



JUDGES

RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES

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Judges: Right In Our On Eyes Study Guide
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≡ PREFACE

The Bible is not just a source of information but also a source of transformation. We don't merely read the Bible; it also reads us. This is important for us to understand as we open the pages of Judges. We might be tempted to read the accounts written as simply history, information about the past that we are now far removed from. We must see that we are prone to the same types of temptations and folly we read about. We need not look at the stories we read, with what C.S. Lewis called chronological snobbery, like we are better and more evolved spiritually than those of old. So, may we approach this great book of the Bible with sober and humble hearts.

As I write this, I feel the task of preaching verse by verse through the entire book of Judges to be quite overwhelming. As I've studied, prepared, and written this study guide there have been several moments where I believe God has changed me. I truly believe all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching (2 TIM 3:16). Pastorally, I have also become very concerned for Christians in our nation and for our church. We are on the brink of what looks like a great generational apostasy, the kind we will read about in Judges. In many ways, the book of Judges serves as a case study of how rebellion against the God of the Bible only leads to ruin and misery for a nation.

I hope that this guide will serve as a tool for you to better understand, know, and apply God's Word to your life. There is no better way to get the truths of Scripture deep into our souls than through personal study of God's Word. My prayer is that this resource will bless you, your family, and the generations that follow after you.

-Pastor Al Johnson

HOW TO USE A STUDY GUIDE

JUDGES

To help you better know and apply God's Word in practical ways, we create content like this Judges Study Guide. We do this because, at The Well, we believe that a life of knowing, loving, and walking with Jesus leads to practical and visible changes in our lives. We hope that you would not only know God more, but that you would also find that walking with him daily is essential, life-giving, and transformative. Each chapter consists of a particular section of Judges, a memory verse, commentary, and the generations that follow after you.



SCRIPTURE READING

Each chapter will have a selected portion of Judges for you to read and study. It is important to understand why we read the Bible. Jesus taught us that *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (MATT 4:4, ESV). In the same way that we need physical food like bread to provide nourishment for our physical bodies, we need God’s Word to nourish our souls spiritually. Additionally, the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to be *“constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of... sound doctrine”* (1 TIM 4:6, NASB). With this study guide, we desire to train men and women to discipline themselves to seek after food that doesn’t perish (JOHN 6:27). We hope that your participation in this study will better equip you for a lifetime of studying God’s Word.



MEMORY VERSE

In each chapter, you will memorize different verses. The reason we memorize Scripture is not to win a contest or to prove to others how smart we are. We memorize Scripture because the Bible is our offensive weapon in our fight against sin and temptation (EPH 6:17; MATT 4:1-10; PS 119:11; ROM 8:13). Memorizing Scripture helps us recall the promises of God and reminds us of the hope we have in Jesus. It also helps us in times of evangelism and counseling (ACTS 2:14-40; 1 PET 3:15).

COMMENTARY

To better help you study and apply God's Word, I have written a short commentary on each passage. While we may understand that the Bible is vitally important to our spiritual health and relationship with Jesus, oftentimes we still read the Bible and walk away unaffected by it—or we often forget what we read entirely. Each commentary is designed to ground the reader in God's Word so that they can retain and apply more of it.

PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

These questions are designed for individual study. The purpose is to help equip you as you seek to understand the Bible for yourself and apply what you are learning to your everyday life. **We recommend you work through one or two questions a day. Do not rush; take time to think through and write out your answers.**

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed for group discussion. This could be in a church small group setting or conversation around the family dinner table. We hope that these questions would help create opportunities for groups to open their Bibles and grow in their love for Jesus together.

CH. 1

INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY JUDGES?

The Bible begins with God creating a world for mankind to enjoy and steward in such a way that reflects God's goodness and glory. While enjoying living in paradise, man is tasked with rule and dominion over the world God created. God gives Adam a wife who will be his companion, helper, lover, and friend. Together they enjoy fellowship with God, enjoy one another, and enjoy the bounty of Eden. However, it's not long before Satan, in the form of a serpent, shows up to destroy and distort what God created, seeking to derail mankind from his God-given mission. The serpent succeeds. Adam and Eve question God's goodness toward them and rather than trust him, they choose to do what they believe is right in their own eyes. This is the root of sin, distrusting God and trusting a counterfeit. *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (JUDG 17:6; COMPARE 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

If the Book of Judges were a movie, it would certainly require those under 17 to be accompanied by an adult. The real, raw, unadulterated realities of sin and its effects are on full display throughout Judges. Death, war, human sacrifice, betrayal, prostitution, sexual scandals, and rape are on repeat throughout this book. We see the men whom God raises up to lead rise on the tide of great victories and get crushed by the waves of sin and

defeat. The heroes aren't heroes in Judges. God's people continue to do what they think is right and refuse to submit to God's Word, will, and ways.

The Book of Judges takes place between the victorious days of entering the promised land and the establishment of a monarchy in Israel. It begins with the death of Joshua and the call of God for Israel's tribe to finish their military conquest. During this time in Israel, they had no king, no national leader, nor a centralized governing system. God commissioned each tribe to fulfill a specific mission in different regions. God was their King. Much like our first parents Adam and Eve, Israel was to listen, love, worship, and serve the Lord, obey his commands, and trust in his providence and protection. But just like our first parents, they rebelled against God, distrusted his goodness, and failed to complete the mission he gave them. Due to Israel's repeated hardness of heart, God gives them over in judgment to the inhabitants of the regions around them. Their enemies would not be defeated, resulting in them being constantly led astray to worship the false gods of the nations around them.

From the beginning, God has always made it very clear to his people that they should worship and serve him alone as the leader of his people. Despite God being abundantly clear, Judges records six to eight different accounts of apostasy by Israel. Their continual rebellion and faithlessness were met with God's continual faithfulness, whereby God would raise up a judge whom he would use to bring deliverance, restoration, and peace. Throughout Judges, we see that though God is unrelentingly faithful, his people are prone to faithlessness. Each time they forsake the Lord, the more corrupt and debased they become as a nation.

Israel's disobedience repeatedly leads them to worship false gods like the Baals and the Ashtaroth. Israel didn't lead; they surrendered. They had no dominion; they were dominated. The nations around them continued to seduce them into affirming what God forbids while celebrating and practicing what God condemns. What God called evil, they called good. As we read Judges we will see that in many ways it seems like America's leaders are using Judges as their playbook. The parallels will continually be a prophetic thought-study. Throughout the book of Judges, we encounter the very real messiness of life and the detestable results of mankind's sin, including the complicated confusing cycle of sin that creates these problems.

What is truly on shocking display throughout the book of Judges, is not the great deviation and horror of the people's sin but the mercy, grace, and glory of God to continually save his people from that sin. While the nations rage, God remains patient and merciful, accomplishing his will through a steady hand of his steadfast love and faithfulness.

Judges does not depict Israel's best days, but some of their darkest days. Israel's progressive movement into idolatry, becoming like the pagan culture around them should be a wake-up call to all Christians.

The Judges saga is a wild ride and isn't for the faint at heart. It's worth the journey, but there will certainly be difficult moments. Just like any adventure, seeing the greatest sunrises and sunsets or enjoying breathtaking views found in God's creation must be first met with the labor of the journey. Some sights take great work to see, and the Book of Judges offers us sights many didn't know they needed to see until

they do. Additionally, Judges includes things that are both terrifying and awe-inspiring, moments that will grieve the soul coupled with moments that magnify the magnitude of God's mercy and grace. Judges will be a study you didn't know you needed.

I pray that this study will help you see that studying tough books of the Bible is just as rewarding as studying your favorite. I'm also praying for more churches and preachers who will endeavor to climb the mountain to bring God's people to the wonders found in the Book of Judges.

CH. 2

WILL YOU OBEY THE LORD?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 1:1–2:5



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

'...and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? - JUDGES 2:2

COMMENTARY

The book of Judges opens by giving an account of what happens to God's people after the death of their great leader. Joshua, a phenomenal leader and towering figure, was the man who led God's people into the Promised Land after the death of another great leader, Moses. There is no doubt that there would be a huge leadership gap after the death of Joshua. In recent years, I've seen and heard several authors comment on this leadership gap as being a failure in discipleship on Joshua's part. The claim is that Joshua's failure to disciple creates the pathway that ushers in the type of apostasy we see in Judges. However, that might not exactly be the case.

It seems in the opening lines of Judges, that God's people knew exactly who their leader was — The LORD: *“After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the LORD,”* (JOSH 1:1). While there may not be another leader who possesses the same type of strong leadership qualities as Moses and Joshua, God's people have been taught well whom to seek first above all. The Lord God is the one who rescued them from slavery in Egypt and who has brought them to the land of Promise as he said he would. This is something that was modeled and taught by Joshua (JOSH 5:13-14). Joshua has taught his people that the commander of God's army was The LORD himself. Now, in the wake of great tragedy and loss, God's people inquire from The LORD on what is next.

With Joshua's faithful legacy intact, a faithful group of leaders continued to worship and serve the LORD. *“And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel”* (JUDG 2:7). This is first seen in Judah and Simeon working together to help one another complete the mission God has given them in obtaining the land that had been allotted them.

This is how the body of Christ is called to labor together. We each have individual callings and tasks that the LORD has assigned to us, but they all play together in God's great mission. We have different jobs, may live in different neighborhoods, and have different interests and friends but we serve the same LORD. The tribes of Judah and Simeon model for us unity around the LORD and his mission, reminding us that we are not in competition with one another. At The Well, we are called to follow Jesus, fight sin, and fulfill the mission — so together

we help one another to that end. The result is that when one rejoices, we all rejoice (1 COR 12:26).

Sadly, not all of Israel remained steadfast and obedient to the mission of the LORD. Nearing the end of the opening chapter of Judges we see this refrain, “[they] did not drive out the inhabitants,” referring to not only a failure to complete the mission, but specifically choosing not to. When various tribes of Israel began to prevail, rather than complete the task God commanded them, they compromised. But it got worse. Instead of God’s people driving out the inhabitants, they repeatedly subjected them to forced labor. Not only did these tribes willfully choose not to obey the voice of the LORD, but they enslaved the nations around them. Just like Egypt had done to their ancestors, they now chose to do to the surrounding nations. This is exactly what happens when a generation does not heal from the sin and harm done to their ancestors. There has been true healing and forgiveness made available through the gospel of Jesus, but if the gospel is forsaken then the victims become the abusers.

In the New Testament, Jesus teaches that he who is forgiven much loves much (LUKE 7:47). Every generation must not only be taught of the great and mighty works of the LORD, but also the depths of our sinful hearts and our need for greater understanding of the mercy, grace, and forgiveness we have in Jesus. In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tells us a parable about a man who had a great debt that he could not pay. The man pleaded with his master for mercy and his master canceled his debt and let him go free. It wasn’t long before the freed and forgiven man found someone who owed him money, and when he called the man to pay his debt, the man wasn’t able to. Rather than extending

the same mercy he received, he choked him, threatened him, and threw the man in prison. When his master found out what he had done, his anger was kindled against the evil servant. He proceeded to throw the servant in prison to be tortured until he could pay off his debt. Jesus ends this parable by saying, *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart”* (MATT 18:35). This is exactly how Judges 2 begins—Jesus shows up to punish Israel’s disobedience.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. What has discipleship looked like in your personal life?

2. Have you ever been part of a formal discipleship process?

3. Read Joshua 1:1. How important do you think being taught how to inquire of the will of the LORD is for a disciple of Jesus?

4. The tribes of Judah and Simeon worked together to obey God and fulfill the mission. How important is it for fellow Christians to help one another follow Jesus, fight their sin, and fulfill Jesus' mission?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you sought the LORD for guidance and obeyed his leading? How did that work out?

2. Can you think of a time in your life when you sought the LORD for guidance but disobeyed his leading? How did that work out?

3. What do you find hardest about obedience to God?

4. What do Matthew 18:21-35 and Judges 2:1-5 reveal to us about how God feels about disobedience and unforgiveness?

CH. 3

WILL ANOTHER GENERATION NOT KNOW THE LORD?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 2:6–3:6



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. -JUDGES 2:10

COMMENTARY

At The Well, we speak a lot about the legacy we will leave behind. The question is not, “Will you leave a legacy,” but “What will be your legacy?” My hope and prayer are that our kids, grandkids, and every generation that follows will worship the same God as we do — Jesus. I am committed to cultivating this type of lineage that will spring forth from our church. This type of generational thinking is at the heart of the Greatest Commandment (DEUT 6:4-9; MATT 22:36-37). It is also a vision of Joshua’s leadership, *“and if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region*

beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (JOSH 24:15). This legacy of faith continues even after Joshua’s death and through “*all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua*” (JUDG 2:7). However, not long after the death of Joshua and the elders who outlived him there arose a generation who did not know the LORD or the work he had done for Israel (JUDG. 2:10).

Generational change is unavoidable, but there are overlaps between every generation, meaning every generation has an opportunity to teach the next to worship the LORD. Not only should we be teaching our children to know God and what he has done like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 teaches, but we should also seek to cultivate legacies of faithfulness that extend far after we are gone. The historical pattern is clear, one that biblical scholar D.A. Carson has said frequently, “One generation believes something. The next assumes it. And the third will forget and deny it.” We are seeing the third wave reproduce at this moment in our country: a great generational apostasy.

In the days of Judges, the generational apostasy resulted in worshipping the pagan gods of the culture around them. Two prominent false gods were Baal and Ashtaroht. Verse 11 describes their worship as doing evil in the sight of the LORD, verse 12 says they abandoned the God of their forefathers, verse 13 says they abandoned the LORD, and verse 14 says that this angered the LORD and God was now against them.

What God called evil, they called good. The worship of Baal and Ashtaroht consisted of the sacrifice of sex and prostitution in the name of the common good. These demon gods were perverts who wanted to watch others have sex. In our day we have couples

or individuals watching porn like they are little Baals and Ashtaroth. It was a common practice in the day of Judges for the men to go down to the Baal shrine and have sex with a prostitute as an act of worship, in hopes that this would arouse the gods and provide rain, fertility, and life for their crops and their land. Instead of trusting the one true God for things like rain, grain, wine, and oil, they followed the cultural trend. It was also common under the worship of Baal to sacrifice children when things were really inconvenient.

This is the same murderous act of modern-day abortion. We have abandoned the LORD, generational apostasy is on the rise, and so-called Christians are “deconstructing” their faith to the point that they’ve forsaken the God of the Bible. Churches scattered all throughout our nation wave the flag of the LGBTQ+ sex cult in affirmation of the demonic sex religion of our day and woke-progressive pastors have forfeited their pulpits in abandonment of their calling. In the name of tolerance and diversity, we’ve accepted what God condemns, we’ve affirmed what God calls evil, and we’ve celebrated at the alters of gods like Baal and Ashtaroth and therefore we must understand that this infuriates the LORD. We have, like in the days of Judges, provoked the LORD to anger. This is a pattern we will see continually occur throughout the book of Judges because sin is alluring, deception is real, sex is enticing, and so rebellion continues. The question of our day is, will we stand and contend for the gospel of Jesus and seek to bring reformation and revival to Christ’s church in our land? Or will we compromise like in the day of Judges? Will we raise a generation that knows,

loves, and worships the LORD or will this be another generation who grows up not knowing the LORD?

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Read Romans 1 - How does Romans 1 compare with what the people did here in Judges?

2. Where do you see the wrath of God revealed in our day and age?

3. How have you experienced consequences for disobeying God's word, will, or ways?

4. Have you ever cried out to God for relief when you've experienced the consequences of sin? How did he answer?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you come from a legacy of faithful Christianity, or are you a first-generation Christian? Discuss how this affects your faith journey as a Christian.

2. Do you think about the legacy you will leave behind? How might this motivate you to faithful obedience in the present?

3. In what ways have you experienced the consequences of sinful disobedience to God?

4. How has God's grace continued to cover your sin, remind you of the love of Christ, and propel you forward to joy-filled obedience?

NOTES

CH. 4

DO YOU BELIEVE GOD WANTS TO USE YOU?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 3:7–31



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them... - JUDGES 3:9

COMMENTARY

Judges chapter 3 consists of three men God raised up to deliver his people out of the hands of the nations that had led Israel astray. These men carried the title of Judge, hence the name of the book. A judge in this context was not like one who presides over a courtroom, but rather a leader God raised to deliver his people and to lead them back to worship the LORD.

OTHNIEL THE BRAVE WARRIOR

Othniel is the nephew of the faithful leader Caleb. Caleb was a close friend of Joshua and served under the leadership of Moses. Caleb believed in and

invested in his nephew Othniel. When it was time, Caleb's disciple Othniel was ready to be enlisted as the next leader. When the opportunity came to step in and lead, Othniel rose and conquered the city of Debir. The favor of the LORD was upon him; he was brave and successful in battle and was also blessed to marry a great woman, for, *"he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD"* (PROV 18:22). His wife also came from a legacy of faithfulness to God. She was a bold and wise woman, and their family reaped the benefits of her wisdom (JUDG 1:11-15). In many ways, Othniel serves as a picturesque, ideal, heroic kind of man. He was humble, learned from great leaders, was disciplined, had courage, and could lead and execute an excellent battle plan. While Othniel is a great leader, Ehud, the next Judge, is a wild man.

EHUD THE SOUTHPAW

One commentator calls Ehud the "devious assassin" (WEBB 2015, 75). Ehud is the opposite of Othniel in almost every way. Ehud is a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin, two details that are key to this story. Ehud's left-hand dominance played into his military fighting style. While Othniel had more of an orthodox and traditional lineage, training, and upbringing, Ehud was unconventional. When it comes to hand-to-hand combat, there are two different fighting stances, orthodox and southpaw. Orthodox is where a fighter's stance is positioned in such a way that his left hand is forward, and his dominant right hand is back ready to deliver knockouts. The Southpaw stance, often the preferred stance of left-handed fighters (i.e. Rocky Balboa), is simply the opposite of the orthodox stance. In the world of boxing and MMA, the southpaw fighters can be deceptively difficult to defend

against. This is Ehud's style of unconventional warfare: deceptive and difficult to defend.

Additionally, Ehud is from the tribe of Benjamin, and they do not have the best track record of being faithful to God. The tribe of Benjamin is only mentioned once in the book of Judges, and it is because they failed their mission on purpose and abandoned their post (JUDG 1:21). Ehud is a reminder that God often uses unlikely people from unlikely places, even faithless families, to accomplish his will.

SHAMGAR THE MYSTERY MAN

The last Judge we see in the third chapter is Shamgar. We know very little about him, his upbringing, or where he comes from. Shamgar gets one verse that says, *“After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel”* (JUDG 3:31). With the few details we have, this is what we know: First, Shamgar's battle was with the Philistines, which would have taken place near the Mediterranean Sea and near what is known today as the Gaza Strip. Ehud's victory over the Moabites was in the lower Jordan Valley in the far east of Israeli territory. Shamgar's battle takes place before Ehud's death in Judges 4:1.

Second, we know that Shamgar is the son of Anath. For most readers, this seems just like another weird name. What is interesting is that Anath is feminine, suggesting that this is his mother. This isn't common because normally the individual would be identified with by father, not mother. We simply don't know anything about Shamgar's dad. Maybe he was raised by a single mom.

Third, the name Anath is connected to Anat, the Canaanite goddess of war which suggests

that Shamgar's upbringing includes his family heritage being involved with the worship of the Canaanite false gods. Lastly, we know Shamgar's weapon of choice — an oxgoad. This is a tool used to prod or poke working animals such as oxen. Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with a cattle prod! Shamgar leaves us asking more questions than we get answers, but this is often how God works, using crooked sticks to draw straight lines and sometimes an oxgoad to save his people.

God uses all types of people, and God saves all types of people. The gospel is the most inclusive and exclusive invitation ever given. It's inclusive in that anyone can be saved. It doesn't matter your background, your socioeconomic status, your race, gender, or even what religion you grew up in. Anyone can come to Jesus, and this is where we find Christianity extremely inclusive. Christianity is exclusive in that there is only one way to salvation. Anyone can be saved, but salvation is in Jesus alone. *“Jesus ... has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (ACTS 4:11-12).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar waged war against God's enemies. Since the coming of Christ, Christians have been called to a different kind of warfare. Describe the nature of our warfare described in Ephesians 2:2 and 6:12.

2. What does it look like for you to engage in spiritual warfare?

3. Judges 3 describes Ehud and Shamgar's unique weapons of warfare. How does 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 describe the weapons of our warfare?

4. What offensive weapons are described in the armor of Ephesians 6:13-18?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you express gratitude for your salvation in Jesus Christ?

2. How is it encouraging that God still works through flawed people?

3. How is the gospel both radically inclusive and exclusive at the same time?

CH. 5

MEN OF VICTORY BUT NO GLORY?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 4:1–24



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And she said, *“I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”* - JUDGES 4:9

COMMENTARY

As Israel continued to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD, God continued to hand them over to the evil rule of the nations that surrounded them. In the fourth chapter of Judges, we meet a new godly judge, Deborah, who is also a prophetess, Barak, who is a commissioned military leader and judge to deliver God’s people from their enemies, Jael who becomes the unlikely hero and dubbed the name *“most blessed of women”* (JUDG 5:24), and Sisera, the military leader who cruelly oppressed the people of Israel for twenty years (JUDG 4:3), but succumbed to his sex drive resulting in a

tent peg in his temple. Let's meet the characters and learn from their victories and defeats.

DEBORAH

Deborah is introduced as a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth. The Scriptures tell us that she was, *“judging Israel”* (v. 4). The nature of her work was more common to biblical counselors. God's people would come to her as she sat *“under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment”* (v. 5). In this context, Israel is oppressed, so the people went to Deborah, a prophetess, to make sense of what was going on.

She sought the LORD and God told her he had commissioned Barak to deliver his people. The problem was that Barak had delayed his obedience, so Deborah had to light a fire under Barak so he would do his job. Her rebuke was strong, *“Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you...”* (v. 6). Deborah is a godly leader, using the gifts and talents the LORD has given her to serve him and his people. Barak on the other hand, was a timid and cowardly man. To clarify, Deborah is not merely stepping up because Barak had been spineless. No, God had called her to this work. Deborah was called by God for particular tasks, the task of dispute settling, biblical counseling, and prophetess.

Some would say that this is only because the men of the time had abdicated their responsibilities, but the chapter simply does not say that nor suggest it. To conclude that, one must read it into the text. There are others, however, who always see Deborah's leadership role as prescriptive to all women at all times and will use this passage as a proof text to suggest an obliteration of

gender norms. Neither position is described nor implied in the text. This is an important lesson in Bible study, the reader must be careful not to make prescriptions where the Bible is only giving descriptions. What is described in Deborah's role is certainly unique. "Deborah, alone among the judges, does not fight — she is not a warrior, cannot lead the army, and has to recruit someone whose abilities will complement hers" (KELLER 2013, 57).

BARAK

Barak is the warrior God has called to lead his people to victory. He is just slow to act. This is not a very masculine, nor a positive quality in your nation's military leader but one that might be very prevalent when your nation's history has a proclivity to worship the false gods of the times. This is true in Barak's day and is most certainly true in our day. Barak is like many Christian men called to lead but who have yet to step out and do so. Also, like many modern Christian men, he needed to hear a solid rebuke, which God delivered through Deborah. Once Barak was clear that God had called him to the task of delivering his people from the hands of their oppressors, he still was hesitant. He requested Deborah's presence at the muster for the upcoming battle. Deborah agreed, but this didn't reflect well on Barak. "Fighting was men's business, and Barak should have been willing to go at God's command and fulfill his manly responsibilities, trusting in the promise he had already been given" back in verse 7 (WEBB 2015, 98).

JAEL

Now, in response to Barak's delayed and potentially reluctant obedience, Deborah prophesied, "*The road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman*" (V. 9). At

first glance, we assume it would be Deborah, but there is a twist, it was Jael. Jael shows up after Barak wins the battle and *“all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left”* (v. 16). While the battle was coming to an end and Sisera recognized he'd been defeated, he fled the battlefield to the tent of Jael. This scene gets a little strange as Jael kills Sisera by driving a tent peg through his temple.

SISERA

This leaves us with Sisera, an oppressive military leader who had an impressive army of 900 chariots of iron but was no match for God's judgment. Moreover, “Sisera was stupid for sex, and it cost him his life” (SCHWAB 2011, 86). This is the way of the nations who rage against the LORD. This is the way of our current sexually confused nation, and the results are never good. Soon in the book of Judges, we will see God's leaders becoming stupid for sex and it will cost them their lives as well. May this serve as a warning for God's people today. Don't be stupid, do sex God's way.

VICTORY, BUT NO GLORY

In the end, Deborah's prophesy is fulfilled in Jael, showing the sovereign hand of God behind that. Sisera is shamed by being killed by a woman. Barak is shamed by having the honor of personally slaying Sisera taken from him. Barak does claim victory, but no glory.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. How does God, in his providence, provide for Barak's victory and the deliverance of his people?

2. Sisera's fall was a fall to temptation in multiple ways. What temptations cause you to act foolishly? What steps do you need to take to break the cycle and fight sin?

3. How does faith allow you to act in obedience, even when you won't be honored for doing it?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are we so reluctant to trust the LORD as a warrior God who will fight our battles for us?

2. How do you exercise faith like Barak?

3. Are there times in your life when you've stepped out in obedient faith?

4. As you reflect on those times, can you see how God provided what you needed? Are there ways in which you are/should be trusting him now?

CH. 6

DOES YOUR CELEBRATION INCLUDE SINGING?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 5:1-31



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

*“Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the
LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the
LORD, the God of Israel.” -JUDGES 5:3*

COMMENTARY

After victory comes celebration. Barak had just led God’s people in a great military battle and Israel had been delivered — a great cause for rejoicing. A celebration is what we find in chapter five of Judges. Deborah, a prophetess, judge, and now songwriter, recounts the wondrous work of the mighty hand of God artistically in poetic verse.

Singing is everywhere in the Bible; both the Old and New Testaments are filled with songs and singing. *“The singing starts in Exodus 15 after God saved Israel from the pursuing army of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and it goes right through the ‘new song’ of the book of Revelation*

that goes on 'forever and ever' (REVELATION 5:9-14)" (WEBB 2015, 111). Singing is central to Christianity. God's people have always been singing people. The most notable book of the Bible dedicated to singing is The Psalms, the Hebrew and early church hymnal. The Psalms have been central to Christian worship from the church age (MATT 26:30; MARK 14:26; EPH 5:19; COL 3:16). Moreover, "the book of Psalms has provided inspiration for countless Christians hymns" (WEBB 2015, 111).

Every Sunday, God's people gather from all parts of the world to worship Jesus in their local context. Whether you are in the bush of Africa, or the suburbs of Dallas, Christians everywhere will be singing songs of adoration and praise to our good God and King.

"Some sing music accompanied by rock bands, some by pipe organs, some by drum ensembles, some by rusty old pianos, and some by no accompaniment at all" (STEENWYK 2013, 15). We sing because Jesus is alive. We sing because Jesus has defeated sin, Satan, and death. We sing because we have salvation, we have been chosen. We were once enemies, but now we are sons and daughters of God. We sing because as one song puts it, "Our redemption is accomplished [so we] raise a shout with ragged voice... knowing he has won the war" ("IT IS FINISHED", MODERN POST). Just like Deborah sang back then in recollection and celebration of Israel's victory, so too the Christian sings today to tell of the victories of Jesus our Savior and King.

At The Well, a drum we always beat (pun intended) is that all of life is worship. We want to be purposeful about helping people worship through song in their everyday lives. Music in the church shouldn't be so detached from the world we live in because

our mission is not detached from the world we live in. Meaning, that church music should sound like good music someone would actually want to listen to. It is our job as Christians to respond to the glory of God in every circumstance of life. We want our music to be a guide unto that end. We see the songs we sing as opportunities to point each other to Jesus and help his people worship him in the day-to-day lives they lead.

Our songs are doxological; God's glory is the greatest motivation for everything we do. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him (PIPER 2011, 10). Our aim in worship is the exultation of God by finding satisfaction in him alone. Everything we do is for this purpose. We want God to be glorified and people to glorify God.

And so, our aim is not merely at the emotionally experiential level but rather is aimed at transforming the minds and hearts of people. God calls us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (ROM 12:1-2) and wants us to worship with our entire being (DEUT 6:4-9). Therefore, our songs should speak to the head and heart of all individuals. To form the head and heart we must be purposeful about how we order our service and arrange our songs. We want to take people on a journey, but also constantly crafting the route.

The songs we sing must teach and instruct. One of the methods of contextualization is explanation. Every step we take, we are teaching and explaining to others. In doing so we are training Christians as missionaries, welcoming non-believers, and overcoming barriers all at the same time. We explain why we sing, raise

our hands, shout for joy, or even be silent and feel the weight of sin while we worship.

We are, therefore, intentional with our song choices so that Christ's glory is rightly put on display. Our team seeks to write new songs, revive old hymns, and create music for the culture that it exists in. Jesus is worthy of our best, so we aim to create good music. We strive to not only be musicians whose hearts are in the right place but to have our fingers in the right place on the fretboard too. Skillful musicianship is not about exulting oneself, but what John Piper describes as, "un-distracting excellence" (THE RESURGENCE REPORT, 2012). It's being so excellent that no one notices anything but what the music is aiming to put on display. For us, we are aiming to put Jesus on display and no one else — and we believe this is the aim and heart of the church's victory songs!

PERSONAL STUDY

1. In Judges 5:31, how are Deborah's last words in her song both a prayer to God and a call to action for God's people?

2. Do you consider the Psalms or the Song of Deborah prayers or songs? How might they be both?

3. How does this change your view on worship songs sung in church?

**GROUP/FAMILY
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How has music been a part of your Christian faith journey?

2. What about music and singing do you like and dislike?

3. Should a Christian's life be marked by singing?

4. How can you incorporate singing to God in your personal or family devotional times?

CH. 7

WILL YOU CONTEND OR COMPROMISE?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 6:1–32



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. - JUDGES 6:27

COMMENTARY

What is consistent throughout Judges is that God keeps showing up despite the idolatrous apostasy of his people. Here in Judges 6, before the call of Gideon, Israel is under the oppressive hand of Midian because of their outright refusal to obey the voice of the LORD. Gideon has grown up in a context where God's people have forsaken the God of the Bible and are worshiping sexually perverted demon gods. It would be like someone in our day who grew up attending the progressive-rainbow flag waving-drag show celebrating-abortion promoting-apostate church. The city celebrates and applauds this false

church for its virtue signals of equality and diversity, but the Marxist-communist regime oppresses the people, and everyone is miserable. So-called Christians sell out to get handouts to the new god of their land. Further, Gideon's father was a sell-out. He sold out to the praise of man and became an idolatrous, sexually deviant worshiper like the rest of their culture. That scenario is Gideon's context.

This is also the context where the angel of the Lord steps in and calls Gideon. We should be encouraged by that. The world around us has lost its mind, our culture is corroding around us, and many churches have stopped contending for the faith. In doing so they have become complicit and compromised. But God is faithful, even when the people aren't, and he continues to raise up leaders from unlikely families and backgrounds to continue his mission.

The angel of the LORD showed up while Gideon was hiding in the winepress, beating out wheat so the Midianites wouldn't take and plunder what was rightfully his (v. 11-12). In the Old Testament, when you see the angel of the LORD, know that this is likely the pre-incarnate Jesus. When it's an angel of the LORD, it's likely a mighty angelic messenger sent from God. Up to this point in the Scriptures, the angel of the LORD has appeared to Abraham (GEN 18:1; 22:12, 15), Jacob (GEN 31:11; 32:30; 48:16), Moses (EX 3:2, 6), and Joshua (JOSH 5:13-15). Now in Judges, he appears to Gideon (and this won't be the last time Jesus makes an appearance in this book). Time and time again, we see the angel of the LORD showing up, because Jesus is the true King and leader of his mission. In Judges 6, he has shown up to call, save, and commission Gideon.

Jesus calls Gideon to contend in a context where all he has known is compromise. So, like many who get saved today, Gideon has questions. In verse 13, he asks Jesus the same question people have been asking for thousands of years, *“if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?”* God, if you are good, and you are with us, then why has all the oppression happened, why are all your people abandoning the faith, why is apostasy the new apostolic movement, and why are heretics the new heralds? Why, God?

God doesn't feel obliged to answer Gideon specifically, but he does respond by commissioning him. Many scholars make parallels to the life of Gideon and Moses. When Jesus shows up in Judges 6, we find Gideon hiding from the enemy while working for his father, who is a priest of a pagan shrine. When Jesus shows up in Exodus 3, Moses is working for his father-in-law, tending his flocks. Jesus commissioned both Moses and Gideon from unlikely circumstances. He told Gideon, *“Have I not sent you?”* and to Moses, he similarly said, *“And I will send you”* (JUDG 6:14; EX 3:10).

Both Gideon and Moses made objections to Jesus' call on their lives. Gideon pointed out his inadequacy because of his family's background and claims he is the weakest in his family. Moses similarly protested his inadequacy saying, *“Who am I.. that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”* (EX 3:11). Jesus addressed both Moses and Gideon's complaint with the promise that he will be with them. Lastly, before Moses or Gideon embarked on fulfilling the mission that Jesus gave them to deliver his people from the oppressive demonic nations that ruled them, he spoke to both Moses and Gideon in a miraculous fire (JUDG 6:21; EX 3:2). The result is they fulfilled the mission.

For Gideon, the first act of obedience was to deal with the cultural idols in his home. Jesus told him to destroy the Baal and Asherah shrines his father had and to take his father's bulls and sacrifice them to God. This made the clear point to his father and the men of the city that Jesus reigns and was calling them to repent. *“So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him”* (v. 27).

Gideon was fearful of his father and the men of the city. He was about to defy and defame people whom he loved and by whom he was raised. It is natural to have great fear when God calls you to step out in faith. The question is not whether you are afraid or not. Both cowards and men of courage have fear. The only difference is who you fear most. Cowards fear the culture, godly men of courage fear Christ. I'd rather offend those in my family and the culture around me than offend my Savior. Likewise, Gideon is fearful yet faithful. Moreover, he gathers a team to go with him in obedience to Jesus; this is discipleship. And when the cultural idols fell, the men of the city were engaged in the work God had for them.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Read Acts 19:21-41. What happened when the people started repenting of their idolatry and following Jesus?

2. In Judges 6, Gideon gets into trouble with the community when he destroys the pagan shrine. How have you gotten into trouble for standing up for the truth?

3. What keeps you from standing up for the truth?

4. Describe how you struggle or have struggled with the fear of man.

5. Confess any fear of man to the LORD and ask that you'd be strengthened to contend for the faith like Judges 1:3.

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you see so-called Christians worshipping the false gods of the culture?

2. In what ways have you been led to worship the idols of the culture around you?

3. What do you think will happen when cultural idols of our day fall?

4. Gideon had a group of faithful men who helped him obey. Who is in your life that helps you follow Jesus, fight sin, and fulfill Jesus' mission?

≡ CH. 8

WHERE DO YOU TURN WHEN YOU ARE ANXIOUS AND DOUBTING?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 6:33–7:8



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

*Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel
by my hand, as you have said..."* -JUDGES 6:36

COMMENTARY

Earlier in chapter six, the LORD sent Gideon to deliver God's people from the oppressive hand of Midian. In the second part of chapter 6, we read he was filled by the Holy Spirit (LIT. CLOTHED) and empowered to act in obedience to God, yet we still see him wrestling with fear and assurance. Reality has set in for Gideon. The past seven years have been full of raiding and pillaging of Israel by Midian. God's people have had to hide their crops and goods so they weren't stolen from them. And now the time has finally come to overthrow Midian. Many have anticipated and prayed for this day to come, perhaps wondering

if God would ever show up. God did show up. God promised to deliver his people from the hand of Midian, and he promised to do so through Gideon.

It is a perfectly normal human response to be anxious on the brink of battle, and certainly Gideon was. To curb his anxiety and garner assurance, he asked God a question as a test to affirm that he was going to fulfill his promise. The opening words of his request are revealing, *“Then Gideon said to God, ‘If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said ...’”* (JUDG 6:36). If you will and as you have said — Gideon is asking if God is trustworthy. While this is an understandable question from a fearful human, God’s Word should have been enough for Gideon. In our sinful nature and flesh, we also question God’s goodness and trustworthiness all the time — but we shouldn’t. God has never been unfaithful to his Word, he has always done what he said he would do, and he is completely trustworthy.

However, sin distorts our perception of reality and causes us to question the goodness of God. This happened to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and it is what happened to Gideon. Sin is never logical, but it always appears to be. For example, with Gideon: Midian is strong, mighty, and outnumbered Israel. Midian has been the victorious oppressor for the past seven years. Gideon has no military leadership experience, and he self-proclaims to be the weakest in his family from the weakest clan in his tribe (JUDG 6:15). Sin makes it seem perfectly logical to fear and distrust God — except for the reality that God has already faithfully delivered his people from Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land just like he promised. Moreover, he has repeatedly delivered his people throughout the Book of Judges. So, if

God said that he would be with Gideon and use Gideon to deliver his people from Midian, that should have been enough for Gideon, but it wasn't.

The same is true for many Christians today, even after reading about the continual faithfulness of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Christians know, trust, and believe in the greatest news of all time — the gospel. We believe that Jesus lived without sin, suffered in our place on the cross as a substitute for our sins, was dead for three days, resurrected, appeared to many, ascended into heaven, and will return. We believe that we who were once enemies of God are now friends of God. We were once orphans without hope, but now we are sons and daughters of God. Jesus has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. We believe that he will provide all our needs. We believe all that and more, and yet, from time to time, we doubt his goodness towards us. We, like Gideon, question God, are anxious, and need assurance.

Ask yourself: to whom do you turn when you do struggle? Gideon turns to the LORD and asks for assurance, for a reminder of his goodness toward him, and of his promises.

God's response to Gideon should encourage you. God does not respond violently or in anger; Gideon doesn't get lectured or scolded. Though Gideon has insulted and mistrusted the goodness of God, he has his request granted. God is very tender and patient toward Gideon and wants you to know he is this way towards you. Do your anxious soul a favor and marvel at God's grace towards Gideon's struggle with doubt. Be encouraged in moments of doubt, discouragement, and dismay to cry out like the man in Mark 9:24, "*I believe, help my unbelief!*" Plead,

with the God of all comfort to bring his promised comfort (2 COR 1:3-5). Pray with thanksgiving that the peace of God, which surpasses all knowledge, would guard your heart and mind (PHIL 4:5-7). *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”* (ROM 8:15-16).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Read Romans 8. List all the reasons to have hope.

2. Read Philippians 4:4-8. What does this passage teach you about prayer and what to set your mind on?

3. In what areas of life do you struggle to trust God?

4. In what Scriptures does God promise provision for the area you struggle?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have you struggled to trust God's goodness?

2. God is tender in his response to Gideon. Is that how you see God toward you? Why or why not?

3. In what area of your life do you need God's assurance?

CH. 9

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE MEN?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 7:9–25



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

*...And they cried out, "A sword for the
LORD and for Gideon!"* -JUDGES 7:20

COMMENTARY

My college coach had a great desire to develop young athletes to reach their full potential. He had a unique ability to help athletes trust the development process, forecasting where they were, where they could be, and how to get there. Human development is a hard undertaking. Whether it's leadership development or the training of athletes to reach their full potential, it takes a lot of work, patience, and precision. This is exactly what we see from God in the making of Gideon into a strong leader. Gideon starts weak, timid, and very unsure of himself. Because of his upbringing, Gideon questions God's goodness for his people and God's goodness toward him as his son and servant. However, God

is continually patient and precise in his pruning to cultivate Gideon into the man he has called him to be, namely a mighty warrior (JUDG 6:12).

We live in a world that doesn't know what to do with men. The progressives demonize them, calling them toxic, and seek to eradicate them through social emasculation, rendering them useless. The political conservatives complain about the lack of masculinity and the absurdity of the progressives but have no plan to develop and cultivate men. Additionally, too many churches placate the culture, trying not to offend anyone. Therefore, they reproduce soft, passive, effeminate males, but not biblical men.

Today, most young men start like Gideon: they grow up in a progressive non-Christian culture that is sexually confused. They have no rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Instead, usually, they can be found hiding in their room, scrolling on their phone, watching porn, playing video games, and wasting their lives.

Upon hearing God's call for their lives, many guys do not respond as inspired warriors ready to receive the call from God and get to work. Like Gideon, they are fearful, insecure, and need development. Over the past decade in pastoral ministry, I've seen this same story play out time and time again, especially among young men. A Christian guy starts to read his Bible, gets plugged into the church, hears God's call for him as a man, and immediately feels overwhelmed and underdeveloped. He is inspired because he is called to something he was created for, but when he examines his life, he sees little to no examples of godly leadership. Like Gideon, he is intimidated by the God-sized task. He wants to do it but doesn't know how. The few examples he has are either

productive leaders who were domineering and disconnected from human relationships, or passive and cowardly men he doesn't want to imitate. He needs godly men to get in and develop and train the young man. Sadly, the culture affirms passivity, and many men just assume being a miserable man must be the lot of modern masculinity, especially if they are also Christians. Men want to lead, they want to answer the call of God, and they want to walk upright in a Holy Spirit-inspired confidence — they just don't know how. They need development.

The thing I love about the Judges account of the life of Gideon is the detail it gives to God's development of Gideon. At this point, we've seen tremendous God-given growth and maturity from Gideon. But we also see Gideon's insecurities. All men have fears and insecurities. Even great leaders from time to time are perplexed by fear and overcome by their insecurity — this happens probably more often than we think. For many, there is a great fear and loneliness that comes with leadership. God sees our fears, anxieties, and insecurities and comes alongside us to help. He does this with Gideon in Judges 7, where he strengthens Gideon's hand through his Word, through one of Gideon's friends, and through the dream the Midianites have. When the LORD strengthened Gideon, his response was worship and taking action in obedience to his God-given assignment. Moreover, the response from the other men Gideon leads was also confidence in God and the mission. The people around Gideon were uplifted and strengthened for the task at hand. When leaders lead in their roles and capacities as given by God, families, and nations flourish.

I pray this would be the response of the men at The Well: worship and mission. I pray we will see

how God's patient cultivation and development of Gideon overflowed to those around him. Their fears were met with confidence in the LORD. This is what a godly man produces. Those around him aren't simply motivated for productivity but are also strengthened with their hope in the LORD, resulting in joy-filled obedience to God. We see this in Judges 7 which is marked by the army's battle cry, "*For the LORD and for Gideon*" (v. 18). What they are saying is, "The Battle belonged to Yahweh, the commander and chief and to his deputy, Gideon" (BLOCK 1999, 282).

The Well hopes to be a place that cultivates and develops men into becoming the men God has created them to be because the battle belongs to the LORD. This takes time and consistent cultivation. It is a ministry priority for me and The Well, and by God's grace, we've seen scores of men mature and are walking upright with steel in their spine and hope on their horizon as they are becoming the men God has called them to be. Some will read this and wrongly assume that the dedication to developing men is at the expense of women and children, however, this couldn't be further from the truth. We spend time, energy, and resources to disciple women and children, but if we miss training the men, it will be the women and children who suffer. The way a man goes will ultimately affect families, nations, and generations. Men are starving for leadership, lacking examples to follow, and looking for men worthy of imitating. I pray by God's grace we can play a part in building men up to fulfill their God-given calling.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. When you think of the roles and responsibilities given to you by God, are you inspired or intimidated? Why or why not?

2. Are there Christians in your life you look up to and are worthy of imitating?

3. Would you say your life is worthy of imitation? Why or why not?

4. What steps must you take for that to be so?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does God's continual tenderness and cultivation of Gideon encourage you?

2. In what ways is God changing, maturing, and growing you?

3. In what ways do you need the LORD to strengthen your hand?

4. What are current fears or insecurities that need the LORD's help?

CH.10

HOW DOES GOD SEE US IN LIGHT OF OUR FAILURES?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 8:1–35



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel. - JUDGES 8:34-35

COMMENTARY

The eighth chapter of Judges is a sobering warning of how not to lead. It is also a reminder that not all great leaders finish well. Taken in the context of the whole Bible, it also serves as a great reminder that we are not defined by our successes or our failures. But, in the here and now of Judges 8, we see only the failure: the unraveling downfall of Gideon. It is discouraging to slowly see Gideon become a man no longer worthy of imitation. The chapter ends

with another generation abandoning the LORD, and forgetting the good God did through Gideon.

Tired, exhausted, and worn out from the battle, Gideon sought to finish the job by capturing the two kings of Midian who escaped so the Midian army couldn't regroup and counterattack Israel. However, it seems that the pressure, sleeplessness, and adrenal dump from battle got to Gideon. He first met conflict from the Ephraimites, which he was able to resolve, but immediately after he is met with more conflict from his countrymen. This time he doesn't handle the conflict well and we see a different side of Gideon. The unraveling begins.

Gideon and his army needed rest and nourishment. So, Gideon requested bread from the locals before they continued their pursuit of the two kings of Midian. Gideon's request was met with hostility, which in turn infuriated Gideon, and he threatened the locals. Gideon's conflict resolution strategy has changed to threats. These are not empty threats but a promise he intends to keep and does. Gideon seems to be more motivated by vengeance than the glory of God and even has his manhood questioned by the enemy.

God is still faithful and uses Gideon to finish the mission and bring peace to Israel. Perhaps the only redemptive moment in this chapter is when the people of Israel seek to make him king because of all he accomplishes by the hand of the LORD. Gideon refused and reminded the people God was their rightful king (JUDG 8:22-23). However, immediately after this, he took the gold from the spoils of victory and used it to make an ephod before putting it on display in the city. This has

dire consequences: *“And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family”* (V. 27).

God gave Israel 40 years of peace after using Gideon to deliver his people from the hand of Midian. In the years of peace, Gideon squandered his reputation, legacy, and the future of his people. Gideon ended his life like the pagan culture around him — a perverted old man with many wives and a concubine on the side. There is no other way to put it — Gideon’s life ends in disgrace.

Despite the discouraging narrative, I pray that as we read this, we take heed lest we fall like Gideon. The way Gideon was tempted is not uncommon. I pray that when tempted, we take the way of escape the LORD promises.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. — 1 CORINTHIANS 10:12-13

The grace of God abounds beyond our imagination. There is more mercy and grace in Jesus than sin in us. For us to grasp the depths of that reality, we must see the unraveling of Gideon for what it is: a tragedy! Gideon’s sin does not define him, and though Judges 8 ends with a lack of honor for what God did through Gideon, Hebrews 11 gives us the last word where Gideon is enshrined as a great hero of our faith. *“Gideon... made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight”* (HEB 11:32-34). The narrative not only recounts God’s actions in and through Gideon but emphasizes

that his achievements were the result of faith, earning him commendation for his unwavering belief (HEB 11:39). This is the very heart of the gospel. Our commendation from God is not based on our good deeds, our successes, or even our failures, no matter how great they may be. Our identity, our hope, and our legacy are those of faith.

As Christians, we are prone to forget the goodness of God. We often define ourselves by our successes or our failures. We live lives that ebb and flow on the emotional roller coaster of perceived victories and failures, oscillating between pride and depression. The story of Gideon serves as a reminder that we all need Jesus. More than that, we must cling to, hope in, and remember the gospel of Jesus lest we believe in vain (1 COR 15:1-2). Just as Gideon's identity is found in faith, so too the Christian's identity is found in faith of the person and work of Jesus.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Do you tend to define yourself by your successes or failures? Why?

2. Do you tend to have strong emotional responses in light of perceived victories or defeats?

3. Where do you find yourself currently prone to temptation?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12-13. Are you able to see the way out when tempted?

**GROUP/FAMILY
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In what ways do you struggle like Gideon?

2. How have you mistreated others because of pride?

3. How does Hebrews 11:32-39 bring encouragement to you?

4. How does God see you through Christ Jesus?

NOTES

CH. 11

DIVINE RETRIBUTION OR REPENTANCE?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 9:1–57



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. -JUDGES 9:56

COMMENTARY

In the last chapter, we see that Gideon didn't finish his life well and left behind a sketchy legacy. The story of Gideon serves as a reminder that we all need Jesus who gives us a new identity. Just as Gideon's identity is found in faith, so too the Christian's identity is found in faith of the person and work of Jesus. However, the consequences of Gideon's foolish sexual perversion remain. Gideon had many wives who gave him seventy sons, and a concubine by which was born to him another son, Abimelech.

Abimelech is treacherously ambitious, orchestrating a cunning plot to enlist his mother's relatives in

Shechem to assist in the murder of his seventy half-brothers, to establish his rule overall. The nefarious mission receives backing from the local demonic non-profit, Baal-Berith. The ominous nature of the undertaking becomes evident when the hired individuals are only described as “*worthless and reckless fellows*” (JUDGES 9:4). In our day, we have local city governments using taxpayer dollars to fund murder missions on the unborn in sanctuary cities in the name of human rights. These murderous magistrates should also be deemed “reckless fellows.” The human heart is murderous if left unchecked. Abimelech is motivated by selfish ambition and vain conceit, which will ultimately lead to his ruin and demise.

The attack on the seventy sons of Gideon was a success for Abimelech and he became the acting ruler. The youngest son of Gideon, Jotham, however, escaped and warned the leaders of Shechem, reminding them that God was the true leader and if Abimelech’s rise to power wasn’t done in good faith, God would bring fiery retribution upon them and Abimelech (vv. 7-15). This is exactly what happens. God showed up and disrupted Abimelech’s plans. Our text says that “*God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem*” which would turn this diabolical alliance against itself. To clarify, God doesn’t create evil, but uses evil for good (GEN 50:20). God didn’t make the evil spirit but made it serve his own good purpose (WEBB 2015, 162). God is not the author of evil, but as we see elsewhere in Scripture, he will use what man intends for evil to bring about good (GEN 50:20). God used Abimelech to defeat Shechem, and then out of what seems like nowhere, Abimelech’s head was crushed by a millstone (JUDG 9:53).

This entire chapter is wild and disturbing. Abimelech is a man driven by selfish ambition, which leads to great acts of treachery. Many commentators call him an anti-judge, a suitable name. All the other judges were used by God to deliver God's people from the hands of those who oppressed them. Here, however, Abimelech created all the chaos, not a foreign power. In the other scenes in Judges, we see God's grace on display, bringing about unmerited favor, redemption, and help that the people certainly don't deserve. But, with Abimelech, we see God's righteous retribution. The story of Abimelech is a reminder that God reserves the right to give us exactly what we deserve. This should serve as a terrifying warning for us of how dangerous it is to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD (WEBB 2015, 167).

I pray that Abimelech would be this type of terrifying example for us, that we would see how if sin left unrestrained, it would lead to ruin. I pray that we would rule over the selfish ambition in our hearts, fighting and killing the sin of pride and bitterness lest it kill us. And therefore, *“do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (PHIL 2:3-4). And when we fail, for we indeed will from time to time, may we be reminded of the great mercy and grace of Jesus towards us.

Finally, may God's righteous retribution serve as a reminder to us that one day God's grace will cease toward the unrepentant. Those who reject Jesus as their Savior and Lord will be like Abimelech and the men of Shechem in God's final act of divine retribution. “This, of course, is Hell, which is the withdrawal of grace forever

(REVELATION 14:11; 20:11-15). Retribution is real, and we forget it at our peril” (WEBB 2015, 167).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. What tactics does Abimelech use to gain leadership?

2. How does Jotham’s speech reveal the truth about Abimelech as a leader?

3. What does this passage teach you about God’s sovereignty over evil?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the leadership of Abimelech and the qualification for an elder in 1 Timothy 3:2-7.

2. How was Abimelech chosen as a leader? How should we choose leaders within the church?

3. Sin, left unchecked, only leads to ruin and misery. How has the grace of God saved you from yourself?

4. How can we guard against selfish ambition and pride in our own lives, relationships, and endeavors?

CH. 12

GOOD SEASONS TO STEWARD OR SQUANDER?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 10:1-18



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

After him arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities... -JUDGES 10:3-4

COMMENTARY

These are some refreshing words: “*After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah*” (JUDG 10:1). The story of Abimelech was a catastrophe, but then comes Tola to save Israel. We don’t know how Tola did it, but the mere two verses we have on his life serve as a joyous reminder of God’s goodness (DAVIS 2000, 128). After Tola came Jair the Gileadite. We also learn very little of his time as a judge of Israel. However, we do see that he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities. This detail is likely to emphasize the fact that there was peace in the land for another

twenty-two years after Tola. So all in all, between Tola and Jair, God's people enjoyed forty-five years of peace before Israel "played the harlot" another time by doing "*what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth*" (JUDG 10:6).

Before we get into Israel's apostasy, let us first consider what we are to do in times of peace and blessing from the LORD. Sometimes in our lives, it seems we move from one big event to the next. Everything is always a struggle, fight, or challenge to overcome. Oftentimes, if we are not careful, we become addicted to the adrenaline rush of urgent chaos. As a result, when times of peace show up, we don't know what to do with them. The narrative of Judges has felt like an emotional roller coaster from what often looks like impending doom followed by a great deliverance. We've seen wild deception and miraculous mountaintop moments. We've seen God continue to pour out his unending mercy and grace, and yet last chapter we saw his righteous retribution. Now, we have just five verses of peace before we jump back into the mess of Israel's worsening apostasy.

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us there is a time for everything; a time for war, and a time for peace (vv. 1, 8). So, just like we know what to do in times of war and hardship, we need to know what to do in times of peace. Everyone wants to know what to do when things are going bad. The internet is flooded with information like "How to trust God in hard times?" or "How to have peace in difficult circumstances?" But hardly anyone is willing to write a blog about what do to when life is not in chaos.

In Judges 10 Israel enjoys peace and then plunges into apostasy. It seems that in times of peace, God's

people tend to coast. We forget about the goodness and deliverance of God. Instead of enjoying the good seasons, we squander them. Instead of preparing for the future, we adopt the epicurean philosophy of *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 COR 15:32).

Here are some suggestions to help us steward and not squander the seasons of peace the LORD provides: First, enjoy the good season. Life is hard, Satan hates you, spiritual warfare is real, and sin is pervasive. So, when God blesses you with a season of peace to enjoy — enjoy it. Don’t sit around waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop, as if God doesn’t have good intentions for you. One great tactic against Satan’s schemes is to purposely celebrate and enjoy the good that God has given you. In Ecclesiastes 9:7-10, Solomon encourages God’s people to not eat and drink like pagans, but to eat, drink, and enjoy God’s provisions like Christians. We don’t do this to escape, to get drunk, or to have a good time before getting back on the grind. We do so with clean purified hearts that are thankful to God so that whatever we do we glorify God (1 COR 10:31). Additionally, he says to enjoy intimacy with your spouse. So, in times of peace, celebrate and praise God by eating good food, drinking good drinks, hanging out with good friends, and enjoying the pleasure of your spouse.

Next, keep making disciples. Don’t stop telling others about Jesus, what he has done, and what he can do. Keep teaching others to obey Jesus. Help others navigate both the good seasons and the bad according to God’s Word. Until Jesus returns, we are to be making disciples who make disciples. Lastly, don’t forget about what God has done. If we would adopt these three rhythms, and stick to them even during the good seasons, the church of Jesus would be less likely to drift off in perpetual

rebellion. This is why we emphasize gathering to worship each Sunday — so that in good seasons or bad seasons we don't forget about who God is and what he has done. Furthermore, this is why we talk so frequently about focusing on continuing to discipline ourselves to follow Jesus, fight sin, and fulfill the mission Jesus gave us. What season are you in? Will you steward it, or squander it?

PERSONAL STUDY

1. In the few verses we have about Tola, how do we see God's goodness towards his people?

2. How might the detail of Jair's sons and donkeys indicate peace and rest among God's people?

3. How might you suggest one should steward their seasons of peace?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What type of season are you in?

2. Do you tend to draw near to God more or less when life is difficult? Why do you think that is so?

3. How can you create weekly rhythms of rest and enjoyment?

CH. 13

WHOSE APPROVAL ARE YOU SEEKING?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 11:1-40



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" - JUDGES 11:7

COMMENTARY

In Judges 11, we find another tragic story. Jephthah's story can serve as a case study for us. His upbringing was complicated; the events we are told in the early part of the chapter set the stage for the man he would become. Like many children who have a volatile upbringing, Jephthah became resourceful and opportunistic, but his motives came from an unhealthy place and led to some tragic choices. The story of Jephthah serves as a reminder that we need God to heal us from our past hurts, trauma, pain, and sins committed against us.

We are told two key things about Jephthah. First, he is a mighty warrior, and second, he is the son of a prostitute. He's a tough guy, a fighter and brawler whose mother makes a living through a less-than-ideal exchange system. Right off the bat, we see his home life is a bit turbulent. No woman chooses prostitution as a career path because she believes that is God's best for her. It's likely Jephthah's mother grew up in an environment of abuse, neglect, and betrayal. At some point in her life, she no longer saw herself with dignity and value other than what others were willing to pay for pleasure. This is a horrible place to be. My heart grieves that any woman would ever feel so degraded or hopeless that they would choose to sell their body for sex. An even worse alternative is that Jephthah's mother could have been trafficked, enslaved, and forced into prostitution.

Moreover, his father thought paying for sex on the side was a good time. That coupled with the fact that God's people were on another one of their apostasy-binges may suggest that this sexual encounter was quasi-religious. Back in chapter 10, we are told that the people of Israel had hooked up with the demonic gods of other nations and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Jephthah's conception was possibly a result of one of those pagan sex rituals.

To make matters worse, Jephthah's father had a wife who bore him two sons who didn't like Jephthah and kicked him out of the house so that he couldn't have any of his father's inheritance (JUDG 11:2-3). I can only imagine what this does to someone's self-esteem, self-image, and formation process as a young man. The result of his childhood trauma was he became a mafia-style gang leader. He gathered a group of outcasts and morally

empty men and became a renegade outlaw anti-hero type in his day (YOUNGER 2002, 249).

However, when it came time for war, the renegade warrior was now of value to the people who disowned him. When the elders of Gilead made their way out to Tob to convince Jephthah to lead the mission, they appealed to his desire for approval from his father and his family. All Jephthah wanted was to be wanted, to have a family, and to be among his people. Every young boy wants their father's approval, but Jephthah received the opposite. I imagine this is what led him to start a crew, so he could have his own people. Deep down he probably saw that as a counterfeit family, but it was better than nothing. So, when this opportunity arose to go back home and be the hero, it likely didn't take much to convince him. Still, Jephthah saw an opportunity to protect himself from his biological family, whom he struggled to trust, and negotiated himself a leadership position if he won the war (JUDG 11:10-11).

When it came time for war, "*the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah*" (v. 29). Meaning, that God was with him, his victory was secure, and all he needed to do was go out and fight and the LORD would grant him victory. One can understand Jephthah's frail faith, his distrust in people, and his distrust of God for all that he has been through. Additionally, one can imagine Jephthah remembering himself as the "innocent party in a dispute and found his rights disregarded by those who should have protected him" (WEBB 2015, 184). Jephthah, however, in a moment of distrust made this strange vow to God that if he won, he would sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house to the LORD (v. 31). We will find out later that it would be his only

daughter who would be the first to walk through the doors of his home to greet him from his victory.

The vow Jephthah made was completely unnecessary. Victory was already his. Additionally, following through with it wasn't going to honor the Lord who gave him victory. Human sacrifice is an abomination and is forbidden among God's people (LEV 18:21; 20:2; DEUT 12:31; 18:10; JER 19:5; EZEK 20:30-31; 23:37, 39). Thus, once Jephthah realized his daughter was the one, he was going to have to sacrifice, he should have abandoned it. *“Any vow that would end in sin was not binding; keeping it could not please God, and the Levitical laws provided for such instances (LEV 5:4-6).”* (ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTE ON JUDG 11:35).

It's one thing to understand how this whole saga unfolded, but it is another thing to learn from this tragic example. God wants to heal us of our past hurt, trauma, and sin committed against us. The Bible is clear that God is good and perfect in all his ways. He is sovereign over evil and often uses evil for good. Moreover, we as Christians have the promise that God will work all things out for the good of those who love the LORD and are called according to his purpose (DEUT 32:4; GEN 50:20; ROM 8:28). This doesn't mean the wrong done to us is suddenly okay, but it does mean we need healing and receive it in Jesus.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. How has your upbringing formed you into the person you are today?

2. Is there any sin you've committed or has been committed against you that has brought shame upon you?

3. How do you live in light of that?

4. Have you experienced healing from past trauma, hurt, or pain?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the family drama that can be perceived from Jephthah's family dynamics.

2. Have you ever sought approval from your friend group? Why?

3. What seems to drive Jephthah?

4. How might Jephthah's life have been helped if he found this identity and contentment in the God of the Bible?

CH. 14

WHAT DOES CONFLICT REVEAL?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 12:1-15



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

*Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then
Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried
in his city in Gilead.* - JUDGES 12:7

COMMENTARY

Conflict is often revealing. It exposes both the good and the bad, your strengths and weaknesses. Our senses become heightened, so what is strong becomes stronger, and what is weak becomes more obvious. Conflict is inevitable. The question is not whether you will experience conflict, but rather what will be exposed, and will you repent, learn, and grow where you can?

In the present day, people tend toward extremes. You have people looking for a fight, for a conflict, or an opportunity to butt heads. Others are so conflict-adverse that their whole life is usually full of compromise. They are always trying to take the path of least resistance, making sure no one is hurt

or offended and that no conflict ever arises. The problem is that we can't avoid conflict forever, so we need to learn how to navigate it in a way that brings honor to Jesus. For those looking for a fight, there will always be one to be found, but your family and friends may not be. No one wants to be around someone who is always combative, defensive, or argumentative. It's exhausting. There are a variety of ways these two tendencies can play out where we either grow angrier or hide and grow more callous. Neither of those are options for Christians.

We see this dynamic at work in the closing of Jephthah's life. His life has been riddled with conflict. We've seen some great successes and catastrophic failures. In this last chapter of his recorded life, we see a conflict again arise, this time between him and the tribe of Ephraim. Both Jephthah and Ephraim are a part of Israel, God's chosen people. Today, this would be like conflict arising between Christians, or between denominational tribes. Ephraim is upset with Jephthah because Jephthah didn't acknowledge their importance as a major tribe in Israel by involving them in the fight against Ammon (WEBB 2015, 186).

This conflict revealed some of Jephthah's positive leadership skills. He didn't back down like a coward, instead, he rose to the occasion as a warrior and protector. Neither did he allow the Ephraimites to bully him. However, while all of these are noble qualities, the weaknesses that were exposed overshadow much of the heroism. When faced with conflict with the Ephraimites, Jephthah almost immediately reverts to defensive tribalism.

He says, *"I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from*

their hand” (JUDG 12:2). In effect, he says, “*You didn’t help us, so we had to defend ourselves.*” Though true, Jephthah’s bitterness over this slight resulted in the need to prove himself and distance himself from being in close relation with the Ephraimites. He has drawn tribal lines even though they are both a part of the larger family of God. This conflict exposed Jephthah’s insecurities and self-interest. Which, as we saw in the previous chapters, has been something that he felt like he needed to protect from early childhood. Like Jephthah, our pain, our sin, our selfishness, our bitterness, etc., is often uncovered when conflict arises. Rather than shoving our emotions down and burying them, or being ruled by them, we should see these opportunities to grow in holiness.

To grow in holiness is to grow in Christlikeness. Therefore, we must see the opportunities that arise in conflict as opportunities to kill sin. Additionally, this is an opportunity to remember and believe the gospel. To kill sin, we must not be afraid of conflict, because sin is at war with us regardless of external circumstances. It’s an internal, private conflict that becomes external and public when outside forces act upon us. Christians need to be acquainted with the areas in their lives where they are prone to sin, especially when conflict arises. Not so we can merely modify our behavior, but rather put to death the death of the body and live (ROM 8:13).

As the great Puritan preacher John Owen taught, you must kill sin, or it will kill you. We need to know why we gravitate toward certain sins. We need to recognize what is being exposed or revealed when we are met with a difficult task, situation, or person. It was likely that Jephthah couldn’t see within himself as easily as we can see in hindsight when reading the record of his life and mission.

This is why we as Christians need trusted, godly people in our lives to help expose the blind spots, who walk with us in both the good seasons and in the challenging times. Cultivating strong, formative Christian relationships can and will help facilitate this fight to grow in Christlikeness and enjoy the abundant life Jesus offers in the gospel.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Read Romans 8:13 & Ephesians 6:10-20.

2. How are we to fight sin?

3. Do you have strong formative Christian friendships?

4. What steps do you need to take to pursue them?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you tend to run from or toward conflict? Why?

2. How have you seen conflict bring out the best and worst in you?

3. What do you do when you see your sin exposed?

CH. 15

WHY SO MUCH ABOUT SAMSON?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 13:1-25



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

“... for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” - JUDGES 13:5

COMMENTARY

Samson is probably the most famous of all the judges for his strength, his long hair, and his unique ability to be sexually seduced and have his eyes gouged out. The story of Samson is unique from many of the other judges, especially in the account preceding his birth. Readers should be thinking while reading it, “This one is different,” which should lead us to ask, “Why is there so much detail about Samson?” Samson’s origin story is communicated intentionally, but why?

First, Jesus showed up. As we’ve discussed before, the angel of the LORD is the pre-incarnate Christ.

God's people have again done evil in the sight of the LORD and have been given over to the Philistines for forty years of punishment (JUDG 13:1). Jesus showed up and spoke to Samson's mom, the wife of a man named Manoah. She was barren and had no children. Jesus told her that she would indeed get pregnant and have a son. He then told her how she was to raise him and what diet and hairstyle he should have because her son had a unique call on his life and had been set apart by God to deliver God's people from the Philistines. Manoah, upon hearing from his wife what happened, immediately went to God in prayer to ask for confirmation regarding what he had heard from his wife. Jesus came back and confirmed everything to both Manoah and his wife, and then disappeared in a flame of fire (v. 20), leaving Manoah and his wife with only one response: worship!

The original Hebrew audience would have picked up that this promised deliverer is going to come from the womb of a barren woman. Not only is this miraculous but also a reminder of how their faith began. Sarah, the husband of Abraham, the first patriarch of Israel, was promised a son though she was barren (GEN 18:10). God didn't just promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, but through this son would come a nation, a promised land, and ultimately a deliverer. Here in the book of Judges, they are experientially living the fulfillment of that promise. Today's audience should also have in mind Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. Elizabeth was another barren woman who was to have a son who would have a weird diet and a unique call from God on his life.

Before the birth of both Samson and John the Baptist, the parents were told that these boys were

not to drink wine or strong drink to be set apart for the LORD (LUKE 1:15; JUDG 13:5). Luke mentions John being born with the Holy Spirit, and the book of Judges records that the Spirit of the LORD stirred Samson (JUDG 13:25). Both figures point to the greatest of them all, the Messiah, the true deliverer.

The command to abstain from alcohol was part of a Nazirite vow, the details of which are recorded in Numbers 6:1-22. The vow was marked by the observer avoiding cutting their hair, eating any product made from grapes (wine or strong drink), and contact with any dead body. The Nazirites were to be dedicated to the LORD. If God's people during the Old Testament wanted to set aside a temporary time to dedicate themselves to the LORD by way of the Nazirite vow, they would follow what is prescribed in Numbers 6:1-22. There were only a few people who were set apart by God to be lifelong Nazirites. Those men were Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist (ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTE NUMBERS 6:1-21 RULES OF NAZIRITE).

It's important to see how Samson's story starts, to meditate on the significance of his origin story compared to similar figures in the Bible. It is also important for us to know the requirements of the Nazirite vow because as we will soon find out, Samson breaks them all. Before we get to the rest of Samson's saga, let us meditate on the start. Let us look at his parents, their commitment, and their seeking of the LORD. Let us look at the uniqueness of the call of this delivery, and let us be encouraged, because it will get messy quickly, and end in a very "Book of Judges" kind of way.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Why do you think so much detail is given about Samson?

2. What do you think is trying to be communicated here in the account preceding his birth?

3. How does Samson's beginning differ from the other judges?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you observe from Samson's mother? What can you learn from her?

2. What do you observe from Samson's father? What can you learn from him?

3. In what ways do Christian parents seek to set their kids apart for the LORD?

4. In v. 25 it says that the Spirit of the LORD began to stir Samson. How has the Spirit stirred in you?

CH. 16

YOUR WAY OR GOD'S WAY?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 14:1–20



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

... But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.” -JUDGES 14:3

COMMENTARY

The first recorded words out of Samson’s mouth were, “Mom and Dad, I want to sleep with the enemy, can you help make that happen?” (JUDG 14:2, PARAPHRASED). This was certainly a shock to his family, and his godly parents objected to this idea.

Remember that Samson is called by God to deliver his people from the Philistines. However, Israel did not ask for deliverance. They were not repenting from their sin and crying out for help like they had before. Israel, God’s chosen people, were content not choosing, worshiping, or obeying God in any way. As we see Samson’s myriad of foolish decisions like his opening line, just remember that “Samson is like all of Israel, doing what is right in his own eyes. His life illustrates what this mindset looks like. Like

Samson, Israel is supposed to be set apart as holy to [God]. Like Israel pursuing foreign deities, Samson pursues Philistine beauties” (SCHWAB 2011, 161).

Samson negatively embodied and represented Israel. They were called to be set apart from the surrounding nations, but sadly, like many Christians today, they looked just like the world around them. However, God is faithful to his promises and works through the destructive behavior of his people. In many ways, Samson’s life is not worthy of imitation. Just because God uses guys like Samson, doesn’t mean he applauds his waywardness.

In the last chapter, we were told that Samson was to be a Nazirite from birth, meaning he was set apart for lifelong service to the LORD and this was symbolized in specific lifestyle observances. He could not cut his hair, eat or drink any product made from grapes (like wine), or come into contact with any dead body or carcasses. However, we immediately see him breaking this vow and hiding it from his parents. His parents were godly leadership examples in his life. God had tasked them with raising this child a certain way; they were responsible. Moreover, the fifth commandment is to honor your father and mother, which Samson broke. Samson knew he was breaking his vow to God, and he didn’t want his parents to know. It’s a temptation for every young child, to do what is right in their own eyes and hide it from mom and dad. Samson gave into the temptation and the dominos began to fall on the path to his demise.

Samson’s first temptation was to seek after a woman he was forbidden to marry. Samson is “stupid for sex” so he proceeds to marry her anyway. The event surrounding the wedding shows Samson’s trend

toward deviance. He encountered a roaring lion in a vineyard that he killed by tearing it in two with his bare hands. Why was the Nazirite in a vineyard if he couldn't drink wine or eat grapes? He was there in preparation to marry this woman he shouldn't be marrying. When this roaring lion showed up in the vineyard, a wise person might have thought, "Hey, I probably shouldn't be here." But, like Israel, rather than repentance, Samson chose to proceed forward with what he felt was right in his own sight. Perhaps worse, Samson used the gifts given to him by God to sin. He used the strength God had given him through the power of the Holy Spirit to kill this lion with ease. A few days later, he went to receive this Philistine woman as his wife and made a pit stop by the lion's carcass. Bees had formed a hive inside the dead lion, and Samson dipped his hand into the dead beast to eat some honey. So much for not being around or touching anything dead.

At the wedding, or as one commentator notes, "the drinking party" (SCHWAB 2011, 161), Samson stirred up conflict with his wife's Philistine kinsmen, resulting in both the betrayal of his wife and the best man in his wedding. While in bed, Samson's new wife manipulated him into telling her information that she then turned around and told Samson's rivals. This angered Samson, which resulted in him striking down thirty men, taking their stuff, and then paying off the Philistines. The scene ends with his wife running off with his best man and Samson having "hot anger" heading back to his parent's house.

Woven throughout this narrative is that God is at work behind the scenes. What we see quickly with Samson is that the strength of God is on display in the incredible weakness of God's servant in keeping his commitment to the LORD.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Have you ever been tempted to pursue something knowing it was forbidden by God? Why?

2. Samson breaks his vow in several ways. How have you ever broken your commitments to God? How and why?

3. Have you ever been tempted to hide your sin from those who care about you?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you sometimes choose to do what is right in your own eyes, rather than God's?

2. What is Samson's weakness? Is pride or arrogance a part of his weakness?

3. What are your weaknesses?

4. How does hiding our sin make things worse?

CH.17

HOW DO YOU PROCESS YOUR FEELINGS EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCES?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 15:1-20



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

... Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. - JUDGES 15:14

COMMENTARY

Once again, we find Samson being led by his passions and doing what is right in his sight. The last chapter ended with Samson leaving his wedding angry without his wife to go back to his parents' house. This is the exact opposite of God's design: *"Man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (GEN 2:24). Samson didn't sleep with his wife, nor leave his father and mother. This must be the worst ending to a wedding in all human history. For those readers with a hot

temper, you should take note. Especially husbands, how many times has your tempter led you to miss out on a proper application of Proverbs 5:18-19?

Once Samson's anger had subsided, he came looking for makeup sex. However, the problem was that his wife was now with another dude, the best man from his wedding. Samson didn't know that at first. He showed up requesting intimacy with his wife, but his father-in-law prohibited him because he had already given his daughter to Samson's best man. At this point, the story of Samson has officially become a Jerry Springer episode. Imagine having such a treacherous father-in-law and a disloyal best man!

It's not the first time we've seen one of God's chosen men get manipulated by his father-in-law (GEN 29:21-30). Jacob loved Rachel and wanted to marry her, not her sister. Likewise, Samson knew who he wanted to marry, so when his father-in-law offered him the sister of his original wife, Samson was furious. Samson had spent time pursuing his wife, or at least time assessing that she was the woman he wanted. In Judges 14 we are told multiple times that Samson believed this woman was right for him (JUDG 14:3, 7). Here Samson's selfishness had gotten the best of him and in anger, he abandoned his wife on his wedding night. He wanted to make up, but she was no longer waiting on him. Time and time again we see Samson only wants what he wants when he wants it. This is a portrayal of how Israel behaved in relation to God.

Samson is understandably angry. We know he is angry at his father-in-law, but he is likely frustrated with himself. His response was to inflict harm on his father-in-law. Samson believed

he was justified in attacking the Philistines. He seemed to imply that his last attempt to stir conflict with the Philistines wasn't done in good faith, but this one would be different (v. 3).

The timing is key for the wildfire Samson was planning. We are told at the beginning of the chapter that it's harvest season, so destroying the Philistines' crops now would be devastating for them. This was exactly Samson's goal. They stole his wife, now he was going to burn down their livelihood, food supply, and income-producing crops. Samson was both resourceful and successful. He first caught 300 foxes and then tied lit torches to their tails before setting them loose in the Philistines' grain fields and olive orchards (vv. 4-5).

The Philistines who ruled over Israel at the time, go on the offensive to hunt for Samson. Members from the tribe of Judah and other fellow Israelites turned on Samson to keep the peace with their oppressive enemy. Instead of coming to Samson's defense, the men of Judah bound Samson's hands together and handed him over to the Philistines. However, God used this moment to deliver the Philistines into Samson's hands. The Spirit of God empowered Samson with tremendous strength to break free from the ropes that bound his hands. He then picked up a donkey's jawbone and slaughtered 1,000 men. It is a crazy feat showing the miraculous hand of God upon the situation to deliver his people just as he had promised. It further reveals that Samson still cares little about his Nazirite vow by using the jawbone of a dead donkey.

Throughout the story of Samson, God was working behind the scenes to wield the deliverance of his people. His people didn't ask

for it, but God wanted it. Samson was God's chosen instrument to bring about this victory.

There are some positives about Samson. After this epic victory, Samson was emotional and thirsty, so he went to God in prayer. "It has been observed that of the judges, only Samson has such a vital and personal relationship with God" (SCHWAB 2011, 165). In his prayer, Samson acknowledged that God was the one who delivered his people and presented his request for water to God (v. 18). Samson was an emotional train wreck who just needed a snack and a nap to restore his strength (v. 19). God graciously responded and provided a place for him to get water.

Many Christians' lives look more like Samson's failings than they will want to admit, and sometimes they allow guilt and shame to rule them. Samson doesn't seem to be ruled by guilt and shame. Perhaps, he's a bit of a forerunner to the renegade reformer Martin Luther who said, "Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong [or sin boldly], but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world" (REEVES, THE GOSPEL COALITION. 2016). We see a lot of what Samson did wrong, yet he didn't wallow in his sin but ran to the LORD for renewal (v. 19).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. God is accomplishing his plan through Samson, yet Samson is still responsible for his sin and the consequences that follow. What consequences of sin have you experienced? What have you learned?

2. Samson is easily entangled in all sorts of temptations. How have you been tempted?

3. Do you have a plan of action for when various temptations arise?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Samson's story teach us about being unequally yoked?

2. How do you respond when someone sins against you?

3. Where do you run when you are aware of your sins and shortcomings?

4. Do you regularly run to God for refreshment?

CH. 18

WHO WILL YOU SERVE CULTURE OR CHRIST?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 16:1-22



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man." - JUDGES 16:17

COMMENTARY

Samson is now in a full downward spiral as we enter the most familiar passage for modern readers in the Book of Judges. Here we will discuss sex, submission to God, and the consequences of continually choosing to do what is right in our own sight, rather than God's.

Sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed fully and freely in the context of marriage. The Bible teaches that marriage is for one man and one

woman for one lifetime. It is not to be entered in unadvisedly, lightly, or merely to satisfy physical desires. Instead, it should be done prayerfully, with careful thought, and with reverence to God, thoroughly considering the purpose for which marriage exists— namely to make much of Jesus by being a picture of the union between Christ and his church, and for mutual flourishing.

Sex and marriage were both God's ideas. Sin has distorted both and we live in the consequences and results of what it looks like to walk away from God's design. Samson was showing that the god he worshiped and obeyed was sex and not the LORD. I'm sure if asked, he would have said, "Obviously, I love and worship the LORD." But we see that he is controlled by lust and not the lordship of God Almighty. It is with this motivation that Samson sought a wife to marry (JUDG 14:1-5). The problem was not the context for him to enjoy sex, but his misunderstanding of marriage altogether.

Marriage is more than sex. Moreover, God commands his people to marry other believers (2 COR 6:14-18). Samson seemed to simply want sex, not to honor God in his marriage. We see this when he rejects the godly advice of his parents and seeks to marry the Philistine woman anyway. We saw in the last chapter that marriage didn't last through the honeymoon. Now, here in chapter 16, instead of enjoying sex in God's way, Samson just settled for paying for it. This is no different than watching porn and masturbating or hooking up with someone you met on an app. The sexual revolution of the 60s has made Samson-like "body counts" far more accessible and normal. It's expected in the modern dating scene that sex is an option at some point before marriage, even among Christians.

Samson has not only become a representative of Israel but also American Christianity.

We need a biblical sex ethic in the context of biblical marriage. Samson missed this entirely. He moved from an unequally yoked marriage to a prostitute, before he found the next woman he thought he loved, Delilah. Because Samson was ruled by sex and not the LORD, he would never enjoy sex as God intended. Nor will he ever enjoy marriage. The Bible says sex is a gift given by God to be initiated by both a husband and his wife (SONG 1:2; 2:3, 6; 4:5, 4:12-5:1; 6:13-7:9, 7:11-13). Sex is a gift of God for the creating of children (GEN 1:28). Sex is a gift from God for oneness between a husband and wife (GEN 2:24). God designed sex to aid in the process of intimacy and knowledge for married couples (GEN 4:1). Sex in the context of marriage offers protection from sin and the results of sin (1 COR 7:2-5). Lastly, God designed sex so that husbands and wives could comfort one another (2 SAM 12:24). Samson had opted out of God's design for marriage and sexual intimacy and found himself a woman, Delilah, who wanted to seduce, deceive, and destroy him. Satan has the same objective for you. Christians need to take heed of the rest of Samson's story.

Delilah ultimately succeeded in her plan to find out the source of Samson's strength. Samson knows that if he told her, she would likely cut his hair and he would "*be like any other man*" (JUDG 16:17). But why would Samson want that? Why would he desire to lose his strength? Up to this point, this is the only thing that God had given him that he had truly enjoyed. Therefore, it is telling when he is willing to give that up, revealing that his love for Delilah trumped his commitment to the LORD. This was consistent with Samson's choices so far:

he did what he wanted when he wanted to. He wanted to both please Delilah and get out of his vow to God. Samson enjoyed the gift of God, but he did not love the gift-giver with his whole heart. His lust had become too strong for him, and his hair points to this reality. Samson's strength is in his dedication to God. The Nazirite vow marked by his uncut hair represented this dedication, but it was never the source of his strength. God was his true source of strength. Instead of running to God for renewal like he did previously, he had been overcome by his own sinful and selfish desires.

Samson had fully succumbed, and both Israel at the time and many American Christians now have followed in his path. Samson carried on as if there were no real issue, and Christians today do the same. That did not turn out well for Samson. He was bound and overcome by the enemy, and they gouged out his eyes. What became obvious to Samson was that sin distorts our reality. It always over-promises and under-delivers. Sin blinds and keeps us distrusting God and his way (2 COR 4:4). Ultimately, sin enslaves. Let us examine and contrast the lordship of sin with the lordship of Christ. Choose today whom you will serve.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. In what ways are your desires congruent with the non-Christian world around you?

2. How do you, like Samson, negotiate with temptation?

3. How have you viewed sex in a way that is a distortion of God's design?

4. What does repentance look like for you in this area?

5. Do you view sex as a gift from God? Why or why not?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Examine Samson's life. What is at risk when we choose our way over God's way?

2. Every time Samson gave in to temptation, he seemed to become more trapped by it. Have you ever felt trapped and unable to overcome sin (anger, bitterness, approval of others, lust, pride, etc.)?

CH. 19

WILL YOU BE RULED BY SIN AND SHAME OR CHRIST'S VICTORY?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 16:23–31



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

*Then Samson called to the LORD and said,
“O Lord GOD, please remember me and please
strengthen me only this once...”* - JUDGES 16:28

COMMENTARY

As the story of Samson ends, we find him completely humiliated. He has lost his strength, his dignity, and even his eyes. His life began with a great call from God, but he lost his way. Here we find him at rock bottom. He has nothing left. Sex has failed him. Women have failed him. His friends have failed him. His nation has failed him. The desires of his heart have failed him. He is at the lowest of lows. Samson has certainly enjoyed moments of being used by God, but those days seem to be long gone now.

Have you ever felt this way? Humiliated by your choices and suffering the consequences? Do you remember the days when you were used by God but now because of your continual selfish pursuits they are merely a memory? Have you ever felt depressed, empty, useless, and far from God? If so, then you know in part how Samson must have felt.

To add insult to injury, Samson was paraded out in front of the drunk Philistines to be laughed at for their entertainment. Samson, the brave, strong, warrior was now the frail, weak, blind slave. The Philistines took this to mean that their god was better than Samson's God. "*Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand,*" they said while worshiping their demon god Dagon (JUDG 16:23). But the story is not over until the LORD says so.

I pray that those words will lighten your soul and give rise to anticipation that our story too is not yet done. What looks like defeat is often the setup for a great victory. We've seen this countless times in the book of Judges, moreover, as Christians we see this exemplified in the resurrection of Jesus. So, how will Samson finish his life?

Repentance. This is where everything changed for Samson. This is where everything can change for you too. No matter where you are at or what you have gone through, turn and trust Jesus. "*Then Samson called to the LORD and said, 'O Lord GOD, please remember me...'*"(v. 28). Samson had nowhere to turn, and no strength left in his hands. All he had was the memory of the presence of God, and so he asked that God remember him. It's as if he is saying, "Remember why you made me. Remember what you told my parents. Remember your promise, O God. I know, I have abandoned

you. I have forsaken you. I have betrayed you. I have despised my commitment to you. I have rejected your ways in pursuit of my own. But remember me, forgive me, and help me. These people mock you, deny you, and hurl insults at you. I need you. They need you. Show yourself mighty, God! Use me one more time, and this time I don't want any glory. All glory is yours. Save me and your people."

Samson was strengthened one last time by God, but this time was different. Samson acknowledged his complete dependence on God. The strength and power of God come upon Samson, and he pulled the pillars of the demon temple down, killing 3,000 Philistines. Samson's greatest and last victory comes at his greatest point of humility. Things might not have turned out like we would have thought in the beginning, but God was faithful to the promise he made to Samson's parents. God had indeed raised Samson to deliver his people from the Philistines. God does use crooked sticks to draw straight lines.

In the end, this is a great reminder that God is always faithful to his promises. We would do well trusting him and walking in obedience. God will not be mocked but will always lay waste to his enemies. Don't mock God, don't test God, but trust God, obey God, and surrender to God. In the end, I hope we take God seriously. I pray we wouldn't flirt with sin, but fight sin, not to earn God's love but because we already have it. This was something Samson learned far too late.

For those who remain discouraged, because, like Samson, you have found yourself off course and far from God, I want you to see that Samson didn't have to earn his way back to God. He simply cried out to him from a genuine and humble heart. There

is far more mercy and grace in Jesus than sin in you. Samson died delivering Israel. Jesus died on the cross in your place for your sin to deliver you. Samson is dead, but Jesus is alive. Samson's victory points us to a greater victory, the victory we need and have in Christ. We all are like Samson bound and chained to sin and need deliverance. Jesus has died to set us free, he has risen victorious, giving us access to that freedom now. Will you walk in the freedom that is in Christ? No matter where you are, God is not done with you. Surrender to him. Trust in him and let him write and rewrite your story.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. What areas of your life are you ashamed of?

2. Have you ever cried out to God in surrender, confession, and repentance?

3. What might that look like? Will you take time this week to cry out to God?

4. Read Matthew 5:29. Combined with the story of Samson, how important is it to fight sin and temptation?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has the story of Samson served as a warning and encouragement to you?

2. Are you currently living in light of Christ's victory, or living in shame because of sin?

3. What might it look like to walk in the victory Christ provided?

4. What about God do you need to remember today?

NOTES

≡ CH. 20

WILL WE CONTINUE DOING WHAT RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES?



SCRIPTURE TO READ:

Judges 17:1-13



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. - JUDGES 17:6

COMMENTARY

Throughout the book of Judges, we've seen the steady decline of Israel's faith. At this point, the steady degradation has accelerated, and Israel is in a complete moral free fall. Chapter 17 picks up with a man named Micah and his mother. Though this woman is never named, some commentators believe this woman could be Delilah. She had 1,100 pieces of silver that were stolen from her by her son. This is the same amount of silver that was offered to Delilah for the betrayal of Samson to the Philistines (JUDG 16:5). We don't know for sure if this is her or not, but it seems possible seeing that the author of

Judges uses other methods of prophetic jest in this chapter. I will address that momentarily, but first, let's make sure we understand what is happening.

Micah stole his mother's money, and the reader isn't told why. It's almost like he stole it just because he could. This is what I imagine life was like in Portland's CHAZ (CAPITOL HILL AUTONOMOUS ZONE) during the 2020 pandemic. Americans were living the book of Judges in real-time. The author of Judges keeps reminding the reader that the moral and spiritual chaos that we see taking over the culture in the Book of Judges is because people kept doing whatever they wanted (JUDG 17:6). They were stealing, looting, and rioting because autonomy and anarchy are what accompanies a commitment to that sort of ethic. They refused to submit to God, his Word, his will, or his ways. They didn't want any real leadership because they despised submitting to anyone and hated law and order. This same rebellion against God's law is still alive in our day through an anti-Christian and neo-progressive spirit, and the results are a world of chaos.

Many Christians have adopted the ideology of our disintegrating culture just like Micah in Judges 17. Upon hearing that his mom had conjured a curse upon the person who stole her money, he gave it back to her. The reader shouldn't take this as a noble act of godly repentance, because it was a counterfeit religion. Furthermore, upon giving the money back, Micah's mother commissioned the construction of an idol for worship. Micah fulfilled her request. We are then told that this type of idolatry was a normal part of his lifestyle. He had a shrine, an ephod, and household gods. He even ordained one of his sons as a quasi-priest (JUDG 17:5).

This is where God's prophetic creativity through the author of Judges is shown. In English, the name Micah remains consistent throughout the narrative. In the original Hebrew, the name used when he is introduced and spoken of in the first few verses is Mikayahu. This name means "Who is like Yahweh?, with the implied meaning that there is none like Yahweh" (SCHWAB 2011, 183). Then, after the author reveals the depths of Micah's idolatry, he calls him Mika (Hebrew) for the rest of the account. The Holy Spirit, through the author of Judges, took the liberty of removing God from Micah's name because he profaned the name of God. This is not a name change by Micah, but an indication by the author that he was an apostate. Micah's actions continued to prove this to be true.

I think this is phenomenally clever. It's a tactic I adopted with one of my non-Christian friends whose name was, ironically, Christian. One day he told me that Islam and Christianity taught the same thing and that all religions lead to God in their own way. After explaining how that's not what Jesus taught, and sharing the gospel with him, I stopped calling him Christian from that day forward. I told him, "Until you trust Jesus exclusively for your salvation and become an actual Christian, I'll call you Chris." There were no hard feelings, and I wasn't trying to be mean. I simply wanted to remind him that his parents gave him this name for a reason. The name Christian means "follower of Christ." I told him that his parents wanted him to follow Christ, and so did I. Some will think this was mean and dishonoring, but the author of Judges would disagree with you. This is precisely why he changed Micah's name in the story. It's far more dishonoring to claim the name of Christ and deny him by willfully worshiping

the cultural idols that surround you. Just because you call yourself a Christian doesn't mean you are. If you claim to be a Christian, follow Jesus.

It may be that modern Christianity has become so soft that Christians are more offended by the Bible than they are by the obvious demonic rebellion happening all around them, or worse, the sin dwelling within them. At the close of his letter to the Corinthians (a New Testament church veering toward progressive apostasy), the apostle Paul gives them a strong word that probably seems harsh and unfair to many modern Christians. *“If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed”* (1 COR 16:22). This should serve as a “reminder of the exclusiveness and zeal that characterized the early church’s mission” a zeal that Israel has lost in day of Judges, and one that we seem to have lost in our day too (BLOMBERG 1994, 342).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. How does the author of Judges want you to view the statement, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”?

2. Do you think Israel needed a king? What kind of king do you think they needed?

3. Is there anything about Micah and his relationship with his mother that stands out to you or challenges your attitude toward your parents?

4. In what ways do you tend to disregard God's Word, will, or ways?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Micah and his relationship with his mother. In what ways did Micah dishonor his mother and the LORD?

2. In what ways do you struggle to honor your father or mother?

3. We are tempted to think that doing whatever is right in our own eyes is best. What does the book of Judges show us is the result of that belief?

CH. 21

WILL BLENDING RELIGIONS RUIN GOD'S PEOPLE?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 18:1–31



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

In those days there was no king in Israel... -JUDGES 18:1

COMMENTARY

There are no heroes in this chapter, only fools. The chapter opens again by pointing to the reality that there was no king in Israel. They had no leader, no deliverer, and no more judges coming. It's not that God had abandoned his people, but rather he has allowed us to see what comes of a nation that forsakes the God of the Bible for several generations. The three main characters in Israel in this portion of the narrative are the Danites, Micah, and the Levite. We met Micah and the unnamed Levite in the last chapter. Micah had forsaken the LORD for idols and false gods and the Levite had taken a job working for Micah. God is watching all of that unfold in his name, but there is no indication of his approval.

The Danites were seeking territory for themselves after they were unable to take possession of the land (JUDG 1:34). Dan was one of six tribes of the Israelites who turned to the Baals, the gods of the culture around them, and forsook the Lord. Their willful disobedience was a part of their tragic failure to obtain their position in the land of promise. Now, time had gone on, generations had come and gone, and they still had no land. They were a people who were trained not in the ways of the LORD, but of the culture. This becomes even more clear by their actions. The entire narrative in chapter 18 is about the land the tribe of Dan will finally obtain. However, they do not obtain it by way of courageous obedience to God, but by cowardice and apostasy.

The Danites found a venerable people, who were minding their own business, away from everyone, and decided they wanted to steal their land for their own (JUDG 18:10). What makes this such a cowardly endeavor is that they had first chickened out against the Amorites and so now they wanted an easier fight. In the first chapter of Judges, they were commanded to take a land God had promised, but they willfully rebelled. Now they were desiring to take this new land that God hadn't promised. To keep the appearance of godliness, they asked the apostate Levite in Micah's house to see if the Lord was on their side. This half-baked priest gave them a vague word from the LORD, "*Go in peace... God sees you...*" (v. 6). Of course, God sees them; he sees everything. It doesn't mean he approves. This is what false teachers who still have pulpits in churches are like. They espouse vague biblical truths but with no real contextual application. The Danites succeeded in their conquest and then stole the idols from Micah and the Levite he hired. This further emphasized

the degradation of the Danites. Cowards in war, thieves in conquests, and idolaters at heart.

Micah first stole money from his mother, but now he is on the receiving end of lawlessness when his idols and hired Levite are stolen by the Danites. Rather than seeing the loss as a wake-up call to repentance, Micah chased after the Danites. He confronted them but was bullied out of any real action or retaliation. The last thing we see of Micah is him asking the question, *“What’s left for me?”* while hanging his head and heading home without his false gods (vv. 23-26). “Once his religious items were stolen, Micah had nothing left... this is idolatry in a nutshell” (SCHWAB 2011, 188). Micah felt helpless, and that’s the big takeaway: idols will always fail you! What Micah saw as a tragic loss could have been one of the greatest blessings of his life. Unfortunately, we don’t see anything more of his life. It serves as a reminder to any Christian who has had their idols stripped from them not to mourn their loss, but instead to seize the opportunity for repentance.

The last representative of Israel in this story is the Levite. In our modern context, we should think of this guy as a young seminary grad who wants to be a pastor but doesn’t currently have a calling in his life. He has a degree but doesn’t have any conviction or character for the job. Therefore, no one will hire him but the progressive false church down the street. They’ll give him a pulpit, and a salary, but he is no pastor. He is a puppeteer and a fulfillment of 2 Timothy 4:3, *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...”*

It’s this same type of self-serving pursuit that made the Levite so easily convinced to join the Danites.

They offered him a bigger platform, and he gladly took his new assignment all while watching his boss get plundered. At the very end of the chapter, we finally get the Levite's name (Jonathan) and he is from Moses' family. This is to signify to the reader that apostasy has even reached the house of Moses, the great leader of Israel, who led God's people out of idolatry and Egyptian slavery.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. How do we see the blending of religions ruin God's people?

2. Why do you think the Danites wanted Micah's idols?

3. What idols are you still holding on to? Why won't you let them go?

4. How do we see God's judgment on display in this chapter?

**GROUP/FAMILY
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Once Micah's idols were stolen, he felt like he had nothing left. When have you ever felt that way?

2. What idols have failed you in your lifetime? Did you learn and repent? Why or why not?

3. At the end of the chapter we find out that this apostate-priest is related to Moses. How many generations does it take to go from faith to apostasy?

4. In what ways does this chapter reveal the judgment of God towards false worship?

NOTES

CH. 22

WHERE ARE THE MEN?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 19:1–30



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

“Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak.” - JUDGES 19:30

COMMENTARY

We’ve read about the absence of a king in chapters 17, 18, and now in 19. Without a God-honoring head of state, we should anticipate things going bad. This chapter is horrific. It serves as a warning to every generation of what human depravity looks like. If sin isn’t restrained, the results will be like what we see take place here in Judges 19.

As we read, let us pray that the Holy Spirit would speak through his Word and grant us a sober and somber understanding of the text, of sin, and its effects.

The story begins with another unnamed Levite in the hill country of Ephraim (JUDG 19:1). The Levites

were the Old Testament pastors. This Levite doesn't seem to be as ambitious for a pastorate as Micah's in the previous chapter, but he is ambitious for sex. The text says he takes for himself a concubine (v. 1). While there is some confusion among commentators about what exactly is going on in the first three verses, we can be sure that this Old Testament pastor is a disqualified piece of work.

What makes the origins of this story a bit confusing is the fact that the same woman is called both the concubine and the wife of the Levite. The text says the Levite, "*took to himself a concubine*" and that she "*was unfaithful to him*" (vv. 1-2). The language "took for himself" is congruent with the Old Testament language of betrothal and marriage. We are also told in v. 3 that the Levite was her husband. If she was his wife, why was she also called his concubine? None of the answers reveal anything pleasant for the Levite. She was either someone else's concubine and the Levite took her to be his wife, making him an adulterer and thief, or he merely saw his wife as one would see a concubine (only good for sex) and not as a companion, friend, or spouse.

The third possibility is that he was already married, but now has a second wife that he took along with him just for sex. All of these options make him out to be a perverted pastor, or whatever the Hebrew word for scumbag is.

Another confusing point of contention is her "unfaithfulness to him." Some commentators see this simply as it reads, that she had sex with another man. But there remains a darker possibility. One translation depicts her running angrily away to her father's house (SCHWAB 2011, 200). Why would she run angrily? One commentator "suggests

that verse 2 should be read, 'And his concubine whored for him.' — i.e., he was pimping her, until she got fed up, left him, and [left] to her father" (SCHWAB 2011, 200). While some of the exact details may be unclear, what is crystal clear is that this marriage is in chaos. Four months after she ran away, the Levite went to make up with his wife and get her back.

He successfully got his wife back from her father's house and they set off on their journey home. As it was getting dark, they stopped in a place called Gibeah, which belonged to the people of the tribe of Benjamin, to spend the night (JUDG 19:14). They didn't have a place to stay so they decided to stay in the city's town square. However, this wasn't a good idea. Concerned for their safety, an old man offered them a place to stay with provisions at his house so that they didn't have to be in the town square.

Later in the night, the men of the city showed up at the old man's door. They are described as "worthless fellows." They surrounded the house and demanded the old man bring out the men of the house so they could have sex with them (v. 22). This is a repeat of what happened in the city of Sodom in Genesis 19:5. Sodom was a demonic, pagan place, but Gibeah is in the land of Benjamin — these are God's people. Their rebellion from God has resulted in them becoming the spitting image of the Sodom of old, and of the demonic sex-crazed nations currently in the culture around them. Moreover, the pastor in this story is silent and the old man proves himself to be a worthless man too.

There are no good guys in this story. The old man forbade them from raping the Levite but offered them his virgin daughter and the Levite's wife. The Levite was a coward of a pastor and a spineless

and despicable husband. He is silent the entire time this chaos is going on. The old man was a sorry version of a father for offering his daughter to these deplorable men. I imagine both women were terrified and screaming. In the narrative, it seems like maybe the old man pulled his daughter back and they hunkered down in the home. However, the men of the city persisted and so the Levite in selfish haste threw his wife out to the mob.

The result was the men of the city raped and killed the Levite's wife. Rather than take any action against the men of the city, mourn the loss of his wife, have a funeral, or repent before God — he cut up his wife into pieces like a psychopath and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel (JUDG 19:29). It's hard to comprehend the depravity of this scene, but this is what apostasy will look like if there is not a revival in our land. This is what happens when we don't repent of sin, worship Jesus, and teach the next generation to do the same. This horrific, graphic, and disgusting scene is tragic, and a glimpse of what our land is becoming. The men in this chapter are some of the vilest and deplorable of all men. Passive men give way to men like this. Our land is full of passive men. We need godly men.

PERSONAL STUDY

1. We take sexual exploitation seriously. If you have experienced it, or know someone who has, consider talking to someone about it.

2. How is Gibeah like Sodom in Genesis 19?

3. Is your home a place of safety? Why or why not?

4. What does this chapter tell us about the depravity of man?

5. Men, how will you lead the next generation to bless women and children?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is each person “doing what is right in their own sight” in this chapter?

2. What happens to a culture when men don't lead according to God's Word, will, and ways?

3. How do you see our culture going down the path of Judges 19?

4. Discuss what a godly man should have done at every point in this story.

5. Will you commit to being that kind of man and training the next generation of Christian men?

NOTES

CH. 23

WILL YOU CONTEND FOR YOUR FAITH OR COMPROMISE YOUR FAITH?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 20:1–48



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.” But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel. - JUDGES 20:12-13

COMMENTARY

Word spread of the atrocities that transpired in Gibeah, as the unnamed Levite sent his graphic message throughout the land. As a result, the men of Israel rose against the men of Benjamin. Before they approached the people of the tribe of Benjamin, they sought to confirm the details of the events from the Levite.

While this chapter begins with quite a heroic feel by the men of Israel, the testimony of the Levite is wildly distorted from the details given to us in chapter 19. In the original account, we are told “worthless fellows” were the rapist-criminals (JUDG 19:22). The original Hebrew word is, Belial, which means wicked, evil, naughty, lawless, ungodly men. There is intertestamental literature that uses the term to refer to Satan (ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTE, JUDGES 19:22). Paul uses this same term in the New Testament to refer to Satan in 2 Corinthians 6:15. The point the author of Judges is making is that the people in the city were overtaken by the demonic spirit of Belial. We shouldn’t play down the spirit of darkness at work here. The details of their actions tell us that these men aren’t worthless in the same way that a 40-year-old guy living at home in his mother’s basement is worthless; they are far more demented.

I’m zealous to make this point because the Levite says it was the city leaders who were guilty of the crime (JUDG 20:5). We see this in our own city today. The current mayor and city council of San Antonio also seem to be led by the demonic spirit of Belial. They passed a budget with line items to fund the murdering of children out of state in the name of healthcare, and actively promote the sodomite type of sexual activity of Belial with flags and parades. Belial is the same perverted demonic spirit that rules most modern progressive cities and city councils that want to promote, affirm, and celebrate sexual perversion and child sacrifice. They call good that which God forbids — this is the spirit of Belial. The Benjaminites and the people of the city didn’t denounce evil but sought to protect it; they even fought to defend it. It seems like the same is true in our city and most major cities in our country.

The men of Israel were united against this grotesque perversion. They were perhaps more unified in this than at any other time in the book of Judges, and they approached the men of Gibeah of Benjamin with outrage at the vile and wicked thing that had happened on their land (vv. 10-11). They came for justice, *“And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, ‘What evil is this that has taken place among you? Now therefore give up the men, the worthless fellows [lit. “children of Belial”] in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel.’ But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel”* (vv. 12-13).

The men of Israel approached the Benjaminites asking that the Satanic men be purged and punished for their crimes. The Benjaminites didn't want justice; they protected these evil men. Israel, however, wanting justice, not vengeance, asked the LORD how they should proceed. God sent the men of Judah for the first battle (v. 18), but it ended up taking three different military efforts for Israel to finally succeed (v. 28). Between each failed mission, God's people cried out to him, submitted to him, and signified their total reliance on him. However, after their victory, their initial quest for justice turns to vengeance.

We need to be clear, we don't *“wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (EPH 6:12). What is going on in Judges 20 is more than just physical warring between peoples. It is a manifestation in the seen realm of what is happening in the unseen realm. The demonic spirit of Belial is at work, and the Benjaminites are willing to go to war to defend their “right” to engage in demonic sexual perversion.

To oppose it or to call it vile and evil gets them outraged. God's people were not initially seeking a war, but justice. The Benjaminites were offended by this. We see the same thing in our day. When Christians seek to uphold God's standard of sexuality and human dignity, the spirit of Belial leads those who oppose God's way to outrage. The Benjaminites were supposed to be loyal to God, but their rebellion showed they belonged to the enemy of God. This same thing has happened to many Christians in our day, who are supposed to be loyal to God, but follow culture instead. Likewise, Christians who oppose this progressive agenda are not seeking a war in the flesh but waging a spiritual war in the unseen realm.

Israel made multiple attempts before they prevailed. Let that be a lesson for Christians of our day and an encouragement to not give up. Sometimes overcoming demonic opposition takes a repeated pattern of prayer (MARK 9:29). So, *“let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up”* (GAL 6:9).

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Do you see the Belial spirit becoming more prevalent nowadays? How?

2. Why do you think so many people defend what God calls evil (SEE 2 COR 4:4)?

3. How should Christians engage in spiritual warfare?

4. Are Christians as united as Israel was against the Belial spirit in our day? Why do you think that is/isn't so?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you see the demonic distortion of truth in your city?

2. Do the leaders of your city defend evil or preach against it? How?

3. How might prayer be an effective power for overcoming demonic strongholds?

4. Is there anything else Christians should do to combat the spirit of Belial in our day?

NOTES

CH. 24

CAN JESUS FIX THIS MESS?



SCRIPTURE TO READ

Judges 21:1-25



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. -JUDGES 21:24-25

COMMENTARY

Judges 21 is the result of Israel's justice, turned vengeance. God had given Israel a just victory over the Benjaminites (JUDG 20:42-47). But that wasn't sufficient for Israel. They turned back and continued the slaughter and burning of their cities (v. 48). This left the tribe of Benjamin with very little to rebuild. It seems Israel's hardness towards the tribe of Benjamin couldn't be curbed, and so in the opening of chapter 21, the men of Israel swore an oath to not let any of their daughters marry into the tribe of Benjamin (JUDG 21:1).

This was a foolish oath and one that made matters worse in trying to keep it while not allowing the tribe of Benjamin to become extinct. Israel's moronic plan was to kill more of their people, steal the virgins, and give them to the men of Benjamin who were left alive (vv. 8-12). Rather than customarily allowing the men who remained to marry their daughters, they resorted to slaughtering more of their own people. This was the result of deep hurt and bitterness between Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. At this point, so much blood had been shed in their civil war that it would take a miracle to restore unity. Israel's destruction of Jabesh-gilead didn't result in enough women for the men, so they had to go find more to steal (vv. 20-23). If this whole plan feels foolish and misguided, it's because it was.

Sin truly twists, distorts, and corrupts hearts, lives, and legacies. The Book of Judges begins with a bit of hope and proceeds to depict the unraveling of God's people. Here at the end of the book, we see that things aren't getting better. Israel can't fix what they've broken. Everyone doing what was right in their own eyes may sound liberating, but it creates a chaotic nightmare of a civilization instead.

One commentator said, "No other book in the Old Testament offers the modern church as telling a mirror as this book. This book is a wake-up call for a church moribund in its selfish pursuits. Instead of heeding the call of truly godly leaders and letting Jesus Christ be Lord of the church, everywhere congregations and their leaders do what is right in their own eyes" (BLOCK 1999, 586).

There is only one hero throughout the book, and that is God himself. He is the only real deliverer, and he is the one we need. Israel couldn't fix the

mess they were in, they needed forgiveness but didn't possess it; they needed a king but didn't have one. The book of Judges serves as an epic saga debunking the evolutionist notion that we've made progress. Mankind is still dealing with the same sickness that is pervasive throughout the Book of Judges. We need a true king who offers forgiveness, hope, and redemption. We need a savior to save us from our sins and to fix what we've broken.

JESUS IS THAT GREAT DELIVERER AND KING.

He has not only offered us forgiveness and salvation but has also redeemed his family. The church, like Israel in the Book of Judges, has sins and scars that Jesus wants to forgive and heal. Jesus' church is like a hospital for people infected with the sickness of sin. We are all works in progress, and we all need Jesus.

In the same way that the book of Judges ends with this longing for a king, we should have a deep longing for Jesus!

So many people in our world today, feeling the effects of sin in the variety of ways depicted in the book of Judges, are longing for the true king. They may not know it, or they may not admit it, but eternity is written on their hearts (ECCL 3:11). Jesus is our only answer. The only one who can fix the mess we find ourselves in.

I commend us to labor with confidence, sharing the good news about our true deliverer, and only Savior of the world — Jesus. There is a harvest to reap if we don't give up. God has called us to be a part of the story he is writing in our day. May we lay

aside what is right in our eyes and submit willfully, gladly, cheerfully to Jesus, his Word, will, and ways.

Christian, don't quit. It's a great joy to serve at the pleasure of King Jesus!

PERSONAL STUDY

1. Does the Book of Judges end with hope? Why or why not?

2. What were your biggest takeaways from your study of Judges?

3. How have you seen bitterness cause you to make bad decisions?

4. Is there anyone you need to forgive? What's keeping you from forgiving them?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you summarize the message of Judges?

2. How did Israel's bitterness and unforgiveness affect how they treated their kinsmen?

3. How does knowing Jesus' forgiveness affect the way you treat people?

4. What is something God taught you while studying Judges?

NOTES

JUDGES

RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES

APPENDIX

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RIGHT IN OUR OWN EYES

I have become very concerned for Christians in our nation. We are on the brink of what looks like a great generational apostasy, the kind we will read about in Judges. In many ways, the book of Judges serves as a case study of how rebellion against the God of the Bible only leads to ruin and misery for a nation. I hope that this guide will serve as a tool for you to better understand, know, and apply God's Word to your life. There is no better way to get the truths of Scripture deep into our souls than through personal study of God's Word. My prayer is that this resource will bless you, your family, and the generations that follow after you.

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