

## THE CONQUEST & JUDGES: PART TWO

*Recommended Reading:* Judges Chapters 1-3, 6-7, 17-21 with the Book of Ruth  
*Corresponds to Workbook pp 73-78*

The Book of Joshua paints the triumphant picture of God's people moving into the Promised Land with victory after victory being celebrated, starting with the tumbling walls of Jericho. The twelve tribes divide up the territory and move into their respective areas, but the Conquest is not quite complete. Pagan altars are allowed to remain in "the high places," where child sacrifice and rampant prostitution took place, and not all of the Canaanites were pushed out. As your grandparents may have taught you, "A job half-done is a job undone!" The next generations will deal with the fall-out of the disobedience and sloth of the preceding generations. The curtain now draws open for the intense and often violent drama of the Book of Judges.

Before launching into the study of Judges, let's look at both its structure and the definition of a "judge." Also, be aware that the contents of this book are deeply disturbing, and we need to know how to explain its meaning (in context and with Jesus as the definitive interpretive key) to atheists or seekers.

### Structure of the Book of Judges

The context of Judges is summarized in the prologue (1:1-3:6), which in turn can be divided into two sections. This prologue looks at how the tribes occupied their territory, contrasting the greater success of the southern tribes (Judah and Simeon) to their northern counterparts in actually disposing of pagan altars and people. Judges 2:10-15 notes that the faith was not handed onto the children, with disastrous results. This sets the stage for the **Age of Relativism** that ruled chaotic Israel for the next 350 years (circa 1380-1050 BC), summarized as: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

The central narrative (Judges 3:7-16:31) depicts the rise of twelve unlikely deliverers: six 'Major Judges' (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson) and six 'Minor Judges' (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Hillel). The people seem locked in a **cycle of sin**, servitude, supplication to God, salvation in the form of Judges who lead the people to military victory over their neighboring oppressors, and then a lapse of faithfulness once conditions improve.

The epilogue, which consists of the last three chapters, is actually not located in chronological order but occurred closer to the beginning to the period of Judges. The events therein make the stark conclusion that this was indeed a dark period in Jewish history, as without God's commandments, the society plunges into violent anarchy. The people of this era lacked a human king (unlike their neighbors), but they clearly acted as though they had no divine king either!

## Judges' Place in Salvation History

Judges occupies an important watershed moment in Salvation History. Prior to Judges, the people looked to Moses, who is mentioned sixty times in Joshua and was instrumental in setting up the Mosaic covenant. However, in Judges, Moses is mentioned only five times, and his commandments only once (Judges 3:4). A seismic shift occurred over these three plus centuries, as Israel begins to yearn for a king, and there arises the anticipation of the coming Davidic covenant. For the rest of the Old Testament—including the historical books, the psalms, the wisdom literature, and the prophets—Israel's past will remain firmly rooted in Moses, but its future hopes will lie entirely with David. This king will inaugurate a New Covenant (2 Samuel 7:1-17; Psalm 89:19-37) that will not replace but, rather, assimilate and even transform the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>1</sup>

**To summarize:** *Israel enters the Promised Land but fails to completely occupy it. The pagans permitted to live among them will prove to be a thorn in their side and a constant source of temptation through forbidden intermarriage and idolatry. The perpetual cycle of sin, servitude, supplication, salvation, and relapse will be hard to escape. God's discipline is experienced as painful and sometimes even severe, but it is never undeserved (Hebrews 12:5-11; Proverbs 3:11-12).*

### How Should We Interpret the Shocking Narratives in the Book of Judges?

"Many readers are understandably disturbed by the narrative of Judges, especially readers who may have been raised on a selective exposure to Scripture that emphasized the Biblical characters as moral examples to help guide Christian behavior. In Judges, however, there are very few characters who provide consistent moral example and many gut-wrenching examples of violence, cruelty, and liturgical and sexual abuse.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the narratives of Judges are intended by the sacred author to be *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. In other words, he describes how things actually were during the time of the judges, not how they ought to have been. A picture of how things 'ought to be' is provided in the following book, Ruth. In Judges, however, the reader is meant to be repulsed by the narratives, shocked by how bad things get when 'everyone does what is right in his own eyes' (Judges 21:25), an ancient description of moral **relativism** (disbelief in any absolute moral standards) and its close cousin **subjectivism** (each personal subject is his own arbiter of truth). Inasmuch as moral relativism and subjectivism are once again rampant in world culture, we see contemporary manifestations of some of the same horrific behavior found in the book of Judges.

In summary, **the horror of the book of Judges is the ugly face of rampant relativism.**"<sup>2</sup>  
This book has sobering relevance for our own time.

### Who Were the Judges?

The book of Judges depicts the adventures of twelve heroes who served as military leaders (not primarily legislative ones) sent by God to rescue the Jews from internal and

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<sup>1</sup> Bergsma, John. *A Catholic Interpretation to the Bible: The Old Testament*. © 2018 by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, pp 319, 328, 338.

<sup>2</sup> Bergsma. *A Catholic Interpretation of the Bible: The Old Testament*, pp 334.

external enemies in Canaan. The word “judge” in Hebrew is “*shophetim*,” which literally means “to defend, to deliver, to govern.” Therefore, these leaders primarily delivered the people from their Canaanite enemies and were called by God (3:9, 15; 6:8) and even filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (3:10). Not all were military leaders—i.e., Deborah was a prophetess and functioned more as a spiritual director.

-Only one, Othniel, nephew of Caleb, was of noble descent.

-Most were unlikely leaders, showing that God picks whom He will, particularly the weakest, to serve as His most effective servants.

-These judges exercised rule over only one or more tribes, never over the entire nation, between the time of Joshua’s death and the establishment of the monarchy under David.

-This diverse dozen delivered Israel from oppression during the period that can best be characterized as a “repeating cycle of disobedience, punishment, repentance, and restoration. The people would *disobey* the Lord, usually by lapsing into Canaanite paganism; experience *punishment* from God in the form of defeat and subjugation by their enemies; cry out to the Lord in *repentance*; and be *restored* to peace through the ministry of a ‘judge’ sent by God. After a time of peace and plenty, the people would forget God, fall back into disobedience, and repeat the cycle again.”<sup>3</sup>

### Quick Summary: The Twelve Judges<sup>4</sup>

| Name of Judge           | Length of Rule | Oppressors    | Duration of Oppression |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. Othniel (3:7-11)     | 40 years       | Mesopotamians | 8 years                |
| 2. Ehud (3:12-30)       | 80 years       | Moabites      | 18 years               |
| 3. Shamgar (3:31)       |                |               |                        |
| 4. Deborah (4:1-5:31)   | 40 years       | Canaanites    | 20 years               |
| 5. Gideon (6:1-8:32)    | 40 years       | Midianites    | 7 years                |
| 6. Tola (10:1-2)        | 23 years       | Abimelech     | 3 years                |
| 7. Jair (10:3-5)        | 22 years       |               |                        |
| 8. Jephthah (10:6-12:7) | 6 years        | Ammonites     | 18 years               |
| 9. Ibzan (12:8-10)      | 7 years        |               |                        |

<sup>3</sup> Bergsma, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*, pp 319.

<sup>4</sup> *Community Bible Study: Servants of God: Judges*. Chapter “Judges: God Chosen Deliverers: Judges 1-3.” © 1998 by Community Bible Study, Reston, VA, pp 1.

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|--------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|
| 10. Elon (12:11-12)      | 10 years |             |          |
| 11. Abdon (12:13-15)     | 8 years  |             |          |
| 12. Samson (13:11-16:31) | 20 years | Philistines | 14 years |

-Two additional judges are described in 1 Samuel (Eli and Samuel). Their influence was over the entire nation just before Saul became the reluctant first king (1 Samuel 10:1) and then the young shepherd boy David's was anointed. (We shall study these players in the divine drama in the next lesson). Chronologically, Samson died just before Samuel was commissioned as Israel's Judge.

**Judges 1**

The tribe of Judah leads the assault into Canaan, but not all the tribes take total control of their regions.

**Judges 2**

An Angel of the Lord chides Israel for their disobedience (2:2-3) and predicts what? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This prophecy will ominously play out in the next nineteen chapters of Judges.

What is a major omission that has caused much of Israel's troubles as this book picks up the story line, in Judges 2:10? \_\_\_\_\_

What did Moses urgently command in Deuteronomy 6:7? \_\_\_\_\_

How consistently and thoroughly are you teaching your children/grandchildren and the youth within reach of your influence the tenets of faith? What will you do TODAY to teach \_\_\_\_\_ (name of a child, godchild, teen, etc)? \_\_\_\_\_

Remember: If you do not aggressively teach your children, the surrounding, pagan culture of America will certainly win the hearts and minds of them by the time they graduate middle or high school! Like Israel, you are engaged in a battle of holiness vs evil influences. By not diligently instructing, you are abdicating a vital responsibility necessary for their welfare.

How do you "abandon God" (2:12), by giving something or someone in your life God's place? What part of secular culture do you find particularly difficult to resist? 1 Peter 5:8-9?

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Did the Jews listen to their judges (2:16-17)? How is Israel's plight described in Judges 2:17? \_\_\_\_\_

Note that "the metaphor of the harlot can be said to be the controlling image of Judges, summing up its theme of covenant infidelity. Two of the judges even seem to have been born of

harlots, another breaks his sacred vows to pursue harlots, and Judges ends with a tragic civil war ignited by the brutal treatment of a harlot.”<sup>5</sup>

What uneasy situation results (2:22-23)? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Summary: Life Application

Could there be “any sweeter sound in God’s ears than when His people cry out to Him, ‘Help, Lord!’? Of all the things He’s trying to teach us, of all the places He’s trying to take us, the loving goal of His long-suffering discipline in our lives is to bring us to the point of recognizing our desperate need of Him.

The book of Judges illustrates this truth through a series of oft-repeated cycles in Israel’s history. Over and over, Israel’s descent into disobedience was followed by God’s discipline, which was eventually followed by the people’s desperation, then finally their deliverance. The intervening period between disobedience and desperation lasted as long as seven years (Judges 6:1), eight years (3:8), eighteen years (3:14), twenty years (4:3), even forty years (13:1).

During these lengthy stretches of time, Israel’s sin resulted in their experiencing great misery, generally at the hands of pagan, neighboring nations. They likely did everything they could imagine to get these Canaanite enemies off their backs and out of their lives. But when they finally cried out to God, they found Him to be merciful—He responded to their humility by coming to their rescue and restoring them to a place of blessing and rest.

The Lord knows exactly what it takes—and how long it takes—to get our attention when our hearts stray from Him, wandering pridefully away from His presence and provision. And when we reach the end of ourselves and cry out to Him for mercy, we realize that His discipline actually demonstrates the depth of His love and commitment to us. His severe mercies bring us home.

Are you experiencing God’s discipline for some area of disobedience? Have you come to the point of desperation yet, or are you still clinging to your own ways of thinking or certain sins?”<sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

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Humble yourself and cry out to Him. He will hear and deliver you.

### Judges 3

What was the defining characteristic of the first judge mentioned, Othniel (3:10)? See Zephaniah 4:6 also. \_\_\_\_\_

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Days had again turned bleak for the Jews, as the Moabites had not only taken control of the city of Jericho but gone even further to enslave the Hebrews. What man of the tribe of Benjamin did God tap on the shoulder to deliver His people? What unusual physical characteristic did he have (which would play a part in the drama to follow)? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>5</sup> Gray, Tim with Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 129.

<sup>6</sup> De Moss, Nancy Leigh. *The Quiet Place* (devotional). © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN. Sept 23.

*Note:* Most men of the time would have hidden a dagger or sword on their left thigh and then used their right hand to draw it forth quickly. Because he was left-handed, he would have hidden his sword on his right thigh and passed any ancient security clearance.

What does Ehud say to obese King Eglon in 3:20? \_\_\_\_\_

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“In Old Testament times and in the era of the apostles, God regularly used prophets to communicate to people—sometimes to Israel, sometimes to other individuals or nations. Occasionally, these prophets brought messages of hope, but often they carried messages of doom. Announcements of judgment were more common because the people needed them. When the nation of Moab oppressed Israel not long after they had settled in the land, God sent Moab’s king a message, but one without words. Ehud’s assassination of Moab’s king delivered a message of judgment. Messages from God are not always pleasant, and treating His Word as though it always should be pleasant ignores the fullness of God’s character and the depths of our own sin. We often need a hard word or startling event to push us back on track, and Ehud’s act of judgment upon Moab’s king does just that.”<sup>7</sup>

What does Ehud confidently tell his countrymen in 3:28 **prior to** the battle, that tells you he had full confidence in God’s power? \_\_\_\_\_

Note the verb tense of the verb!

#### **Judges 4**

This chapter surprisingly introduces a woman as the next judge. Deborah works in tandem with the military commander Barak to deliver the people from Jabin, the king of Canaan, who was equipped with 900 iron chariots. Another woman, Jael, kills the commander of Jabin’s army, Sisera, with a tent peg through the head. (Don’t read Judges before you go to bed!) Deborah and Barak’s song of victory is recorded in Judges 5. Let’s examine this saga a bit closer.

Moses forewarned the Jews that what would happen if they chose to disobey God, in Deuteronomy 28:15, 25, 30-34? \_\_\_\_\_

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To conclude this warning with the words, “The sights you see will drive you mad,” are ominous! Sure enough, when King Jabin, a Canaanite king in the northern sector, established his headquarters on Hazor, a mount overlooking the flat countryside below, about ten miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee on the main trade route from Egypt to Mesopotamia,<sup>8</sup> he took particular pleasure in harshly treating the Jews. The Hebrew word (*‘lachats’*) that describes his treatment literally means “with crushing cruelty.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Swindoll, Chuck. *Insight’s Bible Application Guide: Joshua-Esther*. © 2013 by Word Publishing, Dallas, TX, pp 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Barber, Wayne. *Following God: Life Principles from the Women of the Bible*. (c) 1994 by AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, pp 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Community Bible Study: Servants of God: Judges. Lesson 9: Deborah and Barak: Judges 4-5*. ©1998 by Community Bible Study, Reston, Va., pp 4.

The bleakness of the situation is painted in greater detail in Judges 5, where we learn that the highways were completely deserted because it was simply too dangerous to travel (5:6), and if necessary, the people went far out of their way to avoid the dangerous roads. Judges 5:7 states that no one dared to live beyond the fortified walls, so the peasantry ceased (with farming). Most disconcerting was the military fact that not a sword existed for every 40,000 Jews (5:8), meaning that they were defenseless in dangerous terrain---particularly when compared to King Jabin's 900 iron chariots. The military disadvantage was depressing.

This went on for two decades. As the people cried out in torment to the Lord, a team of two, a judge and military commander, stepped forward to bring deliverance and peace: Deborah and Barak.

First, Deborah stands forth as a woman who strongly believed in the power of God to deliver, without a flicker of doubt. She understood that the battle is not ours, but the Lord's (2 Chronicles 20:15). (Barak the commander did not share this deep confidence).

In those days, God's toughest battle was not in overcoming the armies of Jabin with his mighty chariots. His toughest battle was with wandering Israel! What had happened *again* (4:1)---and notice the word "*again*"! \_\_\_\_\_

It took Israel 20 years to be oppressed before they collectively turned to God in desperation.

How intense must the pressure get before you cry out to God? \_\_\_\_\_

How have you seen Israel's sin cycle play out in your own life? \_\_\_\_\_

When have you looked at your overwhelming life situation (like looking into the face of 900 chariots without even one sword!) and then turned to God and discovered the truth of Zechariah 4:6? \_\_\_\_\_

Deborah had an ear tuned to God's voice, as evidenced by what action and message in Judges 4:6-7? \_\_\_\_\_

Barak appreciates the fact that Deborah is in direct communication with God, and shows his humility in declaring that he shall not move unless she (who conveys God's word) directs him. What a team! She's not a military strategist, but a prophetess. He cannot prophesy, but he can lead a group of unarmed, outnumbered men courageously into battle---if he is convinced God is at the helm. Together, obeying God, they gain a shocking victory--- but let's take it one step at a time!

What other fact does Deborah prophesy to make it clear to Barak that it is not by military strength, but by the power of God, that victory will come (4:9)? \_\_\_\_\_

God tells Deborah to tell Barak (no, this is not telephone tag!) to take 10,000 men from two tribes to the top of Mt Tabor and wait. Remember they have NO weapons. King Jabin's military commander Sisera is encamped below, with 900 iron chariots and armed charioteers.

What plan does God have (4:7)? What clues are given in the later victory song in 5:4 that tell how Sisera's chariots become useless? \_\_\_\_\_

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"Have you ever watched a movie that had really good sound effects? You can just feel the sound vibrating all around you. As we examine the text in Judges 4, imagine Israel's battle with Sisera displayed on the big screen, with modern sound effects. This cinematic aid will help you get a better grasp of the miracle God performed on behalf of the children of Israel. Imagine the sounds of the horses and chariots rolling out—all 900 of them! The chariots begin to be mobilized, and they start heading over that plain of Jezreel over to Mount Tabor. There is excitement in the camp! God had drawn Sisera into His trap. We can see what Sisera could not see—God had just set him up for defeat. In prideful arrogance Sisera was so convinced that Israel did not stand a chance against him, that he moved his army out into the open in a very vulnerable position on the riverbed. What he could not see was that the weather was about to change!

Now, you see Deborah and Barak working together. Here was Barak—a warrior without weapons, but a warrior nevertheless. He was ready, waiting on Deborah to tell him when to move because she heard from God. He didn't dare move until God told him to move. Judges 4:14 tells us, "And Deborah said to Barak, 'Arise! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the Lord has gone out before you.'" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with his ten thousand men to face an army ten times as great. I love that picture! I can just feel the thrill inside of Barak, and I can just hear him saying, 'God is going to do something today! God better do something because we don't have any weapons, and the enemy is out there in that valley!' Deborah faithfully delivered the message from God, and Barak stepped out in obedient faith. Aren't you glad God had Deborah there? I know Barak was glad. Through her, God let Barak know what to do and when to do it.

The riverbeds in the Middle East are called 'wadis.' They are usually dried up, but during winter rains are particularly heavy, and flash flooding can occur because of the rocky terrain. The River Kishon borders the plain of Jezreel. Here were those chariots—those big, heavy, iron chariots going out on the plain of Jezreel—and all of a sudden it was like a dam broke! Suddenly the water came and spilled over the banks and poured around those chariots. Of course, the sandy ground just became mud, and the chariots went from being an asset to being a huge liability. Here come ten thousand Israelites shouting, 'Glory, God is on our side!'

God had the timing down to the season, to the weather, to everything! Barak knew he needed Deborah to reveal God's timing, and Barak wasn't going to budge until she said, 'It is time.'

Once Sisera's chariots got bogged down, evidently his troops threw their swords away and fled. Where did Barak's men get swords in 4:16? Remember they had had none! These were the very weapons of the people in the iron chariots. They got so confused and so panic stricken when they realized that their source of power was gone, that the swords went by the wayside as they fled, and the Israelites were right behind them picking up those swords and killing them just as fast as they could! Not a single Canaanite was left. Now before you start heaping accolades upon Barak, make sure you notice the first statement of 4:15- 'And THE LORD routed Sisera...' God did this.

Your job in any crisis is not ‘do all you can do and then worry that you didn’t do enough.’ Your job is to simply walk with God and do what He says. When you hear, and God has spoken, step out on what He says and understand that victory is something you already have (as Deborah did). What situation you have, God is bigger than that situation. We have great weapons but they are spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4).”<sup>10</sup>

*Lesson:* “God wasn’t giving the military victory to a military man. God was going to assign the victory to a woman, whom man would say was the weaker vessel. First, God used Deborah, and now He would use another woman to show that it is ‘not by might nor by power; but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6). *He was teaching Israel to fight God’s way—in His strength instead of their own.*”<sup>11</sup>

### **Judges 6-7**

The Midianites then joined forces with the Amalekites to invade Israel, looting crops and livestock at will. By choosing the fearful, weak Gideon to lead a minimalist army of 300, God proves the point that the battle is not only His, but His power surfaces best through human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Keep in mind that Gideon is leading a small group of farmers with handmade weapons against a large coalition force with countless camels (7:12). What impresses you about this man’s decision to step out in faith? \_\_\_\_\_

When have you felt inadequate to do what God is calling you to do? How did you respond? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Judges 8**

Gideon started out wisely refusing the people’s demand to make him a king, reminding them that “the Lord (alone) must rule over you” (8:22-23). But what did Gideon do next that eventually led the people right back into idolatry? (8:24-27) \_\_\_\_\_

What does this say about our ability to lead others astray? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Judges 9**

Gideon’s son by a concubine (note the theme of harlotry here again!), Abimelech, does what before assuming a three-year reign (9:4-6)? \_\_\_\_\_

How did God use a woman to “requite this evil” (9:50-55)? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Judges 10**

The cycle of sin continues (10:6-7), and into whose powers do they fall? \_\_\_\_\_

As seen before, the people cry to the Lord in anguish, but this time the Lord delays helping them, for what reason (10:12-14)? Was their repentance deeper than just cries of pain? \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>10</sup> Barber, pp 61-65.

<sup>11</sup> Barber, pp 60.

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What did the Jews then do in 10:16? \_\_\_\_\_

This illustrates the truth that we cannot experience true deliverance without turning from our lives of sin; a change of mind and heart resulting in a profound reorientation of our lives must accompany repentance, or it is hollow.

Recall a time in your life when you realized you had to make a complete change in behavior in order to truly repent? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Judges 11-12**

What was Jephthah's painful family history (11:1-3)? \_\_\_\_\_

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Again, note how often harlotry is a theme that resurfaces—and it occurs on the spiritual level as well, with the repetitive apostasy of Israel. Also, the sexual sin of the father will disrupt family relationships, a dynamic later seen with King David and others.

In spite of his family background, what do the elders of Gilead offer Jephthah (11:4-8)?

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Jephthah goes on to defeat the Ammonites after the “\_\_\_\_\_ came upon him” (11:29). However, civil war with the tribe of Ephraim ensues, leaving 42,000 dead of that tribe (12:6). The situation is quickly deteriorating, as now Israel is not only fighting their enemies next door but also one another. When there is no peace in the family, there can be no peace in the community or nation. How do you see that presently in our nation with the high rate of divorce and family dysfunction? \_\_\_\_\_

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The Jews were now frequently taking foreign wives and then worshipping their gods. It is likely that Jephthah's mother was an Amorite, who offered child sacrifices, and her pagan influence may have influenced his rash oath that results in the sacrifice of his only child and daughter.

### **Judges 13-16**

The story of Samson fighting the notorious Philistines is one of the better-known biographies in Judges. From his birth he was consecrated as a Nazarite, which entailed three vows (Numbers 6:3-8):

1- No \_\_\_\_\_

2- No \_\_\_\_\_

3- No exposure to \_\_\_\_\_

In reading Samson's young adult choices, how did he violate each of these? How does this give an indication as to his relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_

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The Judges steadily deteriorated in character, from noble Othniel to Samson, mirroring the society from which they came.

The Philistine harlot Delilah, whose name means “night,” overcomes Samson, whose name means “sunshine,” by manipulation- ultimately causing his capture, torture, enslavement,

and the eventual death of 3,000 Philistines when he pulled down Dagon’s temple pillars. The lesson is clear: “The Philistine ‘night’ eclipses the Israelite ‘sun.’ The strength of the Lord is lost when that strength is given to pagan women and harlots. Samson is Israel, dedicated to the Lord by a covenant oath. Now by pursuing harlotry and doing what is evil in the eyes of the Lord, he in turn becomes blind.”<sup>12</sup> But he regains his strength once he repents, a Biblical truth that stands today.

### **Judges 17**

Micah, the probable son of Delilah and Samson, was both a thief and idolater who “then took advantage of an out-of-work priest, offering him the security of a paying job (17:10). The wandering Levite accepted the position to ‘lead worship’ at Micah’s personal shrine, even though it meant compromising the worship of the true God. That the priest was wandering unsupported by the people and that he was willing to forego the true worship of God offers us a sense of how far the nation had fallen.”<sup>13</sup>

But it gets worse! This same “bought” Levite “gets a better offer to serve as a priest for the entire tribe of Dan. He leaves taking with him the graven image, teraphim, and ephod belonging to Micah. Micah reaps what he sowed in his own theft from his mother. For dramatic effect, the name of this Levite is not given until the end of the story. He is Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses (Judges 18:30). The irony of Moses’ grandson setting up an idol in the territory of Dan, in the very house of the Lord at Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant rests, is shocking. A descendant of Moses now perpetuates idolatry reminiscent of the golden calf.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Judges 19-20**

This is one of the most disturbing passages in all of Scripture. It begins by showing that the Levite priests were not only practicing idolatry, but they were taking concubines (19:1) as well. (Levites were to marry only women of their own tribe). The incident brings to mind what had happened to Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), except this time a concubine is thrust out the door to the ravaging men, who kill her after a long night of serial abuse. This precipitates revenge, which results in the near decimation of the tribe of Benjamin (40,000 dead), who had protected the perpetrators. Civil war was now rampant.

You will be quizzed in some way by others (or you struggle mightily yourself) about the meaning of these passages. How would you explain their inclusion and meaning, given the bigger picture of Salvation History? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>12</sup> Gray. *Walking with God*. pp 132.

<sup>13</sup> Swindoll, pp 31.

<sup>14</sup> Gray, *Walking with God*, pp 133.

## **Judges 21**

The book ends on an ominous note: (21:25): "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did \_\_\_\_\_." This is a sure recipe for disaster!

Read the four chapters of the Book of Ruth.

How does the story of Ruth (the Moabite convert) prove to be a stark contrast to Israel forsaking God for idols throughout Judges? Who marries Ruth, and who is their great-grandson? \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth the foreigner behaves as Israel ought! This romantic and hopeful book gives us a glimpse of God's future intention of drawing people from every nation into the family of faith, the future Body of Christ.

**(c) Glenda Canfield, September 2021.**