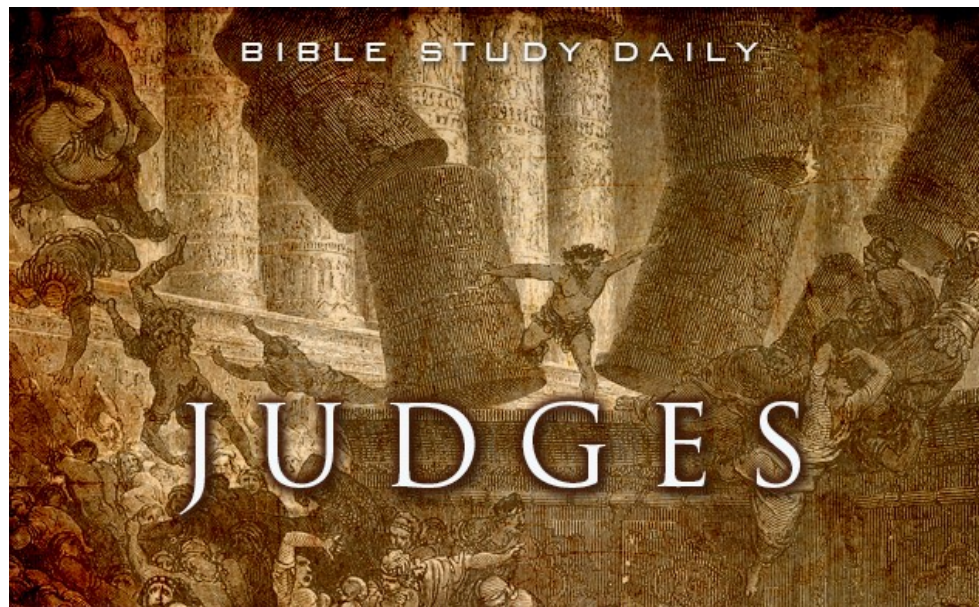




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Judges as well as my study notes for the book.

Name

The English title “Judges” traces its roots from the Latin “Judicum” and the Greek Septuagint “Kritai” back to the Hebrew (“šōpet□m”). The title is appropriate as long as you expand the usual English meaning of judges to include general administrative and military authority.

Author

There is no author identified in the book of Judges itself. However, the Talmud identifies the author as Samuel. Given the time frame of the book it is quite possible that Samuel was the author, but that the final editing of the book was completed somewhat later during the reign of David and Solomon.

Genre

Primarily Narrative History

Literary Form

Historical Narrative

Time Frame

Most scholars agree that the book of Judges begins with the death of Joshua and ends with the coronation of King Saul. Dating the book itself is difficult, but most scholars agree on approximately a 300 year period from 1425 to 1120 BC.

Emphasis

The book of Judges emphasizes the moral and spiritual degradation of the nation of Israel. Despite God raising up judges, the people fell further and further away from God until they ultimately became as defiled as the Canaanites whom they had displaced!

The main themes include:

- Human depravity
- The grace of God
- The need for God’s leadership

Outline

- Prologue (1:1 – 3:6)
- The Judges (3:7 – 16:31)
- Epilogue (17:1 – 21:25)

What I Noticed Today (Judges 1-2)

In Joshua, God was with the whole nation. In Judges, God was with individuals.

Judges 1:1-3:6

This section serves as an introduction to the accounts of Israel's judges: 1) the Israelites do not completely possess the land (Judges 1), and 2) the Israelites fall into a pattern of sin and judgement (Judges 2).

Judges 1

In Judges 1 the Israelites begin the process of conquering the Promised Land.

In verses 1-21 After Joshua's death, the tribes were to conquer their own territories. Rather than fighting as a nation they were now fighting as individual tribes, and they were not effective in claiming their territory. The people allowed remnants of the foreign populations to remain in their midst.

- Judah and Simeon banded together to fight against the Canaanites and Perizzites. God gave them victory and they took possession of the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills. But they failed to drive out the people who lived in the valley because they had iron chariots.
- At the same time, the Benjamites battled the Jebusites living in Jerusalem but failed to drive them out.

In verses 22-25 The people of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) attacked Bethel. A man came out of the city and told the Israelites how to get into the city. They attacked and conquered the city, and let the man and his family go.

In verses 27-36 other Israelite tribes failed to conquer their land:

- Manasseh failed to conquer their land and drive out the Canaanites. They subjected the Canaanites to forced labor allowing them to live among the Israelites.
- Ephraim failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer and lived among them.
- Zebulun failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron and Nahalol. They subjected the Canaanites to forced labor and lived among them.
- Asher failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob.
- Naphtali failed to drive out the Canaanites living in Beth-shemesh and Bethanath. They subjected the Canaanites to forced labor and lived

among them.

- The Danites failed to drive out the Amorites living in Har-heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. They subjected the Amorites to forced labor and lived among them.

Judges 2

In Judges 2 the Angel of the Lord specifically called out Israel for not driving out the inhabitants of the land.

Note: The first person “I” in verses 1-3 indicates this is God speaking. This is not simply an angel, but a theophany, and appearance of the Lord Himself.

In verses 1-3 the Lord reminded the people, He brought them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them on the condition that they do not make covenants with the people living in the land. They were to drive the people out completely and tear down their altars but they failed to do so.

- As a result, He said would no longer drive them out because the Israelites had broken their covenant with Him. The people would be a thorn in the sides of the Israelites, and their gods a snare to them.

In verses 4-5 the people wept bitterly, named the place Bokim (“weeping”), and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

Note: It seems that while the people wept for their misfortune they had not truly repented and the sacrifices they made were more ritualistic than an expression of true faith.

In verses 6-10 we jump back in time to recount the death of Joshua (Joshua 24:29-31):


- The people worshipped the Lord throughout Joshua’s lifetime.
- Joshua died at 100 years old and was buried in the hill country of Ephraim.
- Joshua had specifically told the people to be sure that they taught their children about God, but in Judges 2:10 we see that once the children of the Exodus generation died the next generation did not know God, or what He had done for Israel.

In verses 11-13 the result of not knowing God was that this generation turned away from God, seeking the gods of the people who were around them, even serving Baal and Ashtoreth.

In verses 14-15 the Lord’s anger burned against the Israelites. He handed them over to their enemies and they suffered greatly.

In verses 16-19 the Lord then raised up judges. The people didn’t even listen to the judges but continued to whore after other gods, becoming more and more corrupt over time.

- Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for the people of Israel the Lord



saved them from their enemies while the judge was alive.

- As soon as the judge died they became more corrupt than before.

In verses 20-23 the Lord's anger burned against the Israelites because they had broken their covenant with Him. He would no longer drive out the nations for the Israelites because the Israelites had rebelled against Him.

- The Lord left the Canaanites in the land to test the Israelites to see if they would be faithful to Him.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *In these two chapters of Judges, we see the effects of not remaining true to God. The first thing they were to do when entering the Promised Land was to conquer the land and take possession of it by driving out the inhabitants. But they did not do that and even allowed some of the people to live amongst them as forced laborers.*
- *Moses and Joshua both warned the people to be diligent in teaching their children about the wonders of God, yet they raised a generation of children who didn't know God. Not knowing God this generation sought after other gods, and ultimately became corrupt worshipping foreign gods.*
- *The combination of the corrupting influence of the pagans living among them and the fact that they did not take care to teach their children about God resulted in the people turning away from God in a single generation!*
- *We are so much like this today! We have the corrupting influence of the "world" entering into our churches, and statistics show fewer and fewer people are going to church teaching their children about God. Is there any reason at all to think things will turn out better for us when we reject God as a people than when the nation of Israel rejected God?*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 3-5)

Judges 3

The enemies in the land provided an opportunity for teaching the people about war, and testing the people's willingness to trust God.

In verses 1-6 the Lord left enemies in the land to test the Israelites' faithfulness to Him and to teach the younger generation to fight:

- The Lord left the five rulers of the Philistines, all of the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites in the land.

Note: The Israelites were surrounded by pagan enemies in the Promised Land. The Philistines were in the southwest, the Sidonians in the northwest, the Hivites in the northeast, and the Canaanites in the southeast.

- The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.
- The Israelites took their daughters as wives for themselves and gave their daughters to them, and they worshipped their gods.

Note: The Israelites' rebellion against God was gradual. First, they lived among the pagans, then they intermarried with them, and finally, they worshipped the gods of the pagans.

Note: God's people had to live in the world, but they were not to live like the world. They were to remain separate and obey God. They failed in this by intermarrying with the pagans, and then by abandoning God in order to worship pagan gods.

Note: In these chapters we see the people of Israel going through cycles of disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance – over and over again! Or, if you prefer R's: relapse, ruin, repentance, restoration, and rest.

Note: We see that cycle demonstrated three times in Judges 3 with God raising up Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar as judges who led Israel for a period of time, but in each case after victory and restoration, the people relapsed.

In verses 7-11 the Lord raised up Othniel as the first judge over Israel:

- The Israelites forgot the Lord their God and worshipped the Baals and Asherahs.
- The Lord sold the Israelites to serve the king of Aram-naharaim for eight years.
- The people cried out and the Lord raised up Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, to rescue the people.

- The spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and he judged Israel.
- Othniel led the Israelites in battle and the Lord gave them victory.
- The land had peace for 40 years.

In verses 12-30 the Lord raised up Ehud as the second judge over Israel:

- The Israelites again did evil in the eyes of the Lord and He gave them over to Eglon, king of Moab.
- The Israelites served Eglon for 18 years.
- The Israelites cried out to God and He raised up Ehud son of Gera as a deliverer for the Israelites.
- Ehud killed Eglon with a sword.
- He called the Israelites together and told them the Lord had handed them over to them, so he led them into battle. They killed 10,000 Moabites. The Moabites became the servants of the Israelites.
- The land had peace for 80 years.

Note: *The 80 years of peace was the longest period of peace throughout the history of the judges of Israel.*

In verse 31 the Lord raised up Shamgar as the third judge over Israel. Shamgar delivered Israel by killing 600 Philistines with an oxgoad.

Note: An oxgoad was 8-10 feet long with a metal tip on one end and a chisel type tip on the other end. It was used to control animals and to clean plows.

Judges 4-5

In Judges 4 & 5 we see yet again that the Israelites did evil in the land, God disciplined them, and they cried out to God.

Judges 4

In Judges 4 the Lord raised up Deborah as the fourth judge over the Israelites:

- After Ehud died the Israelites once again did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- They sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan who oppressed them harshly for 20 years.
- This time, the Lord raised up Deborah who was a prophetess and a judge.

Note: A testimony to the fact that God will use people, men and women, who are faithful to Him.

- Deborah called on their military leader, Barak, to gather his men and get ready for battle, but Barak said he won't go unless Deborah leads them!

Note: In such a patriarchal culture it is a testimony to the strength of



Deborah's leadership and her heart for God, that He used her to save the people of Israel.

- At Deborah's direction, Barak assembled an army of 10,000 men at Mount Tabor. On the Lord's timing, they attacked Sisera's army.
- The Lord gave them a great victory and the entire army of Sisera fell by the sword.
- In a similar example, we see where the Lord used Jael, the wife of Heber, to trick Sisera and she was able to kill him.
- This victory gave the people the courage they needed to gain victory over Jabin, king of Canaan.

Judges 5

Judges 5 is a poetic song recounting the victory of Deborah and Barak over their enemies. It is a song both of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. With Deborah's victory over Jabin, the land enjoyed rest for 40 years.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- We will continue to see these cycles of discipline, despair, and deliverance as we continue to study the nation of Israel. God loves His people but wants them to obey Him. They do for a while, then they fall away. God disciplines them and they eventually cry out to God, whereupon God once again saves them and gives them rest for a period of time.
- The Christian church is no different than the Israelites throughout her history. We have had periods of devotion to God! Followed by disobedience *and discipline*. *Here in the US, it seems we are experiencing a time of disobedience to God. But in other countries around the world, the people are experiencing God's restoration and rest!*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 6-7)

Judges 6-8

Gideon delivers the Israelites from the oppression of the Midianites.

Judges 6

We begin Judges 6 with a familiar refrain, “The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

In verses 1-10 the usual consequence ensues as God gives the people over to the Midianites for seven years.

- The Midianites were semi-nomadic marauders who would come into the land to steal crops and livestock.
- Eventually, the people finally cried out to God, but we do not see that they repented of the evil ways.
- The Lord responded with a message delivered by a prophet. He reminded the people how He had brought them out of Egypt. He had delivered them from slavery and oppression. He gave them the Promised Land and drove out their enemies. Yet they had rebelled against God and did not obey Him.

In verses 7-24 in spite of their lack of repentance, the Lord sends an angel to call on Gideon to rid the land of the Midianites. The angel finds Gideon hiding in the winepress beating out wheat. He refers to Gideon as “O mighty man of valor.”

Note: God sees our potential, despite our weaknesses and failings, so He called Gideon by what He knew he could do.

- Gideon offers excuses why he is not the right choice to save Israel. He claims to be of no importance, saying that his family is the least in the tribe, and he is the least in his family.
- Gideon then asks for a sign, and God provides a one in the form of fire that consumes Gideon’s offering.
- Gideon finally realizes he is talking to God and builds an altar.

In verses 25-32 the Lord’s first instruction is for Gideon to rid the idols in his father’s house:

- God’s first instruction is for Gideon to clean up his own house by destroying the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole in his father’s house.
- Gideon obeys but does it at night because he is afraid of what people will do when they find out what he did.

- The men of the city demanded Gideon be killed for tearing down the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole, but his father interceded on his behalf.

In verses 33-40 Gideon seems to be a braver when the Midianites, Amalekites, and Qedemites prepare to attack.

- Gideon sent messengers to the surrounding Israelite tribes to prepare for battle.
- Gideon wants to make extra sure that God is calling on him so he asks for two more signs that God is with him in the form of the fleece wet, then dry.
- With these two signs of confirmation, Gideon finally accepts that God is directing him and is indeed with him.

Judges 7

In verses 1-8 the Lord announced to Gideon that the Israelite army was too large for Him to hand the Midianites over to them. If the Israelites secured victory with a large army, they would think they had won on their own.

- An army of some 32,000 Israelites assembled facing the Midianite army of 135,000 (Judges 8:10).
- The Lord says anyone who is fearful should turn back. 22,000 men turned back, leaving 10,000 men ready for battle.
- Pretty overwhelming odds but God says this is still far too many Israelites, so God shrinks the army of Israelites down to 300.
- With only 300 against 135,000, it would be clear that victory was from the Lord and nothing else!

In verses 9-14 the Lord builds Gideon's confidence by sending him to spy out the enemy camp:

- The Lord told Gideon to take his servant Purah and sneak into the enemy camp to listen to the soldiers. What he heard would build his confidence.
- So Gideon snuck into the camp and overheard a soldier relating a dream in which the entire Midianite army was overturned. Another soldier understood the meaning of the dream saying it meant God had handed the Midianites over to Gideon son of Joash.

Note: Despite all the Lord's reassurances Gideon was still fearful. Another proof of the Lord's leading was the enemy soldier's dream and the other soldier recognizing this dream was a message from God.

In verses 15-23 when Gideon heard the soldier's account of the dream, Gideon worshiped God (Judges 7:15). He called the Israelite soldiers together proclaiming the Lord had given the Midianites into their hands. Gideon entered into the battle by faith.

- Gideon divided the men into three companies of 100 men each. Each man



carried a trumpet and an empty pitcher with a torch inside.

- As they marched to the Midianite camp they blew their trumpets and shouted: “For Yahweh and for Gideon.”

Note: It seems a bit presumptuous to me for Gideon’s battle cry to include himself since the battle was in the hands of the Lord.

- The Israelites attacked at the beginning of the middle watch (the middle watch was from 10:00 pm – 2:00 am), blowing their trumpets and crying out “A sword for Yahweh and for Gideon”.
- The Lord threw the Midianite army into confusion and they fled toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah.

Note: Abel-meholah was about 24 miles south. Abel-meholah was where Elisha was living when Elijah called him to be his protégé (1 Kings 19:16).

In verses 24-25 Gideon sent messengers to the Ephraimites telling them intercept the Midianites and take control of the waterways. The Ephraimites captured Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite princes, and brought their heads to Gideon.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *Many of us are like Gideon. We hear God calling, but we are unsure that it is really Him. We want to be sure because we are afraid to step out in faith. We may be reluctant to move ahead even when God gives us His assurance of victory. But where God leads, God equips and empowers us for victory when we step out in faith, trusting in God, not in ourselves!*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 8-9)

Note: There is a lot going on in these two chapters. I really had to dig in to keep track of all the names of people and places!

Judges 8

Leading off in Judges 8, the men of Ephraim are upset that Gideon didn't call on them to join the fight against the Midianites. Gideon was able to calm them with a bit of flattery (Judges 8:2). He suggested that the Ephraimite gleanings (leftovers) were better than the finest grapes of Abiezer (Gideon's clan).

In verses 4-21 Gideon and his exhausted army of 300 men pursued Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.

Note: We do not read that Gideon asked God, or was led by God in this campaign.

- He asked for bread for his army from the men of Succoth and Penuel (both Israelite cities), but they both refused him. Gideon said he would destroy them when he returned.
- He finally caught up to the Midianite kings and their army of 15,000 men in Karkor and killed them with his army of 300 men.
- Gideon immediately carried out his threats against Succoth and Penuel. He captured a young man from Succoth who wrote down the names of 77 princes and elders of the city. Gideon disciplined the leaders with thorns and briars. He went on to Penuel, tore down the tower and killed all the men of the city.
- Gideon accused the two Midianite kings he had captured (Zebah and Zalmunna) of killing men at Tabor. The two kings told Gideon the men were like him, kings. Since these people were part of Gideon's family he instructed his son, Jether, to kill them. Jether was afraid, so Gideon killed them both and removed their crescent symbols (symbolic of kings).
- In verses 22-28 the Israelites seem to rally behind Gideon's leadership asking him to become their king, but Gideon tells them he will not be their king, neither will his sons, or grandchildren, but only the Lord will rule over them.
- But then the very next thing he does is tell the people to give him a share of the plunder. They agreed and he received about 40-pounds of gold from them!
- Gideon then made an ephod with the gold (an ephod was worn by the priests to determine the will of God). He put the ephod in his hometown

of Ophrah and it became a snare to Gideon and his people.

Note: Gideon's ephod made with golden earrings reminds me of Exodus 32 and the golden calf made with earrings. They were both idols made with plundered gold that led people away from worshipping the Lord.

In verses 28-35 Gideon had 70 sons with many wives, a violation of Deuteronomy 17:17.

- He also fathered a son named Abimelech from a Canaanite concubine in Shechem who was a Baal worshipper.

Note: Baal, pronounced Ba-all, was a god of the Canaanites. Baal was worshipped as the son of Asherah the goddess of the sea.

- After Gideon died the people prostituted themselves with the Baals and worshipped their god, Baal-berith.

Note: The child with the concubine was named Abimelech, which means "my father is king." So while Gideon may have outwardly refused the position of a king he seems to have thought of himself as a king by naming his son "my father is king."

- For 40 years of Gideon the people had peace, but as soon as he died the people forgot about Gideon and what he had done for the Israelites. They turned away from God and turned back to worshipping Baal.

Note: None of the remaining judges whom the Lord raised up over the Israelites resulted in a period of peace (see Judges 3:11, 3:30, 5:31, and 8:28). There is a marked social and moral decline throughout the remaining history of the Judges.

Judges 9

Judges 9 diverts from our story of Judges to reveal the destruction brought on by Gideon's son Abimelech.

In verses 1-6 Abimelech went to his mother's people in Shechem and convinced them that he would be a better leader for them than the 70 legitimate sons of Gideon (though Gideon never laid claim to kingship). The leaders of Shechem paid Abimelech 70 pieces of silver from the temple of Baal, and with that Abimelech hired men and killed the sons of Gideon, his half-brothers. One piece of silver for each of Gideon's sons.

In verses 7-21 Jotham, Gideon's oldest son, was apparently the only surviving son of Gideon's, and when he heard what happened to his brothers he pronounced a curse on Abimelech in the form of a parable (Judges 9:7b-15).

- In this parable, the olive tree is offered kingship over the other trees but refuses.
- Then the fig tree is offered kingship over the other trees and it also refuses.

- Then the grapevine does the same.
- Finally, the trees ask the bramble to be king of the trees and the bramble agrees.
- Jotham is equating Abimelech's kingship with that of the brambles, worthless.
- Jotham then curses Abimelech and the people of Shechem saying that fire will consume them all because they have not acted faithfully to Gideon for risking his life and rescuing the people from the Midianites.

In verses 22-57 Abimelech had ruled over Israel three years when God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and they rebelled against him.

Note: The leaders of Shechem dealt deceitfully with Abimelech by placing robbers on the hilltops to rob people travelling to Shechem. This would reduce tolls and tributes paid to Abimelech.

- Gaal, son of Ebed rose up against Abimelech. Abimelech chased Gaal and his men into the tower of Shechem where Abimelech lit the tower on fire burning them all to death.
- Abimelech went on to the city of Thebez to repeat his victory from Shechem. The leaders took shelter in the city tower, but as Abimelech came to burn the tower, a woman dropped a millstone on him. Abimelech had a servant finish him off with a sword.
- In this way God turned back the evil of Abimelech that he had done by killing his brothers. God also turned back the evil of the men of Shechem for supporting Abimelech and turning away from Him. The curse of Jotham was fulfilled.

Gideon started out fearful and reluctant to answer God's call, but with victory came arrogance. Gideon went into battle on his own without consulting God. He multiplied his wives and even took a Baal worshipping concubine. He refused the title of king but behaved like kingship was due him collecting tribute and even named his son Abimelech. The Israelites had peace while Gideon was alive but as soon as he died they returned to their old ways by rejecting God and worshipping Baal. Introducing Baal worship into his family through his concubine even led to the death of his sons.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *I am reminded of Galatians 5:11, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." In the case of Gideon, the sin of arrogance led to many trials and tribulations for the entire nation of Israel.*
- *This is so true of us today as well. We sin and sometimes that sin destroys families and nations immediately, but sometimes our sin will not impact us, but will impact future generations.*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 10-11)

Judges 10

After Abimelech died, verses 1-5 tells of two judges, Tola an Ephraimite, and Jair a Gileadite:

- Tola judged Israel 23 years and was buried in Shamir when he died.
- Jair judged Israel 22 years and was buried in Kamon.
- Tola and Jair led Israel for a total of 45 years. Nothing remarkable is said about them, but the land enjoyed peace. In all likelihood, they were good administrative leaders.

In verses 6-18 after the death of Jair, once again the Israelites reverted to their evil ways worshipping a number of false gods, including Baal, Ashtoreth, and the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammonites, and the Philistines. God gave them up to their enemies the Philistines and the Ammonites and they were oppressed for 18 years.

Note: The Philistines were in the west and the Ammonites were in the east.

- They finally cried out to God to save them (Judges 10:10), but there was no repentance. God rejected them telling them to plead to their false gods to save them.
- When they cried out to God again to save them (Judges 10:16) they also repented by getting rid of their false gods and resumed worshipping God.
- The Ammonites came together prepared for battle and camped at Gilead. The leaders of Gilead looked for someone to lead the fight against the Ammonites and promised to make him their leader.

Note: The Israelites did not seek the Lord's wisdom in seeking a military commander. Instead, they promised to subject themselves to whoever would step into the leadership role.

Judges 11

In Judges 11 when their enemies came near the Israelites looked around for a military leader and came to Jephthah. Jephthah was the son of a harlot who the people had chased out of the city, but when the enemy approached the elders of Gilead came to him and promised to follow him if he would lead them.

In verses 12-28 Jephthah led negotiations with the enemy kings as though he was king.

Stating the Lord God had given the land to the Israelites, and if the gods of

the Moabites and Ammonites were strong they could have given the land to their people.

Note: It seems that he was a sincere believer and that he knew or was at least acquainted with the scripture. In those days, it was presumed that if your god gave you the land it was yours to possess.

In verses 29-40 the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah (v. 29) as he traveled through the land. At some point, he made a vow to God that if God would give him the victory he would dedicate to God and make a burnt offering of whatever came out of his house first when he arrived home (Judges 11:30-31).

Note: This was a rash vow! Jephthah already had the spirit of God leading him, and he should have known that making such a vow was unnecessary.

Note: Now this is where this account gets problematic. Jephthah could not know who or what would come out of his house first. What if it was a neighbor? He did not have the authority to kill a neighbor. Besides, human sacrifice was a practice of the foreign gods, not of the Lord. What if an unclean animal came out first? God would not have accepted an unclean animal as a burnt offering!

Note: Verse 31 states, “Whatever comes out of the house...will belong to the Lord and I will offer it as a burnt offering.” At issue among scholars is the word “and.” Some say the word should be translated “or.”

- Jephthah returns home in victory, and his only child, his daughter, comes out of the house first. He must fulfill the vow.
- Jephthah’s daughter was given permission to wander the countryside and be with her friends.

Note: I personally doubt his daughter was offered as a burnt offering. First, the conclusion of the chapter reveals that the memory of his daughter is celebrated by the Israelites. If she was martyred, it would have been more appropriate to offer a lament rather than a celebration. Second, the book of Hebrews 11:32 refers to Jephthah as a man of faith and courage. It is unlikely that he would have been referred to this way if he had gone against God’s law by sacrificing his daughter. The solution offered by some scholars is that Jephthah could have simply redeemed his daughter’s life by paying the redemption price to the priests, and committing her to serve the Lord for the rest of her life.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *Man tends to look on outward signs, like parentage and status when selecting leaders, but God looks at the person’s heart, at their character. We would do well to select leaders today based on their love for God and their character rather than on their outward appearances!*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 12-14)

Judges 12

It seems the men of Ephraim could never be happy with someone else's victory. They came out against Gideon (Judges 8) and now they are coming out against Jephthah.

In verses 1-7 Jephthah explained that he had called on the Ephraimites to help but they did not respond so he went into battle without them.

- The Lord had given Jephthah victory over the Ammonites.
- Jephthah gathered his army, fought, and defeated the Ephraimites.
- The Ephraimites started a civil war against their Gideonite brothers, and the result was 42,000 Ephraimites died.
- Jephthah judged Israel 6 years and then he died and was buried in the land of Gilead.

Closing Judges 12 in verses 8-13 is the brief account of three judges that followed Jephthah:

- Ibzan from Bethlehem judged Israel 7 years. He allowed his 30 sons to intermarry with foreigners. He gave his 30 daughters in marriage to men outside their tribe. He died and was buried in Bethlehem.
- Elon from Zebulun judged Israel 10 years. He died and was buried in Zebulun.
- Abdon from Pirathon judged Israel 8 years. He died and was buried in Pirathon in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Judges 13-16

Sampson delivers the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines.

Judges 13

Judges 13 records Israel once again doing what was evil in the sight of God so he handed them over to the Philistines for 40 years.

Note: This is the seventh and last time this reference to the people of Israel doing evil in the sight of God occurs (Judges 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 8:33-35, 10:6, 13:1).

In verses 2-25 an angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah from Zorah and his wife saying that the child they would bear would be a Nazarite from birth and he would begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. Samson (which means "sunny") was born and the Lord blessed him, and the spirit of God

was with him.

- She was not to drink wine or beer or eat anything unclean.
- She was not to cut the boy's hair because he was to be a Nazarite from birth.

Note: A Nazarite was someone who made a vow to abstain from any strong drink, to avoid eating or touching any unclean thing, and to not cut their hair during the period of the vow.

- Manoah sacrificed a young goat and a grain offering to the Lord and the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame from the altar.

Note: It was not until the Angel ascended in the flames of the altar that Manoah realized the person he had been talking to was an Angel of the Lord.

- Manoah's wife gave birth to Sampson. The spirit of the Lord was upon him and blessed him as he grew up.

Judges 14

But, as we see in Judges 14 Samson had a weakness for foreign women.

- Sampson saw a Philistine woman in the town of Timnah and asked his parents to get her for him as a wife.

Note: Timnah was only about six miles west of Zorah the town where Sampson lived.

- Sampson's parents tried to dissuade him from marrying a Philistine woman since this intermarriage was prohibited (Deuteronomy 7:3)
- He insisted and his parents relented.

Note: Verse 8, "After some time he returned to get her." Sampson was returning for the wedding after the engagement period. Verse 9, Sampson defiled himself by taking honey from the carcass of the lion. As a Nazarite, he was to avoid all dead animals. He gave some of the honey to his parents and didn't tell them where it came from so he defiled them as well. Verse 10, Sampson defiled his Nazarite vow again when he hosted a drinking party for the Philistines (the word for "feast" comes from the word "to drink").

- During the course of the 7-day wedding feast, his fiancé nagged him for the answer to the riddle he proposed to the Philistines until he finally relented, gave her the answer to the riddle, and she betrayed him.
- The Spirit of the Lord came upon Sampson and he ended up killing 30 Philistines.
- His father-in-law gave his fiancé to another man.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- Samson was blessed by God with His spirit and separated at birth for a special purpose - to save the people of Israel from their oppressors and

restore their relationship to God. His parents were devout believers, but it didn't take long as an adult for Samson to fall into sin.



What I Noticed Today

(Judges 15-17)

Judges 15-16

Chapters 15-16 continue the story of Samson.

Judges 15

In verses 1-5 During the wheat harvest (May), Sampson returned to see his wife with a goat as a present for his father-in-law. His father-in-law said he thought Sampson hated her (divorce language Deuteronomy 24:3) so he had given her to another man.

- When he found out his fiancé had been given to another man Samson burned the Philistine's crops and orchards down.

In verses 6-13 the Philistines came against Judah looking for Samson.

- The Philistines found out that Sampson had destroyed their crops because of Sampson's wife had been given to another man. The Philistines went to Sampson's wife and her father and burned them to death.
- This angered Sampson even more and he took revenge by slaughtering more of the Philistines.
- The Philistines then went and attacked Lehi, a town in Judah, in revenge for Sampson's killing of the Philistines.
- 3,000 men of Judah went to Samson at the cave of Etam, captured him, tied him up, and turned him over to the Philistines.

In verses 14-20 Sampson kills more Philistines.

- When Sampson arrived in Lehi the Spirit of the Lord came over Sampson and he broke free of the ropes.
- Sampson killed 1,000 of the Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey and escaped the Philistines.
- Sampson gave credit to the victory over the Philistines to the Lord.
- Sampson judged Israel 20 years.

Judges 16

In verses 1-3 Samson travelled deep into Philistine territory to Gaza (about 35 miles from his hometown of Zorah) where he slept with a prostitute who deceived him (much like his fiancé).

- Sampson stayed in bed until midnight and realizing he was surrounded

by men who wanted to kill him at the city gate, he took the doors of the city gate and pulled them out of the ground, put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of the mountain overlooking Hebron.

Note: Scholars disagree whether Sampson carried the city gates of Gaza all the way to a mountain overlooking Hebron which was 37 miles away. The alternative explanation (that makes more sense to me) is that Sampson carried the gate to a nearby mountain east of Gaza (El Montar) that faced Hebron.

In verses 4-20 sometimes later Sampson fell in love with a third Philistine woman, Delilah.

- Delilah was approach by 5 Philistine leaders (1 Samuel 6:17-18) who offered her 1,100 pieces of silver each if she would betray him.

Note: 5,500 pieces of silver was an enormous amount of money when you realize that an ordinary slave was 30 pieces of silver.

- Delilah tried three separate times to get Sampson to tell her the secret of his great strength.
- Delilah nagged him day and night until she wore him out (v. 16). Samson eventually told her the truth about the source of his strength – his uncut hair.
- She cut it while he was sleeping and the Lord left him.

In verses 21-31 the Philistines captured Sampson and put him in prison.

- The Philistines gouged out his eyes, placed him in bronze shackles, and took him to prison in Gaza.
- They forced Sampson to grind out grain in prison.
- His final act as his hair grew out was to pray to God to restore his strength so he could take his revenge on the Philistines.
- God did restore his strength and Samson pulled down the pillars of the temple to Dagon while the Philistines were celebrating.
- Samson died that day along with 3,000 men and women who were in the temple.
- His brothers and father came and carried his body back to Zorah and buried him in his father's tomb.

Note: Samson had everything going for him. He had the spirit of the Lord in him, yet he kept violating the Nazarite vow, especially with regard to foreign women. This attraction to women who worshipped foreign gods proved to be a snare for him all his life.

Note: There are some interesting parallels between Samson and Jesus:

- Both births were foretold by an angel

- Both were separated to God from the womb.
- Both were Nazarites.
- Both went in power of the Holy Spirit.
- Both came to save their people.
- Both were rejected by their people.
- Both destroyed (or will destroy) their enemies.

Judges 17-21

Judges 17-21 represent an epilogue to the book. They describe the moral and spiritual decline of the people of Israel. From a historical standpoint, the events of Judges 17-21 occurred earlier. Given the mention of Moses' grandson and the ark at Bethel, the events of Judges 17-18 probably took place during the days of Othniel, the first judge of Israel.

Judges 17

Judges 17 relates the story of Micah from Ephraim.

Note: Micah means, “Who is like Yahweh?”

- Micah stole 1,100 pieces of silver (almost 28–lbs.) from his mother but admitted to the theft when he heard about his mother's curse.
- Then she said her son was “blessed by the Lord”! The mother said the money was dedicated to the Lord, but took some of the silver and had a silversmith make an idol.


Note: the 200 shekels of silver (about 5 pounds) was the equivalent of several thousand dollars since the price of a household slave was 30 pieces of silver. Such household idols were outlawed in Deuteronomy 12.

In verses 7-13 in addition to making a shrine and having household idols, Micah ordained one of his own sons to be the household priest.

- Then, when a young Levite came along, Micah hired the young Levite to be his household priest, thinking that the Lord would bless him because he had his own priest.
- The priest was from Bethlehem – the far end of the country.

Note: In all likelihood the description that he was “young” indicates that he was under 30 years old and not yet eligible to serve in the temple. In Judges 18:30 we learn that the young priest's name is Jonathon, and he is Moses' grandson!

Note: Judges 17:6 says, “in those days...everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” This was so true in both in the case of Sampson chasing after foreign women who worshipped false Gods, and Micah who thought he could build his own religious shrines and make idols, and secure God's blessing by



hiring a young man to be his personal priest.

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *It is so easy for us to be led into sin! As we see with Samson one sin led to another, and to another until it cost him his eyes and his life. Yes, he accomplished much for God and his people, but how much more might he have accomplished had he remained true to God. How much more might we accomplish if we remain true to God?*
- *How are we doing today? Does the phrase “everyone does what is right in their own eyes still ring true”? I think it does. Especially here in America, we are experiencing a wave of moral relativism where people think whatever is true for them is perfectly ok, with no thought to God, and His best for us!*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 18-19)

Judges 18

Judges 18 opens with the Danite tribe looking for territory to occupy. They had already been granted land by God (Joshua 19:40-48), but they had failed to take over all the land and had even been run out of some of the cities they had occupied.

Note: Rather than seeking God's help in taking the land they had been promised they sent scouts out looking for another land to conquer

In verses 2-8 the Danites selected five men and told them to go look for a new land for them to occupy.

- The five men journeyed to Ephraim and ended up at Micah's house where they met his Levite priest.
- They asked the priest to inquire of God (using the word Elohim) about their journey, and the priest answers that the Lord (using the word Yahweh) says they will be successful.

Note: Since the Danites already have land the Lord had assigned them the priest is speaking against God's original intent but is saying what he thought the men wanted to hear.

- The men went to Laish (aka Leshem, Joshua 19:47) and saw the land was good, lacking nothing, and the unsuspecting people had no allies.

In verses 9-28 the men returned to their clans at Zorah and Eshtaol to report:

- They encouraged their brothers to invade the land immediately because it was a good land.
- 600 Danites left and travelled as far as Ephraim arriving at Micah's house.
- While the 600 men were stationed outside the five spies entered Micah's house to steal the idols, carved images, and ephods.
- They convinced Jonathan, the Levite priest, to go with them to be their priest.
- Micah chased after them and accused them of stealing his property and taking his priest but they threatened to kill him and his family so he returned home.
- The Danites went Laish, killed the people, and burned down the city.
- They then rebuilt the city and named it Dan.

In verses 30-31 the Danites set up their idols and carved images. Jonathan, son of Gershom (Exodus 2:22), son of Moses was their priest. Jonathan's sons succeeded him as priests to the Danites until the time of the exile (722 B.C.).

Judges 19

Judges 19 tells the story of a Levite whose concubine ran away back to her father.


Note: Judges 19 opens with the phrase, "In those days Israel had no king." This is the third out of four occurrences of the phrase (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). With no central authority, the Israelites continued to decline socially, morally, and in their relationship to God.

- After four months the Levite goes to the father's house to implore her to come home.
- After five days at the father's house, the Levite and his concubine set out on the journey home.
- It was late in the day and he refused to stop at Jerusalem because Jerusalem was still occupied by the Jebusites.

Note: Had the Israelites taken over the land as God had told them to Jerusalem would have already been an Israelite city.

- Instead, they passed by Jerusalem to go to Gibeah, an Israelite city.
- The Levite and his concubine were shown hospitality by an elderly man who invited them to spend the night at his house.
- Worthless men came along and wanted to have sex with the man.
- Instead, the man gave the men his own virgin daughter and the concubine, whom the men assaulted all night.
- The concubine was killed in the assault.
- The Levite discovered her body when he was preparing to leave the next morning.
- He cut her up and sent a piece of her to each of the twelve tribes of Israel to show what had been done.
- The people who saw her agreed some response to the atrocity was necessary.

Note: The Danites didn't follow God's instructions to take their land, so they end up looking elsewhere. That led them to Micah. Micah had led his entire family into idolatry. Even a Levite priest had succumbed by hiring himself out as a priest in a house full of idols. The Danites stole Micah's idols and ephods and took the Levite priest with them. From one act of sin, an entire family became idolatrous. Then a priest, then an entire tribe. A little leaven leavens the whole lump!



Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *Our lives and our world is no different today. People excuse a small sin, and suddenly a family is in sin, then a neighborhood, a city, and the nation. It doesn't take long for sin to take hold and pull us away from God's best! It is indeed a sad commentary, but sometimes Christians treat each other with less caring and less respect than non-believers!*

What I Noticed Today (Judges 20-21)

Judges 20

News of the murder of the Levite's concubine united the tribes of Israel against the city of Gibeah (tribe of Benjamin) where the murder occurred.

In verses 1-11 all the people of Israel assembled and came before the Lord at Mizpah.

Note: The reference to "from Dan to Beersheba" refers to all the tribes from north to south. The reference to "the land of Gilead" refers to the eastern tribes across the Jordan. Mizpah is a few miles from Gibeah on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim.

- The Benjamites were not represented among the tribes who gather at Mizpah.
- The Israelites asked how this outrage occurred and the Levite explained what had happened to him and his concubine at Gibeah.
- The people of Israel united and sent 10 men out of every hundred to punish Gibeah for the outrage.

In verses 12-13 the people of Israel sent messengers to the city of Gibeah demanding they give up the men who murdered the concubine but they refused.

In verses 14-18 the Benjamites assembled an army of 26,000 swordsmen plus 700 choice men from Gibeah. The Israelites came against them with an army of 400,000 men

- The Israelites did not ask God IF they should fight the Benjamites, but WHO should go first. God said the tribe of Judah should go first.

Note: When they inquired of God they used the term Elohim, the generic term for God, rather than the covenantal name for God, Yahweh.

In verses 19-28 the Israelites fought against their brothers the Benjamites:

- The army of the tribe of Judah came up against the tribe of Dan and lost the battle on the first day with 22,000 men of Israel killed.
- The people of Israel wept and inquired of God again. God sent them into battle and they lost again on the second day with 18,000 men of Israel killed.
- Finally, the Israelites came together, wept, fasted all day, and gave peace and fellowship offerings. Then they inquired of the Lord (using the name Yahweh). This time, God said He would hand the Benjamites over to the army of Israel.

- The next day the Israelites defeated the Benjamites by killing 25,100 of them.
- Only 600 Benjamites survived by escaping into the rock of Rimmon where they stayed for four months.
- The Israelites turned back and destroyed all the towns of Benjamin by burning them to the ground and killing all the animals.

Judges 21

In verses 1-7 the Israelites realized the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out:

- All the women and only 600 of the men of Benjamin survived the civil war.
- This caused another problem for the Israelites because they had sworn an oath not to give any of their daughters to the Benjamites in marriage, so now with no women the tribe was in danger of extinction.


In verses 8-12 the Israelites developed a plan to avoid extinction for the tribe of Benjamin:

- The Israelites discovered that no one from the clan of Jabesh-Gilead had come to the assembly or joined the army against the Benjamites.
- The assembly sent 12,000 warriors to Jabesh-Gilead who killed every man and woman, sparing only the virgin women.
- They Israelites sent a message of peace and gave the 400 virgins from Jabesh-Gilead to the Benjamites.
- But this did not supply enough women so they allowed the Benjamites to take women during a festival to the Lord at Shiloh. This, they reasoned, allowed them to not break their oath not to give wives to the Benjamites.

Note: A matter of semantics - they would not give their daughters, but the Benjamites were allowed to take them!

Some thoughts for further consideration:

- *There were many opportunities for the disasters of the last few chapters to be avoided. If the city fathers of Gilead had gotten rid of the worthless men within the city as they should have, none of this would have happened. If the Levite and homeowner had stood up to the worthless men, this would not have happened. If the city of Gibeah had given up the worthless men who murdered the concubine the civil war would not have occurred. If the army of Israel had fasted, wept, and restored their relationship to God before attempting to go up against the Benjamites they would not have lost the first two battles. If the men of Israel had not made such a rash vow to prohibit giving their daughters to the men of Benjamin, the tribe would not have face near extinction.*
- *So many failures of leadership are in this story of the Benjamites, the*



Levite, and the people of Israel! Men who do not have the courage to trust God and follow Him faithfully, are prone to developing their own solutions to problems, and man's solution is never God's best!