peace**

*Judges 15:10-20*

### *What is the result of Samson’s actions in the first half of Judges 15?*

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- “Each action prompts a reaction, which brings its own reaction, and the seemingly unbreakable cycle continues”<sup>10</sup>
- Verse 10 – the Philistines prepare for war.
- Verses 11-12 – the Israelites turn on Samson in an effort to appease the Philistines; 3,000 men went down to bring Samson back to the Philistines.
- Verses 14-15 – Samson allowed the Israelites to deliver him up to the Philistines, but when he got there, he broke free from the rope they had used to tie him up.
- Verses 16-17 – Samson then killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.

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<sup>9</sup> Keller 145-146.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 146.

*What did Samson do in verse 18 that the Bible had never recorded him doing before?*

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- Verse 18 – Samson spoke to God—he prayed.
- His prayer is neither humble nor faithful; but rather, it is demanding and full of complaint.
- Verse 19 – Even though Samson spoke to God with a terrible attitude and complaining spirit, God answered his prayer by providing the water that he needed.
- Verse 20 – Samson led Israel for 20 years.



## The Weak, Defeated Victor (16:1-31)

In our previous study about Samson from Judges 14 and 15, we determined that Samson was a vindictive, self-absorbed, emotionally-immature, and sexually-addicted man. Up to this point, he has slaughtered over 1,000 Philistines, but has not yet completely delivered Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. “All his actions against the Philistines have been self-serving, to get him out of the trouble that followed his decision to go to the Philistine town of Timnah”<sup>1</sup> where he fell in love with a Philistine woman. By the end of Judges 15, the author informs us that Samson “judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years” (Judges 15:20).

Finally, at this point, Samson is serving as the judge/leader/deliverer of Israel; so what does he do? According to Judges 16:1-3, Samson not only went to the land of the Philistines—he went to the capital city of Gaza; he not only went looking for a woman—he went to spend time there with a prostitute! Nothing has changed! Samson is still a vindictive, self-absorbed, emotionally-immature, and sexually-addicted man.

### Destructive Pattern of Behavior Continues

*Judges 16:1-3*

Timothy Keller noted that the circumstances of Judges 16:3 are “typical of the pattern of Samson’s life—being enticed into an extremely dangerous situation because of his weaknesses for women. For Israel’s judge to spend the night with a Philistine prostitute (v 1), allowing himself to be surrounded (v 2), is not just disobedient, it is foolish.”<sup>2</sup> It almost seems that Samson is not just addicted to sex, but he is addicted to dangerous, risky encounters with forbidden women.

*In verse 2, the men of the city were said to be setting an ambush for Samson. What happened? Was the ambush successful?*

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- Remember, Samson was inside the prostitute’s house, which was surrounded by the men of the city. Oh, and by the way, the house is located inside a walled city!
- Samson got up from the prostitute’s bed at about midnight. The Scripture does not inform us as to his knowledge of the ambush—it only explains how Samson responded.
- Neither does the Scripture recount the efforts of those involved in the ambush, but we can be reasonably certain that their efforts were ineffective.

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<sup>1</sup> Keller 151.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- So what happened? Verse 3 explains that Samson “arose and took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two posts, and pulled them up, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron,” which is 40 miles away

## Dangerous and Deceitful Delilah

*Judges 16:4-22*

In verse 4, the Scripture explains that Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. Realizing Samson’s weaknesses with women, the leaders of the Philistine nation coerced/bribed her to betray the source of Samson’s strength. “For Delilah, it means that if she could turn him over to them, she would be a national heroine. So the potential wealth, power, and influence being held out to her is very great. She would be set up for the rest of her life.”<sup>3</sup>

*What did she do to try to discover the source of his strength?*

*How many failed attempts did she have before he relented?*

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- Surprisingly, Delilah is very straightforward with Samson. She simply asked him to reveal the source of his incredible strength.
- First Failed Attempt (Judges 16:6-9)
  - He lied to Delilah telling her that he could be subdued but that his attackers would need to use seven fresh bowstrings to tie him down. This would cause him to be as weak as any other man.
  - Delilah tied him up and invited the men into her bedroom to ambush Samson; however, the bowstrings were easily snapped.
  - There were men lying in wait in the inner chamber, but they dared not move when Samson freed himself from the bowstrings.
- Second & Third Failed Attempt (Judges 16:10-14)
  - Amazingly, Samson is still here with Delilah—even after she tied him up. What kept him from leaving?
    - Overconfidence in his ability to escape danger.
    - Addiction to dangerous situations.
    - Emotionally and physically needy of what Delilah had to offer.
    - Denial of Delilah’s true motivation.

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<sup>3</sup> Keller 153.

- After chastising Samson for not telling her the truth, she asked him once again.
  - For a second time, Samson lied to her. She did as he said but the ‘new ropes’ were unable to hold him. This angered Delilah for once again there were men lying in wait to capture Samson.
  - When asked a third time, Samson lied to her again, but this time the lie was coming closer to the truth—he included his hair in this lie.
- Final & Effective Attempt (Judges 16:15-17)
  - Delilah pulled out the ultimate in relational blackmail when she said, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times...”
    - This alone was not enough for Samson to give in, but she continued to torment him with this day after day.
    - The Contemporary English Version says this in verse 16: “Delilah started nagging and pestering him day after day, until he couldn’t stand it any longer.”
  - Samson finally gave in and told her the truth (17).

### *What can we learn about relationships from Samson and Delilah?*

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- When people are in a relationship because of what they can gain from it, that relationship is dysfunctional.
- Samson and Delilah are using one another—Samson for gratification and Delilah for veneration—rather than serving one another. Timothy Keller notes: “They say to each other: *I am with you because I love you*, but they mean: *I am with you because you are so useful to me*. Doubtless there was a lot of passion and romance here—but it was all done out of a motive of self-enhancement, rather than self-giving for the growth of the other. Samson was using Delilah to get sexual love and (probably) the thrill of danger. She was using him to get fortune and fame. It is a pretty obvious taking instead of giving on both sides.”<sup>4</sup>
- Another aspect of dysfunction in this relationship is the helper syndrome. This type of relationship is often characterized by one person who is needy and constantly in trouble, and another person who is the counselor-rescuer.
  - It is obvious how the needy person needs the rescuer!
  - What is less obvious is that the rescuer also needs the needy person “to get a sense of worth and/or a sense of moral superiority.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Keller 154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 155.

- C.S. Lewis explained it this way:  
 “Need-love cries... from our poverty; Gift-love longs to serve...  
 Need-love says of a woman, ‘I cannot live without her;  
 Gift-love longs to give her happiness.”<sup>6</sup>
- “Unless you have that relationship with God, even the most passionate *I love yous* will really mean *I need you to make myself feel as if I am worth something.*”<sup>7</sup> Samson’s life had no evidence of the *God-love* necessary to be in a healthy relationship.

***Once Delilah realized that Samson had told her the truth, what happened next?***

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- According to Judges 16:18-20, Delilah called the Philistine soldiers back one more time. She got Samson to fall asleep with his head in her lap, and then a man came in and shaved his head.
- She cried out, “Samson, the Philistines are attacking.” Once again, he got up to battle against them, but “he did not realize that the LORD had stopped helping him.”

***What did the Philistines do to Samson once he was captured?***

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- Gouged out his eyes.
- Bound him in bronze shackles.
- Forced him into hard labor in prison.

***From where did the Philistines believe that Samson obtained his power? What was the source of Samson’s strength?***

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- “The Philistines thought Samson’s strength was magical (so they believed his lies about fresh thongs, new ropes and braided hair). Magic power depends on external conditions and their *exact* manipulation... Magic is a matter of following the steps to the letter, which pushes a supernatural ‘button,’ and the power comes automatically... The Philistines thought: *He must do something to keep himself strong.* Samson thought: *I don’t have to do anything to keep myself strong.*”<sup>8</sup>
- God’s power is not dependent upon anything a person does or does not do. God’s power is evidenced in through man’s personal relationship with Him. God is able to accomplish His will no matter whether we obey Him or not.

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991) 21.

<sup>7</sup> Keller 155.

<sup>8</sup> Keller 156.

- “We cannot know why God chose to leave Samson to his own strength (i.e. weakness) at this point, when he had not when Samson began to forget his covenant, his relationship, with him. Perhaps a line was crossed when Delilah’s love mattered more to Samson than God’s. Perhaps it was simply time to reclaim Samson spiritually, by giving him weakness in adversity, rather than strength and power. Whichever, God’s strength—which Samson had come to presume upon—is taken away.”<sup>9</sup>
- God was the source of Samson’s strength and His power flows through us whenever he sees fit.

### *Why were the Philistines unconcerned about Samson’s hair growing back?*

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- The Philistines understood that once Samson’s head was shaved, his Nazirite vow had been broken; and as a result, they were no longer concerned with his strength.
- “The Philistines knew only ‘conditional’ gods, gods who were subject to magic manipulation. The God of the Bible, however, is a God of grace, who is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to him. He is not bound or limited by the terms of the Nazirite vow.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Final Showdown: Yahweh vs. Dagon**

*Judges 16:23-30*

Throughout the life/ministry of Samson, God has been using all of the sin-filled behavior of Samson to bring about confrontation with the Philistines (e.g. desire to marry a Philistine woman, burning the fields with the foxes, killing the 1,000 with a donkey’s jawbone, etc.). Here in the last moments of Samson’s life, he is once again put in a situation of confrontation with the Philistines—only this time, Samson is the one who is being shamed and ridiculed. However, God uses Samson through this situation in a greater way than he had throughout the rest of his time serving as the judge/leader of Israel.

### *After reading Judges 16:23-25, what was the purpose for this Philistine feast?*

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- The Philistines had gathered together, in the temple dedicated to the worship of Dagon, to rejoice in their victory over Samson and the God of Israel and to offer a sacrifice to their god.
- This feast turned into a drunken celebration and the people called for Samson to be brought before them as a form of entertainment. They wanted to ridicule him.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 157.

<sup>10</sup> Keller 160.

### *Who was gathered together in this place for this celebration?*

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- According to verse 27, the place was full of men and women.
  - All of the 'lords' or leaders of the Philistines were there.
  - The place was large enough that 3,000 people were up on the roof of the building.
- In essence, everyone who was anyone in the nation of the Philistines had gathered together that day for this celebration!

When Samson was brought out to entertain the crowds, he asked to be able to “feel the pillars on which the house rests” so he could lean against them. Here was Samson—standing before this raucous mob—blind and being ridiculed. “The scene is set; and, for only the second recorded time in his life, Samson prays. Always before, he has assumed that he will be strong, and has used his strength to save himself (14:5-6, 19; 15:3-5, 13-17; 16:3, 8, 12, 14)... Now, for the first time, blind and weak, he simply asks. ‘O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes’ (v 28).”<sup>11</sup> After this humble request, Samson’s strength returns for one last time.

### *Why do you think God returned Samson’s strength to him?*

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- It seems that Samson has had a change of attitude—there is a new attitude of humility demonstrated here—and for the first time, he is exercising faith in God to give him the ability to accomplish this great feat.
- Hebrews 11:32-34 must also be considered in this situation for the New Testament often functions as a commentary for the Old Testament. The writer of Hebrews says:

“<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, **Samson**, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, **stopped the mouths of lions**,<sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, **escaped the edge of the sword**, were **made strong out of weakness**, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” (emphasis added)

Throughout his life, “Samson’s real temptation had been to believe that we are blessed by God because of something great and deserving in us—complacently to see what he had been given by grace as rightfully his, to use as he wished. That, rather than Delilah, was his real sin. It is so hard to remember that we do what we do only because of God’s grace, and that God’s grace is given so that we might do what is pleasing to him and in the service of his people.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Keller 161.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 162.

## What was the result of Samson regaining his strength?

- Samson sacrificed himself by demolishing the temple to Dagon. When he pushed over the support pillars in the middle of the building, the roof—which had over 3,000 people on it—collapsed and all the people on top and inside the building were killed.
- In one act, Samson obliterated the nation of the Philistines by eradicating every one of its leaders. In fact, the Scripture tells us that “the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life” (v 30).

### Samson: A Picture of Christ

*Judges 16:23-30*

From his miraculous birth to his sacrificial death, Samson is a *type* (picture or model) of Christ. “The most important moment of Samson’s life is his death. The most faithful event of his life is the manner of his death. And the most triumphant episode of his life is his death, as he at last, and at the last, performs the role of beginning to rescue God’s people that God had explained to his mother when his angel announced Samson’s miraculous birth (13:5).”<sup>13</sup>

We have already analyzed the similarities and differences between Samson’s birth and the birth of Christ, so now we will compare and contrast their deaths as well.

Compare/Contrast	Samson the Judge	Christ the Messiah
What was the reason for his imprisonment and death?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His disobedience was his downfall. He was unable to live for God and for His glory.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He lived completely for God. His obedience enabled Him to be the perfect sacrifice for sin.</li> </ul>
What did his death accomplish?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His death achieved a portion of the deliverance of the Israelites. Judges 13:5 says, “<i>he shall begin to save Israel...</i>”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His death accomplished the complete deliverance of all God’s children—“once for all” (1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 10:10)</li> </ul>
What happened when he was arrested and imprisoned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was betrayed by someone very close to him—Delilah.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was betrayed by someone very close to him—Judas.</li> </ul>
In what way was he treated when he was arrested?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was tortured, bound and put on display for public mockery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was tortured, bound and put on display for public mockery.</li> </ul>
In what way did he die?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He died with outstretched arms as the building collapsed. He became weak to be strong.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He died with outstretched arms as he was crucified on the cross. He became weak to be strong.</li> </ul>
What did his death accomplish?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He crushed his enemy—Dagon and the Philistines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He crushed his enemy—Satan, the ultimate enemy.</li> </ul>

<sup>13</sup> Keller 162.

Timothy Keller concludes:

“Jesus became weak to become strong. But there is, of course, one last, crucial difference between Samson and Christ. With Samson’s burial, his rule was over (16:31). His story was finished. But with Jesus’ burial, in many ways the story had only just begun. He rules beyond his grave, not just before it. The One who became weak to save will rule in strength and power eternally.

“Becoming and continuing as a Christian is about the same pattern—becoming weak to become strong. Only those who admit they are unrighteous receive the righteousness of Christ. Only those who know their life and strength are theirs purely because of grace are not living in the grip of fear, boredom, and despondency. Only those who know their own weakness are able to know God-given inner strength; the strength which enables us to avoid the pitfalls of Samson’s life: pride, lust, anger, vengefulness and complacency.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Keller 164-5.