

**Faithway Baptist Church  
Adult Bible Study  
Summer 2016  
Pastor Scott Estell**

# Judges Resources

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"An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Book of Judges" by Matthew **Henry** in Volume 2 of *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1708)

*An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* by Eugene **Merrill** (1966)

"Judges & Ruth: An Introduction & Commentary" by Arthur E. **Cundall** [Judges] & Leon Morris [Ruth] in the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (1968)

*Conquest and Crisis: Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* by John J. **Davis** (1969)

*A Survey of Israel's History* by Leon **Wood** (1970)

*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* by Gleason **Archer** (1974)

*The Distressing Days of the Judges* by Leon **Wood** (1975)

*A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* by Norman **Geisler** (1977)

"Focus on Judges," in the November 1979 issue of *Biblical Viewpoint* (1979)

"Judges" by F. Duane **Lindsey** in the Old Testament Volume of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1985)

"Judges" by Herbert **Wolf** in Volume 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (1992)

*Survey of the Old Testament* by Paul **Benware** (1993)

"Adventuring Through Joshua, Judges, and Ruth" by Ray **Stedman** (1997)

"Judges, Ruth" by Daniel **Block** in Volume 6 of *The New American Commentary* (1999)

"Judges and Ruth" by K. Lawson **Younger** in *The NIV Application Commentary* (2002)

"Judges" by Warren **Wiersbe** in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History* (2003)

*The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* by Robert **Bell** (2010)

"The Book of Judges" by Barry **Webb** in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (2012)

*A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* by Robert **Chisholm** (2013)

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptural citations are from the NASB.

# The Book of Judges: An Introduction

The book of Judges is so called because of the primary characters of the book.<sup>1</sup> A judge was one whose primary responsibility was to rescue by delivering the nation of Israel from the hand of oppressors (see 2:16; cf. 2:18, 3:9-10, 15, 28, 31, 8:22, 11:21, 12:3, and 13:5). A secondary responsibility was to rule by governing the land during the days of peace that ensued (see Ruth 1:1). This likely included the task of jurisprudence (see 4:4-5). Judges is found among the "historical" books (Joshua-Esther) of the English Old Testament. The Hebrew Old Testament included Judges among the "former prophets" (along with Joshua, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings).<sup>2</sup>

In the book of Judges, we read of some of the successes of Israel in driving out the inhabitants of the land (first half of chapter 1), but more so of their failures (last half of chapter 1); God's displeasure over and the corrupting consequence of this (start of chapter 2); the "Judges cycle" (see under "One Outstanding Feature of the Book" below; end of chapter 2); the judgeships of Othniel and Ehud (chapter 3); the joint-judgeship of Deborah and Barak (chapter 4); the victory song of Deborah and Barak (chapter 5); the judgeship of Gideon (chapters 6-8), including his fleece test (end of chapter 6) and his defeat of the Midianites (chapter 7); the judgeship of Gideon's son, Abimelech (chapter 9); the judgeship of Jephthah (chapters 11-12), including his rash vow (end of chapter 11); the judgeship of Samson (chapters 13-16), including his slaying of a thousand men with a donkey's

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<sup>1</sup> The word, "judge" is found 22 times in the book. Twelve different judges are named. To these twelve at least two more can be added, mentioned in 1 Samuel: Samuel and Eli.

<sup>2</sup>The probable reason for the inclusion of Judges among the prophets was the prophetic tone of the book (see comments under "The Author of the Book"). As Cundall (p. 17) states: "The implication of the inclusion of dominantly historical books amongst the Prophets should be carefully noted, for it reveals a fundamental attitude of the Israelite historians. They were not concerned merely to compile an authoritative record of their nation's history; their motive was to draw out the religious truths which were implicit in that history." Block (p. 52) adds: "The author's intent is not to produce a cold, rational, and objective record of events; this is literary rhetoric, the language of persuasion, designed to challenge prevailing notions and effect a spiritual and moral transformation in the readers of the composition. The book represents an extended sermon, or a series of sermons, that draws its 'texts' from the real historical experiences of the Israelites in the premonarchic period." Remember, history is His story, the providential outworking within time of God's eternal decree.

jawbone (chapter 15), his demise at the hands of Delilah (chapter 16), and his defeat of the Philistines in his death (end of chapter 16); the idolatry of a man named Micah (chapter 17); the idolatry of the tribe of Dan (chapter 18); the violation and murder of an Israeli woman at Gibeah (chapter 19); a war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the nation, leading to the near annihilation of the Benjamites (chapter 20); and the destruction of Jabesh-gilead in order to provide wives for the Benjamites (chapter 21).

### **The Author of the Book**

According to most interpreters, the author of the book of Judges was the prophet, Samuel. There are several reasons why this may be so:

First, the book was likely written during the lifetime of Samuel, and Samuel was the only significant figure during this time.

Second, the book is prophetic in tone (there is a strong emphasis on Israel's culpability for what transpires), as opposed to merely historical, and Samuel was a prophet.

And third, Jewish tradition (in particular the Babylonian Talmud<sup>3</sup>) identifies Samuel as the author of the book.

### **The Date of the Book**

Roughly-speaking, the book of Judges narrates the history of Israel during the approximately 350-year period<sup>4</sup> from the death of Joshua (1:1; approximately 1375 B.C.) to the beginning of the monarchy under Saul (approximately 1050 B.C.).<sup>5</sup> Most date the book somewhere around 1000

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<sup>3</sup>There was a Palestinian Talmud and a Babylonian Talmud. A Talmud was a written record of the Jewish oral traditions surrounding the Old Testament.

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Gerald Priest ("Old Testament Historical Books" class notes, p. 46) gives a range of 1380-1050 B.C. *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts* (p. 74) gives a range of 1380-1045 B.C. John MacArthur (*The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, p. 63) gives a range of 1398-1043 B.C. Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 11) gives a range of 1390-1050 B.C. Webb (p. 12) gives a range of 1326-1092 B.C.

<sup>5</sup>The book of Ruth (what has been called a "lily pad in the mud pond of Judges") and 1 Samuel 1-12 also fall within this time period.

B.C.<sup>6</sup> A "window" can be established based upon several facts:

First, based upon the repeated refrain, "in those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25), it is likely that the book was composed during the monarchy, when there was a king in Israel. Thus, the date of writing must have been after 1050 B.C., the approximate year of Saul's coronation.

And second, we know the book was likely composed before 1000 B.C., because 1:21 indicates that the Jebusites were still occupying Jerusalem, a situation that changed when David captured the city around that time (see 2 Samuel 5:6-9).

### **The Purpose for the Book**

The book of Judges is primarily historical in nature.<sup>7</sup> Rather than seeking to be exhaustive, the Jewish historians were selective in their retelling of history, including only those items that fit their purpose in writing and in proportions consistent with their purpose.<sup>8</sup> From a purely historical perspective, the book narrates the moral decline that took place in Israel between the end of the leadership of Joshua and the beginning of the leadership of Samuel.

Based upon the repeated refrain, "in those days there was no king in Israel" (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25), most interpreters suggest that the reason why the Holy Spirit prompted Samuel to pen the book of Judges was to remind the Jews living during the days of the monarchy of the terrible conditions that prevailed during the days that immediately preceded the monarchy, perhaps in an effort to bolster the monarchy in their eyes. In other words, monarchy is preferable to anarchy (Steve Thomas). As Geisler

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<sup>6</sup>Lindsey (1:373) gives a date of writing between 1040 and 1020 B.C. Benware (p. 85) says about 1000 B.C.

<sup>7</sup>One key distinction that must be made when interpreting an historical book is determining what is descriptive (describing what they did there and then) and what is prescriptive (prescribing what we must also do here and now).

<sup>8</sup>What Lindsey (1:373) calls "theological selective history." In the book of Judges, more space is given to those judges who were apparently less moral, further reinforcing the emphasis of the book on Israel's faithlessness. As Younger (p. 37) writes: "... [T]he amount of verbiage attached to each major/cyclical judge is generally proportional to his or her spiritual or moral quality: the more moral, the less verbiage; the less moral, the greater the verbiage."

(p. 102) states: "See how thankful you can be now that God has given us stability under the Davidic kingdom and that we are not living in those near anarchy conditions of the days of the judges when everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Accordingly, Geisler (p. 103) calls the book "an apologetic for the establishment of the monarchy."

### **The Theme of the Book**

The book of Judges emphasizes both the failure<sup>9</sup> of Israel and the faithfulness of God.

The faithlessness<sup>10</sup> (which was the cause of the failure) of Israel during these centuries has led some to call this era the "dark ages" of Israel's history. Such faithlessness is emphasized as the book ends: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25; cf. 17:6). It is also seen by such statements as 2:11's "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD" (cf. 3:7, 12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, and 13:1).

The faithfulness of God (see especially 2:1's "I will never break My covenant with you") is seen in His continual freeing of the Israelites from their foes in spite of their unfaithfulness. When the Israelites are defeated due to their depravity, God delivers them. Rightly does Block (6:72) write in this regard: "So against all odds, and certainly against Israel's deserts, the nation survives the dark days of the judges. The true hero in the book is God and God alone."

Judges narrates (sometimes very graphically<sup>11</sup>) the depths of depravity to which the nation of Israel had sunk following the death of Joshua. God graciously responded by raising up the judges to prevent the nation from being annihilated (in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12:1-3) by the Canaanites within and the surrounding nations without (whom God used to chasten the nation for her moral malaise) until such time as the monarchy was established. Samuel relates these dark days in Israel's

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<sup>9</sup>Whereas the book of Joshua was one of victory, the book of Judges was one of defeat. Whereas Joshua was about possession, Judges was about oppression (Geisler, p. 21).

<sup>10</sup>In keeping with this emphasis, a word that is prominent in the book of Judges is "evil," found 14 times.

<sup>11</sup>Accordingly, Webb (p. xvii) writes: "Judges is not a nice book. It's rough and raw and confronting" and (p. 59) "It is clearly a very violent book."

history in hopes that those to whom he is writing will not follow in their footsteps.

## **The Structure of the Book**

The book of Judges may be divided into 3 sections:

- ◆ Introduction or Prologue (1:1-3:6)
- ◆ Body (3:7-16:31)
- ◆ Conclusion or Epilogue (17:1-21:25)

A similar, three-fold breakdown of the book (Lindsey, 1:375-376) is:

- ◆ Causes Introducing the Days of the Judges (1:1-2:5)
- ◆ Cases Exhibiting the Deeds of the Judges (2:6-16:31)
- ◆ Conditions Illustrating the Days of the Judges (17:1-21:25)

So also John MacArthur (*The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, p. 68):

- ◆ The Disobedience of Israel (1:1-3:6)
- ◆ The Deliverance of Israel (3:7-16:31)
- ◆ The Dereliction of Israel (17:1-21:25)

So also Wiersbe (2:93):

- ◆ Disobedience (chapters 1-2)
- ◆ Discipline (chapters 3-16)
- ◆ Disorder (chapters 17-21)

The following outline is from Geisler (pp. 104-105):

- I. The Reason for Judges—Apostasy (chapters 1-3a)
  - A. The backward look to Israel's sin (chapters 1-2a)
  - B. The forward look to Israel's servitude (chapters 2b-3a)
- II. The Rule of the Judges—Loyalty (chapters 3b-16)
  - A. The first cycle (chapter 3b)
    1. Depression by Mesopotamia
    2. Deliverance by Othniel
  - B. The second cycle (chapter 3c)
    1. Servitude to Moab, Ammon, and Amalek
    2. Salvation by Ehud
  - C. The third cycle (chapters 4-5)
    1. Retribution through Canaan
    2. Rest by Deborah
  - D. The fourth cycle (chapters 6-8a)

- 1. Vindication by way of Midian
- 2. Victory through Gideon
- E. The fifth cycle (chapters 8b-10a)
  - 1. Ruination from Abimelech
  - 2. Release by Tola and Jair
- F. The sixth cycle (chapters 10b-12)
  - 1. Loss to Ammon
  - 2. Liberty through Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon
- G. The seventh cycle (chapters 13-16)
  - 1. Ensnarement by Philistines
  - 2. Emancipation by Samson
- III. The Ruin of the Judges—Anarchy (chapters 17-21)
  - A. The story of decline—idolatry (chapters 17-18)
  - B. The story of debasement—immorality (chapters 19-21)

The following chart is taken from page 75 of *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts*:

### *Judges at a Glance*

FOCUS	DETERIORATION	DELIVERANCE						DEPRAVITY				
REFERENCE	1:1 — 2:1 — 3:5 — 4:1 — 6:1 — 10:6 — 12:8 — 13:1 — 17:1 — 19:1 — 20:1 — 21:25											
DIVISION	ISRAEL FAILS TO COMPLETE THE CONQUEST	GOD JUDGES ISRAEL	SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN	NORTHERN CAMPAIGN (1st)	CENTRAL CAMPAIGN	EASTERN CAMPAIGN	NORTHERN CAMPAIGN (2nd)	WESTERN CAMPAIGN	SIN OF IDOLATRY	SIN OF IMMORALITY	SIN OF CIVIL WAR	
TOPIC	CAUSES OF THE CYCLES		CURSE OF THE CYCLES						CONDITIONS DURING THE CYCLES			
	LIVING WITH THE CANAANITES		WAR WITH THE CANAANITES						LIVING LIKE THE CANAANITES			
LOCATION	CANAAN											
TIME	c. 350 YEARS											

*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* © 1993 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.



## Chronological Problems

1. As stated earlier (see under "The Date of the Book"), the book of Judges encompasses a period of approximately 350 years. However, when the total number of years indicated within the book are added up, one comes up with a figure of 410 years (see Appendix A). Several solutions to this problem have been suggested:

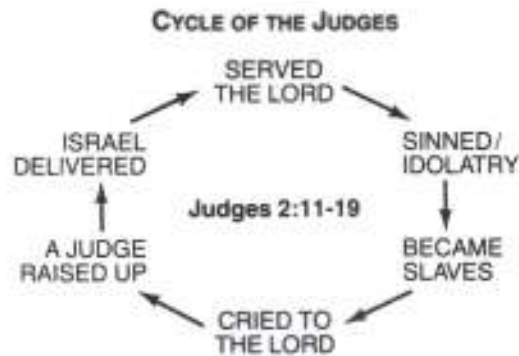
The best solution is the suggestion that some of the periods indicated in the book overlapped. For example, 10:7 seems to indicate that the Ammonite and Philistine oppressions were concurrent (consequently, the judgeships of Jephthah and Samson may have been concurrent). Also, some have suggested that the Philistine oppression and Samson's exploits overlapped, seeing Samson never delivered Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.

Another suggestion is that some of the judgeships (especially the more obscure ones) were localized and, therefore, could have been contemporaneous.

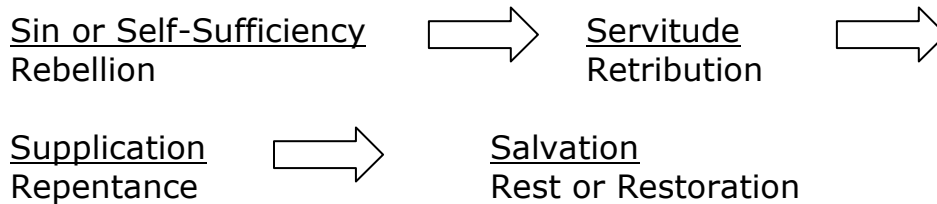
2. 18:30 refers to "the day of the captivity of the land." Some have mistakenly seen this as a reference to either the Assyrian (722 B.C.) or Babylonian (586 B.C.) captivity, thus pushing the date of writing forward several hundred years. The problem is resolved, however, by viewing "the land" not as a reference to the nation as a whole, but to one of the tribes, perhaps Dan (based on the context).

## One Outstanding Feature of the Book

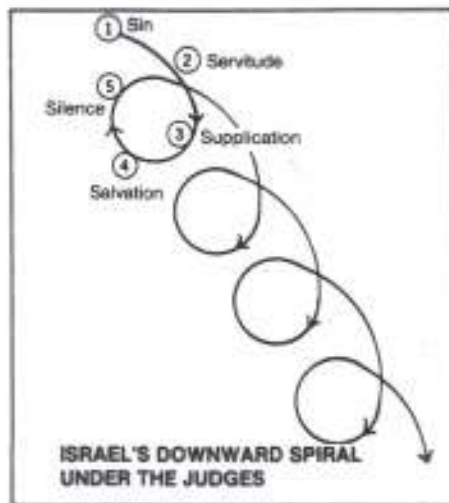
*The "Judges cycle."* The heart of the book of Judges narrates the continual cycle of the failure and subsequent fettering of Israel by its foes, and God's freeing of Israel from its foes. See especially 2:11-23. The following chart, from Benware (p. 89), shows this cycle:



Or to show it another way (adapted from Geisler, p. 104 and Gerald Priest, "Old Testament Historical Books" class notes, p. 45):



A third way to visualize it (cf. 2:19) comes from Lindsey (1:383):



Wiersbe (2:100) describes the cycle with the words: disobedience, discipline, despair, and deliverance.

Block (p. 132) writes: "The rulers raised by God represented stop-gap measures .... Instead of effecting fundamental repairs on this deteriorating dike, they plugged the holes with their fingers. As soon as the finger was removed, the water gushed through with increasing force."

## Appendix A

EVENT	# OF YEARS	REFERENCE
Mesopotamian oppression	8	3:8
Othniel's deliverance and rest	40	3:11
Moabite oppression	18	3:14
Ehud's deliverance and rest	80	3:30
Canaanite oppression	20	4:3
Deborah & Barak's deliverance and rest	40	5:31
Midianite oppression	7	6:1
Gideon's deliverance and rest	40	8:28
Abimelech's rule	3	9:22
Tola as judge	23	10:2
Jair as judge	22	10:3
Ammonite oppression	18	10:8
Jephthah's deliverance and rest	6	12:7
Ibzan as judge	7	12:9
Elon as judge	10	12:11
Abdon as judge	8	12:14
Philistine oppression	40	13:1
Samson's exploits	20	15:20
	410	

# Judges 1:1-3:6

Chapters 1 and 2 (and the first 6 verses of chapter 3) of the book of Judges are introductory, setting the stage for the main section of the book (chapters 3-16).

## Chapter 1

### Verse 1

Some chronological confusion has resulted from the fact that the opening statement of the book seems to imply that the events to follow take place subsequent to the death of Joshua, whereas chapters 1 & 2 seem to describe events leading up to the death of Joshua.<sup>12</sup> A few solutions have been suggested: 1) 1:1a is of no chronological significance; it is but a general statement designed to indicate that the time of the judges was subsequent to Joshua's death (so Cundall, pp. 21 and 51) and 2) 1:1a is of chronological significance; thus, at some point, a regression takes place.<sup>13</sup> In the final analysis, it is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty the precise chronological flow of the introductory chapters.

### Verse 5

"Adoni-bezek" was the leader of Bezek, *adoni* being the Hebrew word for lord.

### Verses 6-7

The cutting off of the thumbs and the big toes was a common practice in such a setting, intended to incapacitate the individual for any future military service and, thus, political leadership. Block (p. 91) suggests that the Israelites should have executed Adoni-bezek instead, in keeping with the "ban" (see comments on 1:17 below).

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<sup>12</sup>For example, 1:10-15 is identical to Joshua 15:13-19 and 2:6-9 is identical to Joshua 24:28-31.

<sup>13</sup>According to Merrill (p. 168), 1:1-8 describe events subsequent to Joshua's death, while 1:9-2:7 describe events prior to Joshua's death. See also Lindsey (pp. 376 and 378) for some possible solutions.

### **Verse 8**

In light of 1:21, the taking of Jerusalem by Judah may have been either temporary or partial. A third option is that the city was taken at that time, but not occupied. This option seems best, as the city was torched at that time, implying that the conquerors were not intending to occupy it.

### **Verse 13**

Grammatically, Othniel could have been either the younger brother (Wood, *Distressing Days*, p. 165 says half-brother) or the nephew of Caleb. Thus, Achsah, the woman Othniel married, was either his niece or his cousin. Lindsey (p. 379) states at this point: "Othniel . . . captured the city and hopefully the heart of Achsah." Othniel would go on to become the first of the judges (3:9-11).

### **Verse 16**

The "city of palm trees" (cf. 3:13) is most likely a reference to Jericho (see Deuteronomy 34:3 and 2 Chronicles 28:15).

### **Verse 17**

The Hebrew verb translated "utterly destroyed" means "to put under the ban" or "to devote to destruction." Thus, they renamed the city "Hormah," which means "total destruction" (Wolf, p. 388). This brings up the whole issue of the "ban," or the utter destruction of one's enemy.<sup>14</sup> God commanded His children to do this to the Canaanites (see Exodus 23:24, Deuteronomy 7:1-6, and 20:10-18), and the Israelites complied early on in the Conquest (see Joshua 6:21, 8:26-28, and 10:28-40). Later on, their failure to do so (see Judges 1:21, 27-33, 2:2, and Psalm 106:34f) caused them problems. Many have questioned the morality of "the ban." However, in light of the fact that God Himself commanded it, its morality cannot be ultimately questioned. Several suggestions have been given as to why God may have required such a drastic measure.<sup>15</sup> At least this much can be

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<sup>14</sup> A recent article on this issue is one by Kyle Dunham, "Yahweh War and *Herem*: The Role of Covenant, Land, and Purity in the Conquest of Canaan," pp. 7-30, in the 2016 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*.

<sup>15</sup> See pp. 28-30 of Younger, pp. 97-98 of Wiersbe, pp. 279-280 of Archer, pp. 99-100 of Geisler, pp. 275-277 of Benware, pp. 38-39 of Cundall, pp. 341-342 of Lindsey, and pp. 246-247 of Wolf. In the opinion of this writer, the best treatment is found in Davis, pp. 48-50.

said: 1) The Canaanites justly deserved such a fate (see Genesis 15:16 and Leviticus 18:25; cf. Judges 1:7). It was God's longsuffering that allowed their evil to go on for so long (cf. 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 3:9); 2) God knew the detrimental impact the Canaanites would (and did) have upon Israel (see Exodus 23:33, 34:12, Numbers 33:55, Deuteronomy 20:18, Joshua 23:13, Judges 2:3b, and Psalm 106:36-38); thus, His edict was in reality an expression of His love for the nation; and 3) We must remember that Israel was a theocracy. In the days of the theocracy, individuals and nations tangibly and more immediately reaped what they sowed. Obedience to the covenant resulted in physical blessing, disobedience in physical cursing.<sup>16</sup>

### **Verses 19b, 21, 27-35**

Significant is the fact that the Israelites did not drive out the inhabitants of the land. As mentioned earlier, their failure to do so caused them untold problems (see Judges 2:3, Exodus 23:32-33, 34:12-16, Numbers 33:55-56, Joshua 23:12-13, and Psalm 106:34-43). Rather than eliminating the Canaanites, the Jews resorted to subjugating them (verses 28, 30, 33, and 35). Saul made a similar mistake years later (see 1 Samuel 15). Cundall (p. 62) insightfully points out a downward progression in verses 27-34.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Verse 1**

The angel of the Lord is equated with God elsewhere in the book (see 6:22 and 13:21-22). Most believe this to be a "Christophany," a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

### **Verse 2**

The bottom line is obedience. Again, consider the story of Saul (see especially 1 Samuel 15:22-23).

### **Verses 4-5**

"Bochim" is Hebrew for weeping. Their repentance was apparently short-lived or perhaps disingenuous (as was that of Esau, who wept, Hebrews

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<sup>16</sup>This also explains the Old Testament phenomenon of the "imprecatory psalm."

12:17).

### **Verse 11**

"Baals" plural indicates that their idolatry was manifold (cf. 2:12, 17, and 19, as well as 2:13, where "Ashtaroth" is a plural). Verse 11 begins a description of the sin cycle that repeated itself throughout the days of the judges (see under "One Outstanding Feature of the Book" in the introductory lesson to the book).

### **Verse 17**

In light of the metaphor Samuel uses in this verse, it is interesting to note that the name, "Baal" means husband. Idolatry is tantamount to spiritual adultery (see also Jeremiah 3:6-9 and Hosea 3:1).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Verse 2**

Notice how God can judge one's sin (2:20-21), yet use that very judgment to benefit the one being judged. How gracious!<sup>17</sup>

### **Verse 6**

Such mixed marriage is exactly what Joshua told them not to do (see Joshua 23:12; cf. Deuteronomy 7:3). The result was what God had warned in Deuteronomy 7:4. Lindsey (p. 384) sees a natural progression in verses 5-7. Block (p. 141) speaks of the same: "...[I]n the pattern of Israelite behavior ... the modern reader should hear a warning for his or her own life: residing with, marrying, serving. Peaceful coexistence with the world leads to cohabitation and alliance with the world, which in turn leads to taking on the religious notions of the world. This is the rule; occasions when the influence is in the reverse direction are the exception." See Proverbs 13:20 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.

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<sup>17</sup>Actually, there are several reasons given in the book as to why God allowed the nation to go into bondage, including punishment (2:20-21), proving (2:22 and 3:4), and preparing (3:2).

### **A Concluding Thought**

"Nowhere else in the sacred record, perhaps, are the disastrous effects of compromise seen so clearly as in this chapter of Israel's history" (Cundall, p. 65; cf. Block, p. 109). In light of this, consider the cost of compromise. Remember, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9).



# Judges 3:7-4:24

Judges 3 (beginning in verse 7) tells of the judgeships of Othniel (verses 8-11; cf. 1:12-13), Ehud (verses 12-30), and Shamgar (verse 31). Judges 4 narrates the joint-judgeship of Deborah and Barak.

## Chapter 3 (continued)

### Verse 10

This is what has been referred to as the "theocratic anointing." The theocratic anointing was the special, Holy Spirit-given ability to lead the theocracy. This anointing was first given to Moses and the Seventy Elders (Numbers 11:17), then to Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9), then to the judges (Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 19, and 15:14), then to Saul (1 Samuel 10:10 and 11:6) and David (1 Samuel 16:13-14), and finally to Christ (Matthew 3:16).<sup>18</sup>

### Verse 15

Interestingly, the Benjamites were known for being left-handed<sup>19</sup> (see also Judges 20:16), as well as ambidextrous (see 1 Chronicles 12:2). It is also interesting to note that, ironically, the name, Benjamin means "son of the right hand."<sup>20</sup> The "present" (KJV) spoken of was most likely a tribute payment of some kind (so NASB, NIV, and ESV).

### Verse 21

As some have said, Ehud preached a "one-point sermon" to Eglon. Davis (p. 108) calls this "a most unusual employment of visual aids."

### Verse 24

To cover one's feet (KJV) was euphemistic for relieving oneself (so NASB, NIV, and ESV; see also 1 Samuel 24:3).

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<sup>18</sup>It is the theocratic anointing that David was afraid of losing in Psalm 51:11.

<sup>19</sup>The Hebrew of verse 15 literally reads "restricted as to his right hand."

<sup>20</sup>Block (p. 169) calls Ehud "the left-handed right-hander."

### **Verse 31**

An oxgoad was a spear-like instrument used for prodding oxen. Wiersbe (2:106) describes it as "a strong pole about eight feet long." Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 177), citing another writer, says it would have been six inches in circumference at its thick end. Wood also says that it would have been made of wood.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Verse 2**

Notice that their oppressors this time were the Canaanites, the natives of the land and those whom the Israelites were supposed to have eliminated (see comments on 1:17). The city of Hazor was utterly destroyed by Joshua during the Conquest (see Joshua 11:1-11). Now, some 170 years later (Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 216), it had been reoccupied by the Canaanites. Both then and now the leader of Hazor was "Jabin." This was probably a dynastic title (akin to "Pharaoh" in Egypt) and, thus, not the same man.

### **Verse 4**

Like Miriam (see Exodus 15:20) before her and Huldah (see 2 Kings 22:14//2 Chronicles 34:22) after her, Deborah was a "prophetess." Additionally, she was a judge. This brings up the whole debate regarding the role of men and women. Evangelical feminists point to Deborah in support of their contention that men and women are equal in both function/work and essence/worth. Several points can be made in response: 1) The author of Judges is merely stating the historical fact of the matter (descriptive). One should not necessarily assume a divine stamp of approval (prescriptive); 2) Male headship is clearly the norm throughout Scripture, being rooted in the created order (see especially 1 Timothy 2:11-13). The case of Deborah is exceptional.<sup>21</sup> "If anyone bring forward, by way of objection, Deborah (judges iv. 4) and others of the same class, of whom we read that they were at one time appointed by the command of God to

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<sup>21</sup>"The period of the judges is an especially precarious foundation for building a vision of God's ideal for leadership. In those days God was not averse to bringing about states of affairs that did not conform to His revealed will in order to achieve some wise purpose" [cf. Judges 14:4] (*Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper & Wayne Grudem, p. 72). See also page 216 of this same work, as well as Block (pp. 193-194).

govern the people, the answer is easy. Extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government, by which he intended that we should be bound" (John Calvin, quoted in John Piper & Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, pp. 258-259); 3) Deborah's leadership was one of the many indicators of the degradation of the time of the judges. It was a reflection of the failure of the men of the day to take charge of the theocracy (see Isaiah 3:12). "...[T]he necessity of women playing a militaristic role, rather than inspiring the hero, was symptomatic of a decline in the quality of male leadership" (Chisholm, p. 72; cf. p. 245). "Because the rule of women was not normal in Israel, her prominence implies a lack of qualified and willing men" (Wolf, p. 404); 4) Statements made within the text itself seem to imply that this arrangement was less than ideal (see verses 6 and 9); 5) Barak, not Deborah, is mentioned in the "Hall of Faith" (see Hebrews 11:32; cf. 1 Samuel 12:11 in the NIV and the ESV); and 6) Even if God allowed women to assume leadership in the political realm (see also the example of Athaliah in 2 Kings 11:3), male leadership in the home (see Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1-6) and in the church (see 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-13) is indisputable.

### **Verse 8**

Barak was not necessarily being a "scaredy-cat." Rather, he wisely desired the presence of the one who was the conduit of divine revelation at the time.

### **Verse 9**

The "woman" referred to is Jael (see verses 17-22).

### **Verse 11**

Though the Kenites were sympathetic to Sisera (see verse 17), they were also sympathetic to the Israelites, a fact of which Sisera was apparently unaware, else he may have had second thoughts about taking refuge in Jael's tent.

### **Verses 18-19**

Jael's hospitality, though somewhat forward by our standards, was commonplace among the peoples of the Ancient Near East.

## **Verse 21**

Sisera's siesta was probably rooted in the fact that, according to Ancient Near Eastern custom, the host was responsible for protecting his guests (see, for example, Psalm 23:5a). Another interesting Ancient Near Eastern tidbit is the fact that it was the women who were responsible for putting up and taking down the tents (Wolf, p. 407; Wiersbe, 2:110). This explains Jael's proficiency with the tent nail and hammer. Like Ehud in 3:21, she preached a "one-point sermon" at this point. Lindsey (p. 389), in a classic case of understatement, calls Jael's deed "an unusual breach of Near-Eastern hospitality." Though severe, Jael's actions were justified in light of God's instructions regarding "the ban" (again, see comments on 1:17). Enemy kings were to be killed (see 1 Samuel 15:9, 33, and 1 Kings 20:42). See also 5:31.<sup>22</sup> Henry (p. 144) writes: "He that thought to destroy Israel with his many iron chariots [see 4:3] is himself destroyed with one iron nail."

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<sup>22</sup>Wolf (p. 380) writes: "Jael's deed reminds us of the attitude found in the imprecatory psalms (cf. 109:6-13), where Israel's enemy is viewed as God's enemy, and Jael's deed becomes the means of glorifying God. Wicked, murdering leaders deserved to die themselves."

# Judges 5-6

Judges 5 is Deborah's song of thanksgiving following the story of the overthrow of the Canaanites in chapter 4. It is the poetic parallel to the prose of chapter 4. Judges 6 begins the story of the judgeship of Gideon.

## Chapter 5

### Verse 1

In response to God's overthrow of the Canaanites, Deborah and Barak break out into one of the great songs recorded in Scripture (see Exodus 15 for another such song). This song is highly poetic (see, for example, verse 27), a fact that is more clearly brought out by some of the more recent English translations. The song was probably composed by Deborah<sup>23</sup>, then incorporated by Samuel into the text of Judges by divine inspiration.

### Verses 20-21

Most interpreters believe that these verses imply a torrential rainstorm<sup>24</sup> sent by God that caused the banks of the Kishon River to overflow, causing the chariots of the Canaanites to get bogged down in the mud. This explains why Sisera fled on foot (see 4:17). The alleged storm is significant, seeing that Baal was considered by its adherents to be the Canaanite storm god. This great victory is referred to in Psalm 83:9. Other occasions when God sovereignly used the weather to defeat His people's enemies include Joshua 10:11 and 1 Samuel 7:10 (cf. Judges 5:4).

## Chapter 6

### Verse 1

The Midianites were related to the Israelites, Midian being one of the sons of

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<sup>23</sup>Several reasons have been suggested in support of this: 1) Deborah's name is mentioned first (analogous to the song of Exodus 15, where Moses' name is mentioned first); 2) Verse 7 is in the first person (however, the Hebrew does allow for the second person here, i.e., "you"); and 3) The song does seem to have a feminine touch (for example, the thoughts of Sisera's mom are considered in verses 28-30).

<sup>24</sup>Interestingly, the name, Barak means "lightning" (Webb, p. 190).

Abraham through Keturah (see Genesis 25:1-2).

### **Verse 3**

The Amalekites were related to the Israelites, Amalek being a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12 and 16), the son of Isaac. The Amalekites were to have already been eliminated by the Israelites (Deuteronomy 25:17-19; cf. 1 Samuel 15:3).

### **Verse 11**

In light of verse 14, the "angel of the LORD" is probably another Christophany (as in 2:1-5). The typical winepress was underground, being a pit hewn out of rocky ground (Wolf, p. 419), whereas threshing floors were located above ground in order to allow the wind to blow away the chaff. That Gideon felt it necessary to go underground to thresh the wheat is indicative of the severity of the oppression the Midianites were inflicting upon the Jews.

### **Verse 13**

See also Psalm 44:1-3 and 9-16.

### **Verses 14-16**

Like Moses (see Exodus 3:11 and 4:10) before him and Saul (see 1 Samuel 9:21) and Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:6) after him, Gideon was acutely aware of his inadequacy for the task at hand (verse 15). Gideon's family was not financially deficient (see verse 27), but likely militarily (Davis, p. 114; so NIV and ESV). God's commission (verse 14; cf. Exodus 3:10 and Matthew 28:19-20a) and companionship (verses 12 and 16; cf. Exodus 3:12 and Matthew 28:20b) can more than overcome our shortcomings.

### **Verses 22-23**

Having seen God face-to-face, Gideon rightly feared for his life (see Genesis 32:30, Exodus 33:20, and Judges 13:22).

### **Verse 25**

The "Asherah" was an integral part of Baal worship. The Asherah pole (so NIV) was a wooden pillar representing the sacred tree (Cundall, p. 107). In

the Law, the Jews were commanded to destroy all such idolatrous artifacts (see Exodus 34:13; see also Deuteronomy 7:5, 12:3, and Judges 2:2). The fact that a bull was offered is significant, seeing the bull was also an integral part of Baal worship. It is interesting to note that the name, Gideon means "hacker" (Younger, p. 173). So, by hacking down his father's idolatrous altar, Gideon was living up to his name. Since it was such idolatry that led to Israel's oppression (see 5:8), the idolatry had to be dealt with before they could be delivered.

### **Verse 30**

How far the nation had backslid! How ironic that the Law commanded the stoning of one guilty of idolatry (see Deuteronomy 13:6-11), yet the men of the city wanted to execute Gideon for ridding the land of idolatry.

### **Verse 34**

The "theocratic anointing" (see comments on 3:10) is given to Gideon.

### **Verses 37-38**

This was not as extraordinary as one might think, as the early morning sun would dry the surrounding ground before drying out the fleece (Davis, p. 115). Why did Gideon use this particular test? Perhaps because Baal was considered by its adherents to be the god of nature. This was, therefore, perhaps Gideon's way of being reassured that Jehovah, not Baal, was the true God of nature. Interestingly, one of Baal's alleged "daughters" was named "Dew" (Chisholm, p. 279).

### **Verses 39-40**

This was exceptional!

### For Discussion

"The character and the actions of Gideon are not always subject to easy analysis as is evident from the various views regarding this man. Some consider him a weak, insecure man and therefore lacking real faith. Others consider him a great champion of faith" (Davis, p. 113).

*Was Gideon's use of the fleece a good thing or a bad thing? Should we resort to such a tactic today?*

In the opinion of this writer, Gideon's use of the fleece was a bad thing in light of God's clearly revealed will in the matter (see verses 14, 16, 36b, and 37b). Consider also Matthew 12:38-39 and Luke 1:18-20. The fact that God granted Gideon's request does not imply divine approval of Gideon's actions; God may have simply been "humoring" Gideon.<sup>25</sup> Should the modern believer resort to such a tactic in order to discern God's will? No.<sup>26</sup> See pages 221-224 of *Decision Making & the Will of God* by Garry Friesen in this regard.

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<sup>25</sup>"God condescended to Gideon's weak faith" (Lindsey, p. 393). "Despite Gideon's lack of faith . . . God in mercy . . . condescended to answer him" (Wolf, p. 424). "The Lord very graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon's request" (Cundall, p. 109). "... [T]he Lord was gracious to accommodate Himself to Gideon's unbelief" (Wiersbe, 2:116). "This is an outstanding example of God's gracious patience with a troubled child" (Wood, *Distressing Days*, p. 214).

<sup>26</sup>"Forget about fleeces. If you've never used them, don't start. If you have, then quit" (John White, quoted in Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, p. 226). "Gideon's fleece test is hardly exemplary. It certainly doesn't show him at his best, and the common practice of taking it as a model for seeking and obtaining divine guidance is highly questionable, to say the least" (Webb, p. 239). "To ask God for a sign when God has already revealed his will reflects an immature faith ...." (Younger, pp. 182-183) and (p. 192) "Those who use this passage as a means of discerning God's will are simply misapplying Scripture." "'Putting out the fleece' is not a biblical method for determining the will of God. Rather, it's an approach used by people, like Gideon, who lack the faith to trust God to do what He said He would do" and "Who are we to tell God what conditions He must meet, especially when He has already spoken to us in His Word? 'Putting out the fleece' is not only an evidence of our unbelief, but it's also an evidence of our pride. God has to do what I tell Him to do before I'll do what He tells me to do!" (Wiersbe, 2:118; emphasis his).



# Judges 7-9

Judges 7-9 concludes the judgeship of Gideon (chapters 7 & 8) and narrates the renegade reign of his son, Abimelech (chapter 9).

## Chapter 7

### Verse 1

Four miles separated the two armies (Wolf, p. 424). The Midianite army numbered 135,000 (see 8:10). Thus, Gideon's initial army (of 32,000, verse 3) was outnumbered more than 4-1.

### Verse 3<sup>27</sup>

This "out" was prescribed in the Law (see Deuteronomy 20:8), designed to prevent such fearfulness from adversely affecting the entire fighting force. More than 2 out of every 3 (22,000 of the 32,000) took Gideon up on his offer. Gideon's army was now outnumbered more than 13-1 (135,000-10,000).

### Verses 5-6

What was the meaning and significance of this test? In regards to the meaning, Cundall (p. 110) states: "Those who were retained were those who lapped as a dog laps, a description that has perplexed many. Obviously it cannot mean that the 300 used their tongues to lap up the water from the spring, since this would involve falling upon their knees like the others and, in any case, the use of the hand [in verse 6] is specifically indicated. The best explanation appears to be that the 300 used their hands as a dog uses its tongue to scoop up the water while they remained on their feet." As to the significance of this test, most interpreters agree that the test was designed to reveal those who were most alert. "Of the entire host, only 300 were cautious enough in the face of surprise enemy attack to drink from their hands with upraised heads. The rest immersed their faces in the water and demonstrated their unreliability in emergencies" (Merrill, p. 174).

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<sup>27</sup>It is interesting to note that this incident took place at the spring of Harod (verse 1), and Harod means "trembling."

**Verse 7**

This second reduction was 97% (from 10,000 to 300). Less than 1% (from 32,000 to 300) of Gideon's original army now remained. His army was now outnumbered 450-1 (135,000 to 300). Hence, the need for Gideon's unusual battle plan.

**Verse 10**

Purah was likely Gideon's armor bearer.

**Verse 11**

"Strengthening the hands" was a Hebrew idiom for encouragement (see also 1 Samuel 23:16).

**Verses 13-15**

These men were probably Midianite sentries. In the Old Testament, dreams were a means of divine revelation (see, for example, the stories of Joseph and Daniel). Thus, Gideon's euphoria. According to Wiersbe (2:122; so also Wood, *Distressing Days*, p. 232), barley was a grain primarily used by the poor, so the loaf of barley bread (which many interpreters understand as also being moldy) perhaps depicted the weakness of Gideon's army.

**Verse 16**

The dividing of an army into three companies was a common military stratagem (see also Judges 9:43, 1 Samuel 11:11, 13:17, and 2 Samuel 18:2). The "trumpets" were ram horns. Commenting on the weapons Gideon selected, Cundall (p. 112) states: "Never did an army advance with such a motley assortment of equipment."

**Verses 19-20**

The middle watch was from midnight to 4 a.m. (Block, p. 282), making the beginning of it just after midnight, thus making the attack a surprise one. To add to the element of surprise, Gideon's army generated a lot of noise (blowing of trumpets, breaking of pitchers, and war cries) and light (torches).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>According to Wolf (p. 427), the fact that each of the 300 men had a trumpet (7:16) gave the impression of a much larger army, as it was customary for only the high-ranking officers to

### **Verses 21-22**

Gideon's strategy<sup>29</sup> of fright rather than fight, leading to flight, worked to perfection, producing much commotion and causing the Midianites to think that the enemy had already penetrated the camp. Thus, they mistook one another for the enemy. Block (p. 283) calls this "psychological warfare at its best." This is a good illustration of the words of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14:6b.

### **Verse 23**

All three of the tribes mentioned were part of Gideon's original army (6:35). Thus, they were able to get in on the action after all.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Verses 1-3**

The Ephraimites were angry with Gideon for not seeking their assistance earlier.<sup>30</sup> Notice how tactfully Gideon responds. This is a good example of Proverbs 15:1 in action.

### **Verse 4**

Gideon's army had been pursuing them for some 40 miles at this point (Wolf, p. 430).

### **Verse 6**

The mention of the "hands" of Zebah and Zalmunna is likely due to the Ancient Near Eastern practice of cutting off the hands of those killed in battle to facilitate the body count (Wolf, p. 430).

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sound the trumpets.

<sup>29</sup>This is a reminder that the performance of God's promises does not necessarily preclude human planning. However, God's work is ultimate (see 7:22). It is first the sword of the Lord and secondarily the sword of Gideon (7:18 and 20).

<sup>30</sup>Since Joshua was an Ephraimite, no doubt this tribe possessed a great deal of military pride.

**Verse 16**

Wiersbe (2:127) describes this as "beating them with thorny branches." He also (2:172) says that some think that Gideon made the men lie down on the ground, covered them with thorny branches, then drove a threshing sledge over them. Younger (p. 198) describes it as a flogging with desert thorns and briars.

**Verse 21**

Gideon's execution of the two kings of Midian was justifiable both in light of "the ban" (see comments on 1:17 and 4:21) and in light of the law concerning "the avenger of blood" (see Deuteronomy 19:6 and 12).

**Verse 23**

Gideon refuses the invitation to set up the monarchy, citing the need to continue the "pure theocracy." Interestingly, the Law made provision for the monarchy (see Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Apparently, God knew that man's depravity would preclude the perpetuation of a pure theocracy. Though Gideon refused the people's offer to become king, many have pointed out that he nevertheless acted like one (e.g., evidently having a harem, 8:30-31), including naming one of his sons, Abimelech (8:31), meaning "my father is a king" (Wierbse, 2:129).

**Verse 27**

The ephod, which Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 227) describes as "a sort of extravagant apron," was a revelatory device employed by the priests (see 1 Samuel 23:9-12). Though Gideon refused the kingship, his actions seem to indicate an illegitimate desire for the priesthood. Whatever his motive, his actions backfired big time.

**Verse 28**

Chisholm (p. 293) points out the irony of the words, "they did not lift up their heads anymore" with what happened to the two generals of Midian in 7:25.

### **Verses 30-31**

Gideon's downfall<sup>31</sup> continued, as evidenced by his plunge into polygamy. His adulterous relationship with a Canaanite woman of Shechem (resulting in the birth of his son, Abimelech) caused the nation much trouble later on (see chapter 9). "The hatred and murder that plagued Gideon's family are characteristic of OT polygamous situations" (Wolf, p. 435).

### **Verse 33**

The name, "Baal-berith" literally means "lord of the covenant." How sad that the nation had turned from the true God of the covenant to an impostor.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Verse 6**

Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 234) rightly calls Abimelech a "renegade king." Abimelech's action was contrary to the expressed desire of his father, Gideon (see 8:23).

### **Verses 7-21**

Jotham, the lone surviving son of Gideon (besides Abimelech), cleverly denounces the kingship of his half-brother with a fable<sup>32</sup> that likens Abimelech to a thorn bush (NASB "bramble"). The shadow produced by the thorn bush was negligible (verse fifteen). Thus, Cundall (p. 129) rightly calls the thorn bush's invitation "absurd." Jotham's words in verses fifteen and twenty proved to be prophetic.

### **Verse 24**

This is confirmation of such texts as Numbers 32:23b and Galatians 6:7.

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<sup>31</sup>Wiersbe (2:113; emphasis his) says that Gideon "started his career as somewhat of a *coward* (Judg. 6), then became a *conqueror* (7:1-8:21), and ended his career as a *compromiser* (8:22-35)." Speaking of Gideon's rise and fall, Cundall (p. 122) rightly states: "Perhaps it is easier to honour God in some courageous action in the limelight of a time of national emergency than it is to honour Him consistently in the ordinary, everyday life, which requires a different kind of courage."

<sup>32</sup>Block (p. 320) calls it a "literary cartoon."

### **Verses 26-29**

The insurrectionist becomes a victim of insurrection.

### **Verse 45**

The Ancient Near Eastern custom of spreading salt on a city was to symbolize its perpetual desolation (Cundall, p. 134). See Deuteronomy 29:23, Psalm 107:34, Jeremiah 17:6, and Zephaniah 2:9. Abimelech's effort was ineffective, for we later read of Shechem in 1 Kings 12:1.

### **Verse 48**

Ironically, "Shechem" is Hebrew for "shoulder."

### **Verse 49**

Jotham's prediction (see 9:15 and 20) is literally fulfilled.

### **Verse 53**

The millstone piece that the woman dropped was undoubtedly the "upper millstone," which was about 2-3 inches thick and 18 inches in diameter (Cundall, p. 135). Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 250) says it was 10-14 inches long and five pounds or more. Many interpreters point out that Abimelech, who had killed his brothers on a stone (9:5 and 18), was killed with a stone. In discussing this incident, Chisholm (p. 328) makes reference to the modern roadside sign, "Watch out for falling rocks!"

### **Verse 54**

It was considered a disgrace for a man to be killed by a woman. The scene is reminiscent of Saul in 1 Samuel 31:3. Even though Abimelech's armor bearer put Abimelech to death, Jewish lore gave the credit to this woman (see 2 Samuel 11:21).

### **Verse 56**

The fratricide of 9:5 did not go unpunished. See also 9:23-24. David Gooding (cited in Chisholm, p. 323) comments: "Things have seriously deteriorated when the bondage from which Israel has to be delivered in this fashion is no longer bondage to some foreign power but a bondage to one of Israel's own number ...."

# Judges 10-12

Judges 10-12 tells of the judgeships of Tola (10:1-2), Jair (10:3-5), Jephthah (10:6-12:7), Ibzan (12:8-10), Elon (12:11-12), and Abdon (12:13-15). Clearly, this section is dominated by the judgeship of Jephthah, whom Chisholm (p. 74) calls "one of the most tragic figures on the pages of Scripture" and whom Davis (p. 121) calls "one of the most interesting of the judges and, we might add, one of the more problematic."

## Chapter 10

### Verses 1-5

Most interpreters think that the judgeships of Tola and Jair were contemporaneous. This helps account for the first of the two chronological problems discussed in the Introductory Lesson on Judges. Based on verse 4, it appears that Jair followed the polygamous example of Gideon (8:30), as did Ibzan (12:9) and Abdon (12:14) after him.

### Verses 6-8

The cycle resumes. This time the oppressors are the Ammonites. The Ammonites were related to the Israelites, Ammon being a descendant of Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:38). It is interesting to note that the two nations God raised up to oppress Israel (verse 7) were two of the nations whose gods Israel served (verse 6). Based upon verse 7, most interpreters believe that the Ammonite and Philistine oppressions were contemporaneous, making the judgeships of Jephthah and Samson contemporaneous. Again, this helps account for the aforementioned chronological problem. Such oppression was in keeping with the curses for not keeping the covenant (compare verse 8 with Deuteronomy 28:33).

### Verse 10

Israel recognizes her sin in terms of commission (serving Baalim) and omission (forsaking God). In regards to the second, see James 4:17.

### Verses 13-14

God's patience with the nation was obviously running out (cf. Deuteronomy 32:36-38). Block (p. 347) describes this as God saying: "You made your

bed, now sleep in it!" "The cycle of deliverance followed by forgetfulness, ingratitude and apostasy had occurred too often for a facile overlooking of their sin" (Cundall, p. 139). Besides trying to make a point, God was also testing their sincerity (much like Christ did with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:25-28).

### **Verse 16**

The Israelites appear to prove their sincerity, bringing fruits in keeping with repentance (as Matthew 3:8 says).

## **Chapter 11**

### **Verses 1-3**

Jephthah's initial reluctance to deliver the nation (see verses 7 and 9) is explained by this parenthesis.

### **Verses 12-28**

In an effort to avoid war with the Ammonites, Jephthah nobly tries diplomacy (verse 12). The Ammonites, however, accuse Israel of occupying territory that rightfully belongs to them (verse 13). Sound familiar? Jephthah convincingly refutes this claim (verses 14-27), but to no avail (verse 28).

### **Verse 29**

Jephthah receives the theocratic anointing (see comments on 3:10).

### **Verses 30-31**

Jephthah's vow, which Henry (p. 196) calls "dark, and much in the clouds," is one of the most tantalizing tales in all of Scripture. Some castigate Jephthah for making it, calling it "rash." "Though intended as an act of devotion, it showed a lack of faith in God's enabling power" (Wolf, p. 455; see also Cundall, p. 146 and Chisholm, p. 74). Chisholm (p. 352) describes it as slipping a bribe under the table (cf. Webb, p. 329). Younger (p. 262) describes it as "manipulative" and "making a deal with the deity." Could Jephthah have legitimately offered as a burnt offering whatever came out of



his house?<sup>33</sup> What if it was an unclean animal, which was prohibited from being so sacrificed?

### **Verses 34-40**

The fact that Jephthah's daughter came out to meet her father "with tambourines and with dancing" (verse 34) was customary after victory in battle (cf. Exodus 15:19-21 and 1 Samuel 18:6-7). In light of the words of Jephthah in verse 35 (ESV: "I have opened my mouth") and of his daughter in verse 36 (ESV: "you have opened your mouth"), it is interesting to note that the name, Jephthah means "he opens." Interpreters are divided as to the outcome of Jephthah's vow. Several believe that Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> If so, this is an indication of the paganization of Jephthah. Others believe that Jephthah dedicated his daughter to a life of tabernacle service.<sup>35</sup> For a good overview of both positions, see pages 124-128 of Davis. Support for the second position includes the following: 1) Human sacrifice was clearly forbidden in the Law (see Leviticus 18:21, 20:1-5, Deuteronomy 12:31, and 18:9-10; cf. Jeremiah 32:35). It is hard to believe that any Israelite would make a vow that would force him to so violently violate the Law (however, do remember this was the days of the judges); 2) Jephthah's daughter wept because of her virginity (verses 37-38). Assuming her dedication to tabernacle service included a vow of celibacy, this practice makes perfectly good sense. If she was to be sacrificed, this practice seems less meaningful. As Merrill (p. 177) states: "If she were about to be sacrificed, it hardly seems she would bewail her unmarried state, nor would she spend her last two months away from her father whom she dearly loved. Rather, she would bemoan the brevity of her life"; 3) Verse 39 tells us that following the fulfillment of the vow,

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<sup>33</sup>While the initial assumption might be that whatever came out of Jephthah's house had to be a human being, and not an animal, Younger (p. 263) suggests otherwise: "It may seem odd to Western readers for sheep or cattle to come out of one's house. But the typical 'four-room house' of this period contained a room that housed animals."

<sup>34</sup>Proponents of this view include Henry, Davis, Benware, Wolf, Cundall, Younger, Chisholm, Webb, and Block. The Jewish historian, Josephus (cited in Davis, p. 125) also espoused this view: Jephthah "sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering; offering such an oblation as was neither conformable to the law, nor acceptable to God." "The text taken in its simplest meaning appears to lead us to that conclusion" (Davis, p. 128).

<sup>35</sup>Proponents of this view include Wood, Merrill, Wiersbe, and Archer. This would have been somewhat analogous to what Hannah did with her son, Samuel (1 Samuel 1).

Jephthah's daughter "had no relations with a man." Had she been put to death, this statement would appear to be meaningless. "This would be a very pointless and inane remark if she had been put to death. But it has perfect relevance if she was devoted to the service of Jehovah at the door of the tabernacle the rest of her life" (Archer, p. 285); 4) The Hebrew conjunction, *waw* in verse 31 can be translated either as a conjunctive ("and") or as a disjunctive ("or").<sup>36</sup> If the second, Jephthah left himself an "out"; 5) When he made the vow, Jephthah must have surely realized the likelihood that one of his family members would be the first to greet him upon his return; 6) The Hebrew verb translated "to lament" by the KJV and the ESV in verse 40 could also be translated "to talk to" (much as it is in its only other Old Testament occurrence, in Judges 5:11); and 7) Jephthah's consternation in verse 35 is not necessarily due to despair over his daughter's fatal fate, but to the fact that her celibacy meant the end of his line (see also verse 34). Davis (p. 125) explains: "[Jephthah] would dedicate to God for tabernacle service one member of his household. The fact that it turned out to be his daughter was tragic for him. Because she was his only child; he could never expect to see grandchildren; and he would seldom, if ever, see her again." Whatever the outcome, Jephthah's daughter is to be commended for her submissive response (see verse 36), much like Isaac in Genesis 22.

## Chapter 12

### Verse 1

As before (see 8:1-3), the Ephraimites felt slighted and let it be known. However, whereas Gideon humored the Ephraimites, Jephthah did not appreciate their protests (see verses 2f).

### Verses 5-6

The Gileadites put the Ephraimites to a linguistic test through means of a password. Apparently, the Ephraimites had an "isogloss" (a linguistic phenomenon characteristic of a given area)<sup>37</sup> that caused them to pronounce the Hebrew consonant *shin* (an "sh" sound) like the *samech* (an "s"

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<sup>36</sup>Davis (pp. 125-126) offers this rendering: "Whatever comes from the doors of my home to meet me as I return shall be devoted to the Lord's service if it is human, or if it is a clean animal, I will offer it up as a whole burnt offering."

<sup>37</sup>Another prominent biblical example of this phenomenon is Peter in Matthew 26:73.

sound).<sup>38</sup> A whopping 42,000 Ephraimites failed the test and lost their lives (this passage is a favorite of Hebrew teachers when stressing the importance of proper pronunciation).

### **Verses 8-15**

Like the judgeships of Tola and Jair (see 10:1-5), most interpreters believe that the judgeships of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon overlapped. Once again, this helps account for the chronological problem alluded to earlier. To bring out the contemporary significance of what is said in verse 14, that the male members of Abdon's household rode on donkeys, Block (p. 340), citing Beverly Beem, says that "to describe each son as riding on his own donkey is like saying each son was given his own Porsche."

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<sup>38</sup>Similarly, Wolf (p. 458) points out that during WW 2, the Nazis identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced *kookoorooza*, the word for corn. Younger (p. 274) comments: "The high and mighty Ephraimites cannot 'speak the Queen's English,' and so fail the Shibboleth test. Instead of saying 'God save the Queen!' they say 'God shave the Queen!'"

# Judges 13-15

Judges 13-15 narrates the judgeship of Samson (chapter 16 concludes the account). Of all the judges, Samson was undoubtedly the most famous. As Cundall (pp. 154-155) states: "In a group of unique individuals, Samson was in a category all of his own."

## Chapter 13

### Verse 1

The cycle resumes one final time. This time the oppressors are the Philistines, who occupied the coastal plain of Palestine. You may recall that Shamgar, an earlier judge, delivered Israel from the Philistines (see 3:31).

### For Discussion

Concerning the influence of the Philistines upon Israel, Cundall (p. 154) states: "The Philistine menace was the greater because it was so insidious in some of its phases. The direct and cruel aggression of the Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites and Ammonites, etc. was missing, to be replaced by infiltration through intermarriage and trade. Their rule over people does not at all appear onerous at this early stage and the men of Judah . . . seem to have resented the exploits of Samson and to have accepted the Philistine yoke with docility [see 15:11]."

*What lessons can be learned from the subtle approach employed by the Philistines?*

Be on guard because evil is not always obvious. For example, Satan does not visibly appear with a pitchfork in hand (see 2 Corinthians 11:14).

### Verse 3

"The angel of the LORD" is once again a Christophany (see comments on 2:1).

### **Verse 5**

The child to be born to Manoah and his wife was to be extraordinary. A Nazarite (from the Hebrew adjective, *nazir*, meaning dedicated, separated, or consecrated) was one who was especially set apart for the Lord. The "Nazarite vow" (see Numbers 6:1-21) involved three stipulations:

1) Abstinence from the fruit of the vine<sup>39</sup> (Numbers 6:3-4; cf. Luke 1:15); 2) No razor to the head (Numbers 6:5; cf. 1 Samuel 1:11); and 3) No contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:6). Tragically, Samson eventually violated all three stipulations. Samson's failure to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines is hinted at by the word "begin" at the end of verse five. Israel was not finally delivered from Philistine oppression until the reign of David (see 2 Samuel 5:17-25).

### **Verse 8**

Manaoh's entreaty has been variously understood. On the one hand are those who question it. Wood (*Distressing Days*, p. 308) calls it "improper" and adds: "... Manoah was out of order in making the request, for all he needed to know had already been stated to his wife." Younger (p. 289) says: "Obviously, he is unwilling to trust the Lord's word already revealed through his wife's testimony." Wolf (p. 463) writes: "The fact that the angel did not directly answer Manaoh's question [see verses 12-14] may imply that his request for a confirming visit showed lack of faith [much like Gideon]." <sup>40</sup> On the other hand are those who commend it. Davis (p. 134) calls it "most impressive and instructive." In the same vein, Cundall (p. 158) calls Manaoh's attitude one "which all prospective parents would do well to emulate." Wiersbe (2:145) says: "We can't help but be impressed with the devotion of this husband and wife to each other and to the Lord."

### **Verse 18**

This is reminiscent of Jacob's encounter with a wrestling opponent in Genesis 32 (see especially verse 29). The true identity of the visitor of Manoah and his wife is hinted at in this verse. The Hebrew adjective translated "secret" (KJV), "incomprehensible" (NASB note), or "beyond understanding" (NIV) can also be translated "wonderful" (see KJV note, NASB, ESV, and NIV note). See Psalm 139:6. Its participial form is found in verse nineteen.

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<sup>39</sup>Interestingly, during her pregnancy Manoah's wife also had to observe this stipulation (see 13:4, 7, and 14).

<sup>40</sup>Notice, however, that Manoah says in 13:12: "**when** your words come to pass."

More importantly, its noun form is found in Isaiah 9:6, a clear reference to deity. Apparently, Manaoh could not take a hint.

### **Verses 21-22**

Manaoh finally gets the hint. Like Gideon before him (see Judges 6:22-23), Manaoh feared for his life, in light of Exodus 33:20 (cf. Isaiah 6:5).

### **Verse 25**

The theocratic anointing comes upon Samson (cf. 14:6, 19, and 15:14).

## **Chapter 14**

### **Verse 2**

Samson's demand (rather than expression of desire) was a clear affront to his parent's authority, as it was their prerogative to select a wife for him. "In Israelite society the father was the head of the family and as such exercised control over all of its members, including the choice of wives for his sons" (Cundall, p. 162).

### **Verse 3**

Samson's parents rightly protested his taste, seeing this gal was a Philistine.<sup>41</sup> God forbade His people to marry the ungodly inhabitants of the surrounding nations (see Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4; cf. the New Testament counterpart in 2 Corinthians 6:14f), a prohibition that Abraham (see Genesis 24:3-4) and Isaac (see Genesis 28:1-2) honored, but which Esau (see Genesis 26:34-35), the nation as a whole (see Judges 3:6), and now Samson violated. The Philistines were called "uncircumcised" (cf. 15:18 and 1 Samuel 14:6, 17:26, 36, 31:4//1 Chronicles 10:4, and 2 Samuel 1:20) partly because they did not practice physical circumcision. Their physical uncircumcision typified their spiritual uncircumcision (see Jeremiah 9:26 and Acts 7:51). In spite of his parents' protests, Samson persisted, saying regarding this Philistine woman: "She looks good to me." The Hebrew is: "She is right in my eyes." This is in keeping with the theme of the book of Judges, everyone doing what was right in his or her own eyes (17:6 and 21:25).

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<sup>41</sup>"The saga of Samson begins and ends the same way, with Samson displaying a fatal weakness for Philistine women" (Wolf, p. 465).

### **For Discussion**

*What practical lessons can we learn from these opening verses of chapter 14 (notice also verse 7), particularly in regards to dating/courtship?*

Look beyond the surface (1 Samuel 16:7 and John 7:24).

Seek parental input and approval when it comes to a marriage partner (Ephesians 6:2).

Continuing contact creates compromise (Proverbs 13:20, 1 Corinthians 5:6, and 15:33)

*Does this passage apply to the issue of interracial dating today?*

No. The issue is not race, but religion (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; cf. Exodus 34:16).

### **Verse 4**

The "He" is probably a reference to God (so also NIV). This was "of the LORD" (part of His permissive will) only in the sense that God in His sovereignty used Samson's sinful choice (as He does every sinful choice made by man) to accomplish His perfect will (cf. Genesis 50:20).<sup>42</sup> THIS DOES NOT, HOWEVER, EXCUSE THE DECISION!

### **Verses 8-9**

Samson may have violated his Nazarite vow by contacting a dead body (though this was the dead body of an animal, not of a human; another instance of his doing so may be in 15:15). This may explain why he did not tell his parents where the honey came from (cf. verse 6).

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<sup>42</sup>Lindsey (p. 405) states: "This does not mean that breaking the Law was desired by God but that Samson's decision was overruled by God for His own purpose and glory." Davis (p. 135) adds: "The parents of Samson did not realize that even this evil act on the part of their son was included in, and would be utilized by, God in His perfect plan. The writer of the text looked back over the history of Samson and saw in his movements, and even in his weaknesses, the hand of God."

### **Verse 10**

Samson may have violated his Nazarite vow once again. The word translated "feast" is the Hebrew *misteh*, which literally means "a place of drinking" (Wolf, p. 468). Wiersbe (2:174) calls it "a drinking party." Block (p. 431) calls it a "drinking bout" and "stag party." "[Samson's] presence at the carousal of 14:10,17 hardly suggests abstinence from strong drink" (Cundall, p. 157). See also Esther 1:5f, which speaks of the same kind of event (using the same Hebrew word), an event that clearly included drinking (see Esther 1:7 and 10). Might Samson have also drunk such drink at the vineyards of Timnah (verse 5)?

### **Verses 12-14**

Was the riddle Samson's way of ridiculing his Nazarite vow? Was he flaunting the fact that he had violated it by contacting the lion?

### **Verse 17**

An ominous development (see Judges 16:15-17).

### **Verse 20**

Samson's bride is given to his best man. This action was perfectly legitimate, since the marriage had yet to be consummated.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Verse 1**

R. G. Boling (cited in Younger, p. 305) describes Samson's gift of a young goat as "the ancient counterpart of the box of chocolates."

### **Verse 6**

How ironic that her giving-in to their earlier threat (see 14:15) set in motion a chain of events that eventually led to their threat being carried out. As Block (p. 433) says it: "... [T]he woman draws the solution to the riddle out of Samson to prevent her and her family being burned, but in the end she succumbs to the very catastrophe she tried to avoid precisely because she got the answer from him (15:6)."



**Verse 7**

One of Samson's many character flaws was his vengeance (see also 15:11). The Philistines were likewise guilty of this (see 15:10). Though he pledged to cease, Samson exercised his vengeance one final time (see 16:28).

**Verse 8**

"Hip and thigh" (KJV and ESV) is a Hebrew idiom, the derivation of which is disputed. The idea is completely, entirely, or severely (Davis, p. 137; NASB: "ruthlessly"; NIV: "viciously"). R. G. Boling (cited in Younger, p. 307) explains it as Samson leaving them "a tangle of legs and thighs." Block (p. 442) describes it as "presumably a wrestling idiom for total victory."

**Verse 9**

The name, "Lehi" is Hebrew for "jawbone," so named because of the exploit to follow (see verse fifteen).

**Verse 15**

Notice how Samson differs from all the other judges in that he is a "one-man show" (accordingly, Younger, p. 307 calls him "the lone-ranger-judge"). Whereas the nation joined the other judges in helping them repel the enemy, Samson received no such support. "Samson emerged to wage a one-man war against the Philistines . . . nowhere does he have one single soldier at his side, let alone an army" (Cundall, p. 154).

**Verse 17**

"Ramath-lehi" is Hebrew for "Jawbone Hill."

**Verse 19**

The KJV's "the jaw" is potentially misleading, implying that the water came out of the jawbone. Remember, however, that the Hebrew word for "jawbone" is "Lehi" (see comments on 15:9), the name of a place (thus, the NASB, ESV, and NIV translate it the hollow place in Lehi). Furthermore, according to verse 17, Samson had already discarded the jawbone. "En-hakkore" is Hebrew for "Caller's Spring."

# Judges 16-18

Judges 16 concludes the judgeship of Samson, detailing his tragic demise. Judges 17-18 is the first of two appendices that conclude the book, illustrating the depths to which the nation had descended.

## Chapter 16

### Verse 1

It may be that many years had passed from the conclusion of chapter 15 to the start of chapter 16, with chapters 14 and 15 occurring in the early years of Samson's 20-year judgeship (15:20 and 16:31) and chapter 16 occurring at the end of it. Gaza was a Philistine city (the name is still found today in the narrow area of land know as the "Gaza Strip"). Samson had a particular affinity for the ungodly, Philistine women (see also 14:1-3 and 16:4). His relationship with this woman was in clear violation of Leviticus 19:29.

### Verse 3

Apparently, Samson went unnoticed and/or unhindered. This was certainly an extraordinary feat, as, according to William Barrick (cited in Chisholm, p. 416), these gates would have weighed between 5,350 and 10,700 pounds. Did Samson carry the gates the nearly 40 miles and several thousand feet uphill from Gaza to Hebron? Not necessarily. The Hebrew literally reads: "before the face of Hebron," an expression that means "facing" or "toward" (Wolf, p. 474; NIV: "to the top of the hill that faces Hebron").

### Verse 4

Like Solomon after him (see 1 Kings 11:1-11), Samson disobediently pursued the ungodly women of the surrounding nations, women who turned his heart away from God. Ironically, the name, "Sorek" means "choice vine" (Wolf, p. 475). As you may recall, one of the stipulations of Samson's Nazarite vow was abstinence from the fruit of the vine (see comments on 13:5).

### Verse 5

There were five "lords of the Philistines," one for each of the five cities that comprised the Philistine "Pentapolis" (literally: "five cities"). Thus, the

payoff amounted to 5,500 pieces of silver. To get an idea of just how much this was, this was 550 times the yearly wage given to the Levite in 17:10. Using an annual wage of \$25,000, Younger (p. 316) estimates this payout to be equivalent to 15 million dollars today. That the Philistines did not know the secret of Samson's strength suggests that Samson was not abnormally muscular.

### **Verses 7-8**

The "seven fresh cords" would have been "seven tendons from an animal freshly slaughtered" (Block, p. 457) and, thus, perhaps a violation of his Nazarite vow's prohibition against contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:6). Other possible instances of Samson violating this vow may be found in 14:6, 8-9, 19, and 15:15-17.

### **Verse 11**

Apparently, the Philistines were unaware that this method had failed once already (see 15:13-14).

### **Verse 13**

Notice how perilously close Samson comes to revealing the secret of his strength. As Block (p. 458) rightly remarks: "Now he is really playing with fire."

### **Verse 15**

Like Samson's fiancée before her (see 14:16), Delilah questions the sincerity of Samson's love for her.<sup>43</sup> This once again proved to be an effective tactic.

### **Verse 16**

Again borrowing a page from the book of Samson's fiancée (see 14:17), Delilah badgered Samson until he broke. Sadly, Samson did not learn from previous experience.

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<sup>43</sup>"He might have challenged her on the same grounds, for her own love was anything but clear" (Wolf, p. 476). Ward Andersen ("Samson," in the November 1979 issue of *Biblical Viewpoint*, p. 127) writes: "[Delilah] asked him a question that God might well have been silently asking him for years: 'How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me?' (v. 15)."

### **Verse 17**

Was Samson's hair the real key to his strength? Most interpreters think not. "It was not the mere loss of hair that brought Samson into humiliation; it was his disobedience to God and the complete violation of the Nazarite vow" (Davis, p. 140). "This certainly does not suggest that the hair in itself possessed any supernatural powers, but only that the uncut hair represented the bond which tied him to God as a Nazarite. Cutting the hair would signify physically the rupture of that bond" (Merrill, pp. 179-180). Cundall (p. 178) adds: "The hair itself was not the source of Samson's unique strength. This lay in his separation to the Lord, of which the unshorn locks were the symbol."

### **Verse 20**

Like Saul after him (see 1 Samuel 16:14), the theocratic anointing is taken from Samson due to sin. What happens to him is not unlike what Azariah warned of in 2 Chronicles 15:2. Commenting on this 20<sup>th</sup> verse, Cundall (p. 178) states that there is "possibly no sadder verse in the Old Testament." "Rather than break his relationship with Delilah, [Samson] allowed it to break him" (Wolf, p. 476).

### **Verse 21**

It is interesting to note that part of God's judgment upon Samson was the loss of his eyesight, as it was his "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16) that occasioned his sin of marrying the woman of Timnath (see 14:1-2) and his sin of having physical relations with the woman of Gaza (see 16:1). Henry (p. 220) makes the observation that it was Samson's spiritual blindness (seen especially in verse 20) that led to his physical blindness (verse 21). How ironic that Samson is imprisoned in Gaza, the very city he had so easily escaped from earlier (see 16:1-3). To add to Samson's humiliation, the Philistines make him grind at the mill, a woman's task (Exodus 11:5 and Job 31:10). Wiersbe (2:154) summarizes this verse with the words: blinding, binding, and grinding.

### **Verse 22**

One wonders why the Philistines let Samson's hair begin to grow again. Wiersbe (2:174) suggests that perhaps the Philistines wanted Samson to regain his strength so they could put it to good use for their benefit and that allowing Samson to regain his strength was no longer a significant threat due to his blindness.

### **Verses 23-24**

Sadly, Samson's sin gave occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme God's name (2 Samuel 12:14). God will let the Philistines know what He thinks of their blasphemy in a few moments (see verse 30; cf. 1 Samuel 5:1f, where at a later time in Israel's history, Dagon would once again fall before Yahweh). "The Philistines attributed Samson's downfall directly to Dagon (v. 24), and it was this theological error that led to the destruction of Dagon's temple" (Wolf, p. 479).

### **Verse 30**

Block (p. 469) quips that Samson's performance (verse 25) was so good that it "brought down the house" (verse 30). At least 1,030 died, seeing Samson killed at least that many during his lifetime (see 14:19 and 15:15). In this chapter, the Judges cycle is seen in the life of Samson: sin (verses 1-20), servitude (verses 21-27), supplication (verse 28), and (to some degree) salvation (verses 29-30).

#### ***The Samson Problem***

Wiersbe (2:142) calls Samson "a deliverer who couldn't deliver himself, a conqueror who couldn't conquer himself, a strong man who didn't know when he was weak." How can Samson's many moral failures be reconciled with the fact that he was a vessel of God (and included in the "Hebrews Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11:32)? Wolf (p. 381) responds by stating: "The fact that God worked through Samson need not denote approval of his lifestyle. In God's sovereignty the Holy Spirit came on men for particular tasks, and this enduing was not necessarily proportionate to one's spirituality." Cundall (p. 44) adds: "It is apparent that God may make a man a vehicle of His revelation, or a channel of power, quite apart from the quality of life of the individual concerned. There is an inscrutable element in this fact of God's choice which is not completely open to man's understanding. From the human standpoint we may question how God could equip and employ a man like Samson. But the fact is that He did, and while the details of Samson's life may cause embarrassment to the modern reader, the value of the part which he played in the history of Israel is evident. It is equally clear that, in this period, the coming of God's Spirit upon a man is not to be equated with the fuller teaching and revelation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament period. A charismatic anointing did not necessarily produce holiness of life."

## Chapter 17

As mentioned previously, chapters 17-18 are an appendix. Chronologically, the events of these two chapters likely took place early on in the judges period. There are several reasons for this: 1) Chapter 18 tells of the migration of the Danites to the north, and 5:17 seems to indicate that this migration was already in progress; 2) According to 18:27-29, the name of the city of Laish (or Leshem) was changed to Dan. Joshua 19:47 indicates that this had already taken place; and 3) If "Manasseh" in 18:30 should read "Moses," then this is early on because Jonathan was the grandson of Moses (see Exodus 2:21-22). Davis (p. 97) thus places chapters 17-21 between chapters 2 and 3.

### Verse 1

The name, "Micah" means "who is as Jehovah?" (Davis, p. 143). This is ironic in light of Micah's behavior in these chapters (chapters 17 and 18), including his idolatry (see verse 5).<sup>44</sup> As Younger (p. 338) writes: "Disregard for parental well-being, thief, homemade idolatrous objects of pilfered silver, private shrines, personal priests, self-made religious paraphernalia—these are hardly the proper trappings of one whose name means 'Who is like Yahweh?'" Micah certainly did not live up to his name.

### Verse 2

If the calculation of Younger is correct (see comments on 16:5), then this amount is staggering, being approximately 3 million dollars today.

### Verses 3-4

This was in direct violation of the Law (see Exodus 20:4//Deuteronomy 5:8, Exodus 20:23, and Deuteronomy 27:15). There was a time in Israel's prior history (see Exodus 32:25f) when such an act resulted in capital punishment. Once again, the decadence of the days of the judges is seen.

### Verse 5

Micah was guilty of setting up a shrine in a place God had not prescribed (see Deuteronomy 12:5). Like Gideon before him (see 8:27), Micah was

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<sup>44</sup>As Webb (p. 451) writes: "Micah, whose name means 'Who is like Yahweh?' creates a 'house of gods.'"

also guilty of illegitimately making himself an ephod. To add to his sin, Micah made one of his sons a priest, another direct violation of the Law, as only the sons of Aaron were to be priests (Exodus 29:9 and Numbers 3:5-10).

### **Verse 6**

This is the key verse of the entire book (see also 21:25). The events of these chapters (Micah doing what was right in his own eyes in chapter 17, the Danites doing what was right in their own eyes in chapter 18, etc.) are indicative of the anarchic attitude that prevailed during this time in the nation's history, as everyone was wrongly doing what was right in his or her own eyes (cf. Deuteronomy 12:8), thereby doing what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord (cf. 2:11, 3:7, 12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, and 13:1). At this point, more than one interpreter invokes the Frank Sinatra song, "I Did It My Way."

### **Verse 7**

It is interesting to note that Bethlehem was not one of the 48 Levitical cities assigned by Moses (see Numbers 35:1-8 and Joshua 21:8f).

### **Verses 10-12**

This is what Merrill (p. 183) calls a "family chaplaincy." Wiersbe (2:158) likewise calls this Levite a "private chaplain." Chisholm (p. 454) calls him a "rogue priest." The fact that a Levite, who was not qualified to be a priest, not being a descendant of Aaron (see comments on 17:5), would stoop to such a level is yet a further indicator of the moral decay of the nation in the days of the judges (Davis, p. 145). Micah's consecration of this priest (verse 12) was akin to ordaining him.

## **Chapter 18**

### **Verse 1**

Sadly, the Danites had failed to possess their allotted portion of land (see 1:34). Consequently, they wrongly sought out another place. As Wolf (p. 483) states: "Their desire to move revealed a lack of faith in the Lord who had allotted to them their original territory." They, too, are doing what is right in their own sight.

**Verse 3**

The Danites realized that there was something wrong with this arrangement.

**Verse 6**

Was this truly a divine injunction? Should not the Levite have advised them to return to their original allotment and conquer it?

**Verse 7**

The city of Laish was farther north than any of the land allotted to the twelve tribes (Wolf, p. 484), a further indication that the Danites were acting improperly.

**Verse 10**

Has He? See comments on verses 1, 6, and 7.

**Verse 24**

Most find it quite humorous that the worshipper has to rescue his gods, rather than vice versa. The fact that Micah's gods could be carried away is reminiscent of Isaiah 46:7. Micah's reaction is indicative of the extent of his idolatry. This is a case in point of the proverbial "what goes around comes around," as the one who stole (see 17:2) is stolen from.

**Verse 30**

Most interpreters believe that "Manasseh" should read "Moses." If this is so, once again (see comments on 17:5 and 17:10-12) the same problem is brought to light, as the priests had to be descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother. See the Introductory Lesson ("Chronological Problems," point 2) for a discussion of "the captivity of the land."

Commenting on chapters 17-18, Wood (p. 213) states: "The episode involved several factors contrary to the Law. Micah erred in making his own sanctuary, when Shiloh alone was to be recognized. The Levite was wrong for not remaining in his assigned city and for engaging in illegal priestly activity with a private party. The Danites were in error for moving from their allotted territory, for establishing their own private sanctuary, and for stealing the property of another to do it." Younger (pp. 344-345) likewise asks: "What kind of son steals from his own mother? What kind of mother



leads her son into idolatry? What kind of a Levite serves at an idolatrous shrine and then happily moves to serve at a bigger idolatrous shrine? And what kind of people plunder their own people while on their way to annihilate a peaceful city in a region outside the boundaries of their God-ordained allotment?" The days of the judges truly were the "dark days" of the nation's history.

# Judges 19-21

Judges 19-21 is the second (the other is chapters 17-18) of two appendices that conclude the book, illustrating the depths to which the nation had descended.<sup>45</sup> The tale told in these chapters is "one of the most shocking episodes of Israel's history" (Wolf, p. 489) and "one of the darkest pictures of Israelite life in the entire Old Testament" (Block, p. 521). As with the first appendix (chapters 17-18), most interpreters believe that the events of these chapters took place early on in the judges period.<sup>46</sup>

## Chapter 19

### Verse 1

A concubine was what Wolf (p. 489) calls a "secondary wife." According to Wiersbe (2:162), Old Testament men who had concubines included Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, Saul, David, and Solomon. Once again (see comments on 17:7) we have a Levite not living in one of the prescribed Levitical cities.

### Verse 2

Some versions (such as the Septuagint, an ancient translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek; so also Chisholm, p. 467, Younger, p. 352, and Block, p. 516) read that the concubine left out of anger, not because of infidelity. Lending credence to this option is the fact that the concubine was not put to death, the penalty for an adulteress (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22).

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<sup>45</sup> "... [I]n these closing pages of Judges you find reports of wife abuse, blatant homosexuality, gang rape leading to murder, injustice, brother killing brother, and even kidnapping" (Wiersbe, 2:161).

<sup>46</sup> One reason for this belief is that Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was still on the scene (see 20:28). Phinehas appears earlier in Numbers 25 and Joshua 22. Another suggestion is that some amount of time must have passed since the atrocity committed by the men of Gibeah, else Saul, a native of Gibeah (1 Samuel 10:26), would never have been made king.

### **Verses 12-13**

The Levite refused to lodge overnight in Jerusalem (or Jebus) because it was under the control of the Jebusites (see also 1:21). He probably thought it would be safer to lodge in one of the Israeli-controlled cities to the north, either Gibeah (another 4 miles away) or Ramah (another 6 miles away). Little did he know how faulty his assessment of Gibeah would prove to be.

### **Verse 15**

The failure of the locals to put these folks up for the night was indicative of the city's spiritual condition. Block (p. 531) calls it a "social malignancy." "The absence of hospitality on the part of the Benjamites should be regarded as an outward sign of apostasy, for in the Old Testament a godly man, among other things, was one who extended hospitality to those in need" (Davis, p. 148; see Job 31:32). Cundall (p. 195) adds: "Such a breach of etiquette was an indictment of the men of Gibeah and an ominous warning of what was to come." Block (p. 530) writes: "The last clause of v. 15 would have been shocking anywhere in the ancient Near East."

### **Verse 22**

The designation, "worthless fellows" (literally: "sons of Belial") is a very pejorative one. Literally it means "sons of no profit" or "sons of worthlessness" (Davis, p. 149). To get a flavor of this expression, see 1 Samuel 2:12 and 2 Corinthians 6:15. The ensuing events are reminiscent of Genesis 19, showing how an Israeli town (Gibeah) had become another Sodom.

### **Verses 24-25**

The literal rendering of what the Ephraimite says in verse 24 is telling (literally: "do to them what is good in your eyes"), indicative of the depravity of the day (see 17:6 and 21:25). That the Ephraimite would even think of such a thing (verse 24), and the Levite do it (verse 25), is unimaginable. Such, however, was the decadence of the day. In light of this callous act, "one can easily see why the concubine had left her husband in the first place" (Wolf, p. 493). This tragedy became infamous in the nation's history (see Hosea 9:9 and 10:9).

### **Verses 29-30**

Commenting on the Levite's seemingly inexplicable behavior, Merrill (p. 183) states: "Sometimes a person or nation can be awakened to reality only by something so bizarre or shocking that it is impossible to overlook." It may be that the Levite was trying to make a point, namely, that anyone who did not avenge this atrocity would suffer a similar fate (cf. 1 Samuel 11:7). "When the limbs of the concubine had been sent throughout Israel, the implication was that any city that did not respond to deal with this atrocity would itself be subject to death" (Wolf, p. 503). Indeed, the city of Jabesh-gilead did not join the rest of the nation in retaliating against the Benjamites and, thus, did suffer such a fate (see 21:10).

## **Chapter 20**

### **Verse 1**

"From Dan [farthest point north] to Beersheba [farthest point south]" is an instance of the literary device known as merism.<sup>47</sup>

### **Verse 2**

This was the largest army ever assembled by the nation (Wolf, p. 496).

### **Verse 16**

See comments on 3:15 regarding the left-handedness of the Benjamites (cf. 1 Chronicles 12:2). According to Philip King and Lawrence Stager (cited in Chisholm, p. 501), such a slung stone could travel anywhere from 99.2 to 148.8 mph! The Hebrew verb translated "miss" is one of the words for sin in the Old Testament (to miss the mark).

### **Verse 29**

The ambush was a common military stratagem (see Joshua 8:9-29 and Judges 9:34-45). Notice how the promise of victory on God's part (end of verse 28) did not preclude proper planning on their part (verse

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<sup>47</sup>A merism expresses the whole of something by listing its opposite extremes (i.e., from the one extreme to the other and, by implication, everything in-between). A modern example is "head to toe."

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### **Verse 35**

The third time was a charm for the Israelites in their war with the Benjamites. See p. 205 of Cundall for a layout of the third and decisive battle.

### **Verse 45**

In keeping with the proverb, "what goes around comes around," the Hebrew verb translated "caught" in this verse is the same verb translated "seized" in 19:25.

### **Verses 46-47**

In these verses, only 25,600 of the original army of 26,700 (see 20:15) are accounted for (actually the figure is 25,700, as 20:35 and 47 indicate). The 1,000 unaccounted for probably perished during the first two battles (Wolf, p. 501).

### **Verse 48**

Though this seems like a case of overkill in every sense of the word, the Israelites were following the dictates of the Law (see Deuteronomy 13:12-16).

## **Chapter 21**

### **Verse 7**

When the dust had settled from their rout of the Benjamites, the nation began to come to grips with a practical problem: How would the tribe of Benjamin survive long-term (see 21:3 and 6), given the fact that the other tribes had promised under oath not to let their daughters marry the remaining 600 Benjamite men (see also 21:1 and 18)?

### **Verse 14**

One solution to the problem was the taking of women left over from the destruction of the city of Jabesh-Gilead for not joining in the battle against the Benjamites (see 21:5 and 8). The taking of the virgins of Jabesh-Gilead (see 21:12) was in keeping with Numbers 31:17-18.

**Verse 23**

The first solution to the problem was an incomplete one. Therefore, a further solution had to be proposed. Henry (p. 251) calls this event "a public ball." Note how the Israelites rationalized this act (21:22). In a classic case of understatement, Wolf (p. 505) calls this a "highly unorthodox method of obtaining a wife." Henry (p. 251) adds: "The case was extraordinary, and may by no means be drawn into a precedent."<sup>48</sup>

**Verse 25**

The book concludes by repeating the key verse (see also 17:6). This is a fitting summation of the entire period.

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<sup>48</sup>Webb (p. 507) considers this incident a case of rape. Younger (p. 384) and Block (p. 583) consider both incidents in chapter 21 a case of rape.