



STUDY GUIDE

JUDGES

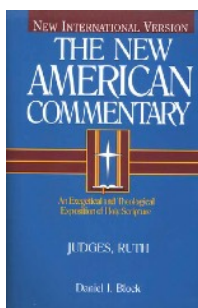
WHEN
THE PEOPLE
DO WHAT
IS RIGHT
IN THEIR
OWN EYES.



RECOMMENDED HELP FOR STUDYING

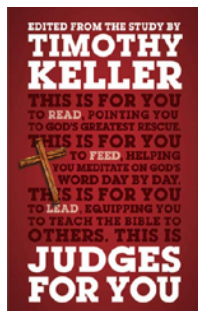
JUDGES: when the people do what is right in their own eyes

From technical to very accessible



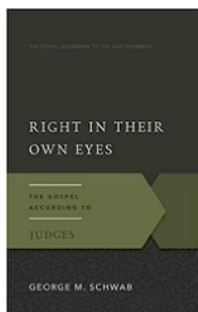
Technical but accessible

Judges, Ruth
by Daniel I. Block



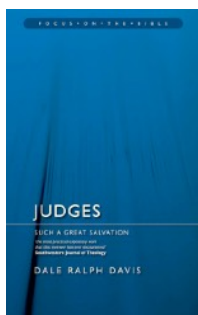
Accessible

Judges For You
by Timothy Keller



Very Accessible

Right in Their Own Eyes
by George M. Schwab



Very Accessible

Judges: Such a Great Salvation
by Dale Ralph Davis

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The study questions were written, and the excerpts were compiled, by Brett Baggett. This Study Guide was edited by Brandon Allen, James Hoover, and Jenny Yarbrough. The excerpts contained are from sermons, books, and articles by various pastors, authors, and theologians, both current and from church history.

HOW TO USE IT

This Study Guide is designed to help you work through the book of *Judges* in 18 weeks. It contains one week of introduction and 17 weeks of Bible study. I pray this will be a great tool for personal study, small groups, and leadership training of various kinds.

PURPOSE

My hope for this study guide is to equip the people of Jesus Christ to understand, love, and obey the written Word of God. I believe when that happens they will more joyfully understand, love, and obey the Incarnate Word of God—Jesus Christ the Righteous.

For God's glory and the joy of all people,



JUDGES

when the people do what is right in their own eyes

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Study 0

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

JUDGES SHOULD MAKE US LONG FOR JESUS BY BRETT BAGGETT

After the conquest of Canaan, depicted in the book of Joshua, the people of God spent around 350 years in a despicable cycle of joy and sorrow detailed in the book of Judges. Judges tells the sad story of the people doing what was right in their own eyes, which led to constant misery and the need for a deliverer.

In simplest terms, the book of Judges reveals how the LORD’S people are half-hearted at best and full-blown idolatrous at worst. There is an endless cycle of unfaithfulness, discipline, regret, deliverance, and unfaithfulness again. As soon as a judge dies, the people forget the LORD.

This brings us to an important point—*the story of Judges should ultimately make us long for the true and better deliverer, Jesus*. Jesus is the king who not only rules over his people with justice and equity but also with grace and mercy. He not only delivers us from our great enemies sin and death but also changes our hearts so that we no longer deeply desire to do what is right in our “own eyes.” By God’s grace, Jesus changes us to desire to do what is right in his eyes. He does not simply deliver us for a time but buys for us an eternal redemption by his cross and resurrection. He is the king who—at great cost to himself—delivers us from all danger and rules over us in all joy. He is the eternal king we need and long for.

1. What stood out to you in this section and why? What are you most looking forward to in studying the book of Judges?

Date of events. The events in Judges took place in the period between Joshua's death (either mid-14th or late-13th century B.C.) and the rise of Samuel and Saul (mid-11th century).

Date of composition. The earliest the book would have been written is after its last recorded event, in the mid-eleventh century B.C. If the phrase in 18:30, “the day of the captivity of the land,” refers to the Babylonian exile, then the final form of the book does not precede the time of the exile. But most likely most of the book had been written by David’s time (1010–970 B.C.), because the introductory framework in chapter 1 states that the Jebusites were living in Jerusalem “to this day” (1:21). Since David captured the city c. 1003 B.C., most Jebusites presumably did not inhabit the city after that. On the other hand, some evidence suggests they persisted in the city to some degree (e.g., 2 Sam. 24:16), so this is not a conclusive argument.

- Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 35603-35611). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

3. What stood out to you in this section and why?

[illegible]

Purpose. The book of Judges was written to show the consequences of religious apostasy and to point the way to a king who, if righteous, would lead the people to God. In contrast to the serene way in which the book of Joshua ends—with all Israel obeying God’s commands, for the most part—the book of Judges shows that, in fact, Israel began to disobey God even during the time of Joshua. This disobedience continued and grew more serious—and more debased—throughout the period of the judges. Time and again Israel turned its back on God and embraced the gods and the ways of the Canaanites, as the introductory summary in 2:16–23 indicates. Israel’s history unfolded in this period in a cyclical or repetitive way: each cycle took Israel further downward in its debasement and apostasy. By the end of the book, Israel had violated its covenant with God in almost every way imaginable.

Occasion. The book of Judges arose out of the apostate conditions of the time. It was written as a justification for the monarchy, since the final verdict of the book—“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25)—implies that things would have been different had there been a (godly) king leading the nation: they would have done right in God’s eyes. The next book in the English Bible is Ruth, which ends with a genealogy that points to David, the godly king par excellence (Ruth 4:18–22). Following the book of Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel relate the establishment of the legitimate Davidic monarchy in Israel, which God was pleased to bless (2 Samuel 7). God had planned for kings to rule in Israel from the beginning (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10), and had even given instructions for their conduct (Deut. 17:14–20). These instructions were very countercultural: rather than a king “like the nations,” where the prevailing model was the king as warrior, Israel’s king was to focus on keeping the Mosaic law (Deut. 17:18–20). If such a king had arisen in the period of the judges, things would have been far different. As it was, Israel’s apostasy pointed to the need for establishing the legitimate kingship under David.

Historical background. The period of the judges spanned a major transition in the ancient Near East, when the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 B.C.) gave way to the Early Iron Age shortly after 1200 B.C. The Late Bronze Age was a period of prosperity. In Palestine, the system of relatively small, independent city-states in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2100–1550 B.C.) was replaced by large empires (Egyptian, Hittite, etc.) in the Late Bronze Age. However, Israelites and Canaanites were able to live there relatively undisturbed, the former in the hill country and the latter in the lowlands and coastal areas.

At the end of the Late Bronze Age, major upheavals took place throughout the Mediterranean basin. Widespread destruction is evident. Archaeological evidence shows a radical drop in population in major centers and an increase in more briefly inhabited sites in outlying areas, in the hill country, and in

desert fringe areas. Imported pottery abruptly ceased. The large, visible signs of society collapsed. However, there was a continuity of culture at the grassroots level. Rough as it was, pottery did continue to be made.

The causes of the widespread destruction are not clear, but they coincide with the migrations of the “land and sea peoples” known from Egyptian texts. These peoples clashed with Egypt at the end of the thirteenth century B.C., and they were also involved in other disturbances in the eastern Mediterranean. Due to such conflicts, the Early Iron Age (c. 1200–1000 B.C.) was a “dark age” of sorts. It was not until c. 1000 B.C. that a true internationalism reasserted itself throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and houses and cities again began to rival those of the Late Bronze Age.

Canaanite religion and culture. The major problem for Israel during the period of the judges was its penchant for turning away from the Lord and toward the gods of the Canaanites. What was it about Canaanite religion and culture that proved to be such an irresistible attraction? The land of Canaan was awe-inspiring to the Israelites, as can be seen in the story of the spies who reported on its wealth and strength (Numbers 13). To a recently freed slave people, accustomed to the hardships of life in the wilderness, the cosmopolitanism and material wealth of Late-Bronze-Age Canaan, with its large urban centers, could not have failed to impress. The Canaanites were clearly superior to the Israelites on many levels: art, literature, architecture, trade, political organization, and more. It is not difficult to see how the Israelites would have been tempted by the elaborate Canaanite religious system, which ostensibly supported—and even provided—all of this.

One prominent feature of Canaanite religion was its highly sexualized orientation. The system of sacred prostitutes—“priestesses” of Baal—allowed people to combine sensual pleasures with worship of Baal. This undoubtedly was attractive to many Israelites (cf. the Israelites seduced by the Moabite women in Numbers 25).

- Crossway Bibles. *ESV Study Bible* (Kindle Locations 35614-35653). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

4. What stood out to you in this section and why?

[illegible]

Study 1

HALF-HEARTED

Judges 1:1–2:5

WHAT JUDGES TEACHES THE CHURCH

BY DR. ROBERT GODFREY

It seems incredible that it could happen. Only a generation after Joshua, Israel no longer knew the Lord. How is such a development possible?

This is a very important question, not just for the ancient Israelites, but for us. Churches, too, have seen sudden decline from one generation to another. How can we understand and prevent this kind of calamity?

The book of Judges provides a very clear answer to our questions. Its answer does not say everything that might be said in general, but it does say specific, crucial things that we must ponder to understand both Israel's situation and our vulnerability.

To begin with, Judges shows us that Israel descended into calamity when it moved away from living by faith in the Word of God to living by sight in the wisdom and values of the world. As we see in Judges 2–3, Israel rapidly descended into gross sin and disobedience, serving the statues and altars of the Baals and intermarrying with those who did not worship the Lord. Idolatry and intermarriage are the great sins against which Joshua warned Israel again and again (Josh. 23:6–13). And with good reason, for these two great sins are interconnected. The one leads to and reinforces the other.

This descent into idolatry and intermarriage did not just happen, however. These gross sins were the end results of various compromises that Israel had made earlier. Israel had served the Lord faithfully in the opening of the book of Judges, but that begins to change at Judges 1:19, where we read, “And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron.” It does not appear that the Israelites actually fought against the chariots of iron and were defeated; rather, it seems that they saw the chariots of iron and decided not to fight. That decision seems very reasonable and proper—to a people living by sight. Chariots of iron were the most powerful military weapon of that time.

Israel, however, was called to live by faith in the Word of God. The Word of God had come to her through Joshua, who said, “For you shall drive out the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong” (Josh. 17:18). Later in the book of Judges, we are shown how God kept His promise because Deborah and Barak were able to defeat Jabin, a king of the Canaanites, even though he had nine hundred chariots of iron (Judg. 4:3). The Word of God reminds God's people that God's “delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes

pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Ps. 147:10–11).

We can see what went wrong—living by sight and not by faith—but that does not show us why things went wrong. For that, we must turn again to the words of Joshua:

But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” (Josh. 24:19–20)

Now wait a moment, you may be saying. If Israel was not able, how were they accountable? In what sense were they not able? What did Joshua mean when he said those words? He did not mean that the people were individually unregenerate and so were unable. He did not mean that they would not be perfect in keeping the law and so would be unable. He seems to have said that they would be leaderless—having neither Moses, nor Joshua, nor the elders who knew them—and so would not be led and guarded in faithfulness to the Word of God.

Joshua was recognizing that God would not give them another Moses or Joshua. He would give them judges who would be for them saviors (Judg. 2:16). But these judges would be only regional and temporary leaders. The lesson that God was teaching Israel—and us—in a variety of ways in the book of Judges is that the people needed a good and faithful king. Israel’s problem was clear: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6).

Israel had to learn its need for a king and in turn to yearn for a king—not a king like the nations as they would have in Saul, but a man after God’s own heart, namely, David. Yet even David could not protect and lead God’s people ultimately. He sinned, his house was divided, and he died. Who, then, is the leader—perfect, faithful, and undying—for God’s people? Obviously, only Jesus is such a king.

What is the antidote, then, for the church and its problems? What will preserve a saving knowledge of God from generation to generation? It is following King Jesus according to His Word. Where the church fails to do so, it will find itself, like Israel, unable to live by faith rather than sight. But where the church turns to Jesus and follows ministers who faithfully preach His Word, it will live before Him. The book of Judges is a mirror held up to the church that forces us to ask ourselves, “Is Jesus our king and do we live by faith in His Word?” If the answer is yes, the church from generation to generation will know the Lord.

– Dr. Robert Godfrey, in an article titled *What Judges Teaches the Church*, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-judges-teaches-church/>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-7**. What do we learn about the period of history in which this book is set, according to **verse 1**? How does this differ from **Joshua chapter 1**, which followed the death of Moses? Who did the LORD tell to go up against the Canaanites and who actually went? How does Adonibezek respond once they “caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes”? What can we learn from all of this?

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2. Read **verses 8-15**. How does **Joshua 15:13-19** help tie the book of Joshua and the book of Judges together? How does **1 Samuel 18:25** help us understand what is happening here with Caleb, Achsah, and Othniel? What else stands out to you and why?

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3. Read **verses 16-36**. What had the LORD commanded his people to do in **Joshua 6:17** and **11:14**? How do these verses help us see the half-hearted obedience of the LORD'S people?

[illegible]

4. Read **chapter 2 verses 1-5**. Who is “the angel of the LORD” and how can we tell? What did he do? What did he promise? What did he command? What did the people do in response? What did the LORD do in response to their disobedience? How did the people respond to the LORD’S discipline? How does **Hebrews 12:3-17** help clarify?

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GOD PUTS THORNS IN OUR BED BY J.I. PACKER

He is both your upholder and, in the last analysis, your environment. All things come of him, and you have tasted his goodness every day of your life. Has this experience led you to repentance and faith in Christ? If not, you are trifling with God and stand under the threat of his severity. But if, now, he (in Whitefield's phrase) puts thorns in your bed, it is only to awaken you from the sleep of spiritual death—to make you rise up to seek his mercy.

Or if you are a true believer, and he still puts thorns on your bed, it is only to keep you from falling into the somnolence of complacency and to ensure that you “continue in his goodness” be letting your sense of need bring you back constantly in self-abasement and faith to seek his face. This kindly discipline, in which God's severity touches us for a moment in the context of his goodness, is meant to keep us from having to bear the full brunt of that severity apart from that context. It is a discipline of love, and it must be received accordingly. “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline” (Heb 12:5). “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees” (Ps 119:71).

— J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 166

Study 2

IDOLATROUS

Judges 2:6–3:6

WE MUST TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION BY JOHN PIPER

O how I want the mothers and fathers of our church to be teachers of the Word of God in your homes. So let me try to answer three objections which may come to your mind. First, some might say that parents have no right to prejudice a child regarding what he will accept as true. It is better to leave all religious options open, and then when he chooses one, it will be owing to authentic commitment, not to parental authority. There are four problems with that objection.

- 1) It goes counter to all the teaching of Scripture that parents are to teach truth about God.
- 2) It is impossible not to teach children about God, because not to teach them is to teach them plenty. It teaches them that Jesus does not matter much, that Mom and Dad don't consider him nearly as important or exciting as new furniture, or weekends at the lake, or Dad's job, or all the other things that fill their conversation. Silence about Christ is dogma. Not to teach the infinite value of Christ is to teach that he is negligible.
- 3) It is not true that teaching children about God has to make them close-minded and irrationally prejudiced. It might if the parents are insecure and have their own faith built on sand. But if parents see compelling reasons for being a Christian, they will impart these to their children as well. Nobody accuses a parent of prejudicing a child's cosmology because he tells the child the world is round, and the little stars at night are bigger than the earth, and the sun really stands still while the earth turns. Why? Because we know these things are so and can give evidence to a child eventually that will support this truth. And so it is with those who are persuaded for good reasons that the Christian faith is true.
- 4) And, fourth, it is simply unloving and cruel not to give a child what he needs most. Since we believe that only by following Christ in the obedience of faith can a child be saved for eternity, escape the torments of hell, and enjoy the delights of heaven, it is unloving and cruel not to teach him the way. When I look at my three sons in love, I say, "O Christ, let me not be delinquent in bringing them with me to glory."

– John Piper, in a sermon titled *Will the Next Generation Know?*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/will-the-next-generation-know>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 6-10**. What marked the people of God during the time that Joshua and his fellow elders lived? What happened after the generation of Joshua? How should this sober us as we teach the next generation and make disciples in our day?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 11-15**. What are some of the words used to describe what the people of Israel did after the death of Joshua and his generation? What are some of the words used to describe the LORD'S response to their apostasy? **apostasy: "abandonment of former faith."* What is the state of the people of Israel as described in **verse 15**? How do we see the sovereignty of God in these verses as opposed to a naturalistic view of history?

What is the state of the people of Israel as described in **verse 15**? How do we see the sovereignty of God in these verses as opposed to a naturalistic view of history?

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3. Read **verses 10-23**. These verses serve as a summary of the entire book of Judges. What did the LORD do in response to the “terrible distress” of the people? What did the people do in response to the LORD sending them Judges to save them? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

4. Read **chapter 3 verses 1-6**. Why did the LORD leave the other nations among the people of Israel according to **verse 2**? Why did the LORD leave the other nations among the people of Israel according to **verse 4**? Is *testing* the same thing as *tempting*? How do **James 1:13** and **1 Peter 4:12-13** help clarify?

[illegible]

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” James 1:2

James begins by telling us to count it unalloyed joy when we face various kinds of trials. It would be seriously wrong to assume that James advocates the kind of unrealistic happy-face Christianity that, sadly, we sometimes encounter today. Rather, James is telling us that in spite of the fact that trials can be severe and painful, we can see through our tears and realize by faith that God has a good intention in taking us through this sorrow. We can realize that the trial will produce perseverance and help to make us mature and complete.

There are basically three kinds of tribulations spoken of in the New Testament and in James: persecution, poverty, and sickness. These are divine crucibles by which our faith is made pure, and because we know this, we can—indeed should—rejoice even as we weep.

What enables a person to persevere is integrity. Integrity means that we don't compromise and thus it enables us not to give up. Integrity is not something that comes overnight, but is something that is built up through repeated tests. It is the trials that God sends that purge us of sin and enable us to grow and mature in integrity.

James says that perseverance must finish its work so that we become mature and complete, lacking nothing (1:4). This does not mean moral perfection, as if we become sinless in this life. Rather, it means wholeness. The goal of the tests God brings to us is to make us well-rounded as believers. Each of us has things that are out of balance in our lives, and God's goal is to make us stable and mature so that we have things in proper perspective.

Those who have matured through some suffering know from experience how it sober us. It removes the brashness of youth and replaces it with the consistency of maturity. It takes off rough edges. It teaches us to prize what really counts and to let go of things that don't matter as much. During the time of our suffering we don't see the end result, but by faith we can count it as joy because we trust that He knows what He is doing with us.

Coram Deo

Have you ever been through a time of suffering that left you a milder, more sober, more “centered” person than before? What “bad” aspects of your life were refined and what good aspects of your life were strengthened? As hard as it may be, strive to thank God for the trials He sovereignly brings into your life.

— Ligonier Ministries, in an article titled *The Benefits of Trials*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-benefits-of-trials/>

Study 3

OTHNIEL AND EHUD

Judges 3:7-31

A LEFT-HANDED RESCUER BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

With Othniel's death (Judges 3:11), the cycle begins again—"the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (v 12). This time, God gives them over to Eglon, king of Moab. God's people face not simply one king, but an alliance of enemies (v 13). And the subjection is worse—"they took possession of the City of Palms" (v 13), the city otherwise known as Jericho. This was the place where, supremely, God had given his obedient people victory over their enemies (Joshua 6); now this is the place where God "gave" Eglon victory over them. Further, the subjection is a decade longer (Judges 3:14).

As in the last cycle, the people respond to God sending trouble by crying out to him (v 15). "And he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man." To the first readers of Judges, the greatest surprise in this narrative would have been that Ehud, the man God used, was "left-handed" (v 15). If you look up the references in the Bible to "right hand," you will find that they are all quite positive. God swears by his right hand, he has pleasures by his right hand, and his chosen One sits at his right hand (Isaiah 62:8-9; Psalm 16:11; 110:1). Why? Since most people were right-handed, the right hand was a symbol of power and ability. You fought with your sword in your right hand. But Judges 3:15 literally says that Ehud was "unable to use his right hand." It is very possible that Ehud's right hand was paralyzed or disabled in some way.

Othniel was a typical "leader-type": a warrior from a family of faithful men, in the tribe of Judah (who were chosen by God to be "the first to go up" into their inheritance, 1:1-2). Ehud is a surprising choice; in a society which was even more cruel than our own to people who were physically handicapped, he would have been considered ineffective. No one would have looked up to him or naturally chosen to follow him. Yet he is God's choice.

— Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You)*. Location 583 of 2989. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 7-11**. What does the writer mean when he says “they forgot the LORD”? What do we learn about salvation and God’s grace in this passage?

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2. Read **verses 12-14**. What did the people of Israel do? What did the LORD do in response?

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3. Read **verses 15-30**. What is the significance of Ehud being left-handed (**verse 15**)? What stands out to you in this passage and why? What should we learn from these verses?

[illegible]

4. Read **verse 31**. What light does the *ESV Study Bible* note on **Judges 3:31** shed on the identity of Shamgar?

BENJAMIN THE WOLF BY R.C. SPROUL

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil.” Genesis 49:27

Like it or not, we are all shaped by our ancestors. Of course, Scripture does not teach fatalism whereby our parents’ influence absolves us from the responsibility of our own actions. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the later generations of those who hate him (Ex. 20:5–6) because these generations usually repeat their fathers’ sins, not because the Lord punishes us for our parents’ transgressions (Ezek. 18). Nevertheless, the Bible is clear that our lives are in large measure molded by the sins (and righteousness) of our forefathers.

Benjamin and his offspring are a good example of this truth. Jacob blesses his youngest son in today’s passage, revealing that this tribe will be like a wolf who devours its prey and in the evening divides its spoil (Gen. 49:27). One commentator has noted that wolves typically kill more than they can eat, and so this metaphor tells us the tribe of Benjamin will satisfy himself and then divvy up what is left over. In other words, there is the potential for this clan to enjoy abundant success within the family of Israel.

Benjamin went on to succeed and father many godly individuals. Ehud, a Benjaminite judge, rescued Israel from Moab (Judg. 3:12–30). Jonathan hailed from the tribe of Benjamin, and, unlike his father Saul, he loved David (1 Sam. 9:1–2; 14:49; 18:1–5). Esther, who saved her people from extinction during Persian rule, and her cousin Mordecai also counted Benjamin as a forefather (Est. 2:5–7). Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, was a Benjaminite as well

(Rom. 11:1). Though they had sinful ancestors like the rest of us, all of these persons finally chose righteousness over evil.

However, the wolf imagery is also forboding, warning of potential danger ahead for Benjamin. This tribe would also be capable of producing unfaithful men. Aside from King Saul, there is the ghastly episode in the period of the judges when certain Benjaminites raped a Levite's concubine, leading to her death. The authorities in this tribe were unwilling to punish these evil men and compounded sin when they rose to defend them (Judg. 19–21)! These men chose to follow the sin of their clan, and they suffered the inevitable results.

Coram Deo

For good or for ill, mothers and fathers have the greatest influence on their children. If parents imitate the example of the righteous and trust in the Lord and His promises, their children will be far more likely to follow the risen Christ. Those parents who love the Lord in words only and repeat the sins and addictions of their fathers will likely provoke their children to evil. Be mindful of the example you set for your children and other young people.

– R.C. Sproul, in a devotional titled *Benjamin The Wolf*, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2007/12/benjamin-wolf/>

Study 4

DEBORAH AND BARAK

Judges 4:1–5:31

PALM TREES AND TENT PEGS BY REBECCA VANDOODewaARD

The instructor in my self-defense class had us read an article to help us mentally prepare for physical conflict. One line caught most of my attention: “When women disengage from their traditional role of nurturer . . . [they are able to fight].”

That statement has a couple of problems. First, it assumes that the role of nurturer is tradition. It’s not: it’s God-given instinct. But more than that, and common in many churches today, is the false dichotomy of nurturer or fighter. People speak and act as though being the one precludes being the other—and that one is unfeminine. Scripture has a different perspective.

Judges 4 introduces us to two women. One, Deborah, is a significant person in Israel, serving as prophetess and judge. She is a nationally maternal figure, holding court under a palm tree and sorting out the people’s disputes. Her positive care for the nation does not inhibit her warrior side. When Israel’s general is too timid to lead the army himself, she goes with him, like a mother with a shy son. She does not hesitate at the battle, but spurs the men on to action: “Up! . . . Does not the Lord go out before you?” (v. 14).

The second woman in this chapter is Jael, a stay-at-home wife. Her husband is a Kenite, and they live on the edge of society: “as far away as the oak . . . which is near Kedesh” (v. 11). When the army beats Sisera, general of the Canaanites, he flees from the Israelite settlements and finds himself at Jael’s door. She realizes who he is, and her nurturing, fighting spirit is clear. She gives him a warm drink, tucks him into bed, and hammers his head to the ground.

Neither of these women had to switch off the nurturer inside to let out the warrior. Both instincts worked together to get Israel the victory. And the women were not squeamish about it, either: “He asked for water and she gave him milk . . . she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still . . . dead” (5:25–27).

Now we might think that we don’t have enemies to eliminate. Or do we? We struggle against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). We must destroy arguments and take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10:5). Fighting is a matter of spiritual survival. It is also a matter of nurturing. This is why Paul connects spiritual battle with care for other Christians: it is tied closely with making supplication for all the saints (Eph. 6:18). We must be spiritual and mental fighters if we want to biblically nurture the children and others under our care.

The nurturing instinct is God-given, and so is the instinct to fight. When sanctified, these instincts serve us as tandem helps in waging war against threats to the souls and bodies under our care. We do best when we engage both.

—Rebecca VanDoodewaard, in an article titled *Palm Trees and Tent Pegs*, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2018/04/palm-trees-tent-pegs/>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-10**. What marks Deborah as a person? How does she view the word of God (see **verse 6**)? Though Deborah is a judge over the people of Israel, who is to do the fighting?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 11-16**. What does Deborah exhort Barak to put his trust in when it comes to fighting and victory (see **verse 14**)? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. Read **verses 17-24**. Of what significance is it that Jael killed Sisera rather than some mighty man of valor? What else stands out to you in these verses and why? Who is ultimately given the credit for subduing Jaban the king of Canaan (see **verse 23**)?

[illegible]

4. Read **chapter 5**, the song of Deborah and Barak. What can we learn from this song?

[illegible]

“LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel” (5:4–5).

One of the lessons that we learn from the book of Judges is that the Israelites as a whole were spiritually corrupt during that period even though the Lord brought them assistance again and again. When a judge died, the people inevitably descended back into wickedness, becoming even more corrupt than before (Judg. 2:19). After the death of Ehud, the judge God used to rescue His people from the Moabites, Israel fell back into sin, and our Creator handed them over to Jabin, a king of Canaan who cruelly oppressed the Israelites for two decades (Judg. 3:12–4:3).

But the Lord did not utterly abandon His people. Today’s passage tells us how God brought victory to Israel through Deborah and Barak. Deborah was an Ephraimite prophetess “judging Israel at that time” (4:4). She is the only female judge, but it is clear from the narrative that she did not serve in the same capacity as the other judges. She did not exercise any military leadership in the conflict, and her judging seems to have focused mainly on giving revelation to God’s people, who came to her “for judgment” (v. 5). One commentator notes that this indicates the pitiful state of the priesthood at the time. Ordinarily, the people were to go to the priests for judgment (Deut. 17:8–13), but in the era of the judges, so many priests were spiritually unqualified that their counsel was not sought (see 1 Sam. 2:12–36).

Barak, who was from the tribe of Naphtali and led the Israelites against Jabin’s forces, was better than most of the judges who came after him. Yet, he was no paragon of faith. God spoke through Deborah, telling Barak to lead men from Naphtali and Zebulun against Sisera, Jabin’s general, and the Canaanite forces. Moreover, Barak was promised victory (Judg. 4:6–7). However, Barak resisted, saying that he would go only if Deborah went with him (v. 8). The promise of God was insufficient for him, evidencing a lack of faith on his part. Deborah consented to go with him, but she told Barak that in the victory to come, he would not receive the glory (v. 9). God can use people even when their faith is less than perfect, but we lose out on blessings when we doubt His promises.

So, God delivered Sisera and the Canaanites into the hands of Barak and the Israelite army (vv. 10–16). This salvation included a supernatural intervention, for in the song of victory that Deborah sang, we read that God sent a storm to flood the Kishon River, giving the advantage to the Israelites (5:4–5, 21).

CORAM DEO (Living before the face of God)

Thanks be to God, He can still use us to advance His purposes even when our faith is less than perfect. As Barak’s example shows us, however, we will miss additional blessings if we doubt the promises of the Lord. Our goal should be to obey God and His Word right away. That way, we will be used of Him, and we will enjoy extra blessings as well.

– R.C. Sproul, in a devotional titled *Deborah and Barak*, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2019/02/deborah-and-barak/>

Study 5

GIDEON (pt.1)

Judges 6:1-40

SERMON BEFORE SALVATION BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

This time, God “gave them into the hands of the Midianites” (v 1). It is the worst oppression yet—Israelites are forced to leave their homes and “[prepare] shelters for themselves” in the inaccessible mountain ranges (v 2). The Midianites were not interested in political control but rather economic exploitation, plundering the land of its crops (v 3). They “did not spare a living thing for Israel” (v 4)—the people were starving and the land was ravaged (v 5). Eventually, “Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord” (v 6).

So far, though more oppressive, the cycle is following its normal route. Now we expect God to raise up a deliverer, a judge (as in 3:9, 15; 4:4, 6-7). But instead, “when the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet” (6:7-8). God’s first response to the people’s cry is not to send a savior or salvation, but to give them a sermon! Before they can appreciate the rescue that will come, the people need to understand why they need rescuing. The prophet comes and helps them to understand why they are in the trouble they are in. He wants them to understand where their idolatry—their sin—has led them.

The nature of the sermon shows that God is trying to convict the people so that they will be truly repentant—which suggests that the “crying out” of verses 6-7 is not a sign of real repentance. Their history, after the deaths of Othniel, Ehud and Deborah, is strong evidence that their sorrow was skin-deep, not heartfelt. So God reminds them of two things: what he has done, and what they have done. What has he done? I rescued you out of Egypt, freeing you from slavery. I took you out of all oppression, and I gave you this land by driving out your enemies. I repeatedly reminded you that I am the Lord, and that I am your God, who demands and deserves your exclusive obedience. And so I told you not to worship other “gods” (v 8-10). What has Israel done? “You have not listened to me” (v 10).

God sends the prophet to convict of sin before he sends the judge to rescue from oppression because the people are regretful, but not repentant. The Bible makes a clear distinction between the two: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Both are characterized by very deep sorrow and distress. But they are completely different. First, “worldly” sorrow or regret does not produce any real change, while repentance does. Why? Regret is sorrow over the consequences of a sin, but not over the sin itself. If there had been no consequences, there would have been no sorrow. There is no sorrow over the sin for what it is in itself, for how it grieves God and violates our relationship with him. The focus is all horizontal—“worldly”—and not at all vertical—concerned about how it affects relationship with God. Therefore, as soon as the consequences go away, the

behavior comes back. The heart has not become disgusted with the sin itself, so the sin remains rooted.

Second, “worldly” sorrow stays regretful, while repentance removes all regret about the past. Why? Real repentance comes to focus on the only real, permanent result of sin—the “loss” of the Lord. Repentance always makes us more able to accept and “move past” the things that happened. When we realize that God has forgiven us and we haven’t “lost” him, we feel that earthly results are rather small in comparison. We say: I deserved far worse than what happened. The real punishment fell on Jesus, and will never come to me.

After real repentance and restoration to God, we do not hate ourselves, and we do not hate our lives. When someone is inconsolable, it means they have made something besides God their real god and savior (eg: money, friends, career, family). It is an idol, and its loss is therefore impossible to heal without repudiating it as an idol.

Regret is all about “us”: how I am being hurt, how my life is ruined, how my heart is breaking; but repentance is all about God: how he has been grieved, how his nature as Creator and Redeemer is being trampled on, how his repeated saving actions are being trivialized and used manipulatively.

We know the people of Israel are idolators. God’s response to their crying shows that they are regretful for what they have lost, and want it restored; but they are not repenting of their idolatry. God’s aim in sending them his prophet is to move them beyond regret to repentance.

What can we learn from this? Many things! Most importantly, to check what we are sorry about: the consequences of the sin in our lives, or the sin itself; the loss of the pleasure an idol offered, or the damage to our relationship with God. Here are two other implications:

- *We have to listen to God’s word. It is interesting that the people cried out for some dramatic miracle, and God sent them a sermon—an exposition of the word of God. There is no getting around the study of the Bible. That is where we learn who we are; that is the means through which God brings spiritual renewal in our lives.*
- *We need to discern in ourselves the difference between the normal lapses on the road to increasing Christian maturity and getting “stuck”—a repeated pattern of lapses which is a sign of no real progress. If you are continually falling into the same spiritual pit, and your falls are not decreasing in numbers or intensity, then you may be responding in regret rather than repentance. In other words, you may be simply regretful for the troubles of your sin, but unwilling to identify and reject the idol under the sin which is still attractive to you. The big problem here is that we often cannot get a good perspective on our hearts all by ourselves. Many people who are making progress feel they are not, and many people who are not making progress are in denial about it. This is why we need several strong Christian friends and Christian leaders who can help us tell the difference.*

– Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God’s Word For You)*. Location 915. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-10**. What does the LORD remind the people of when he speaks through the prophet? What does this teach us concerning our continual need of hearing the gospel in our own day (see **verses 7-9**)? What does this teach us concerning how to repent of idolatry (see **verse 10**)?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 11-18**. Who is “the angel of the LORD”? How does **verse 14** help clarify? What question does Gideon ask the LORD? How does the LORD answer? How does Gideon respond to the command of the LORD? What should we learn from these verses?

[illegible]

3. Read **verses 19-27**. What do we learn about the seriousness of sin by Gideon's response the realization that he was face to face with the angel of the LORD and the LORD'S words to Gideon right after? What do we learn in this passage concerning the wages of idolatry?

[illegible]

4. Read **verses 28-35**. How does Gideon respond to the LORD revealing himself personally to him? How do the people respond to Gideon's breaking down the altar of Baal? What should this teach us concerning the cost of following Jesus in our day? What should this passage teach us concerning the strength of the LORD for his people?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

5. Read **verses 36-40**. What is more shocking to you in this scene, that Gideon would ask these things of the LORD or that the LORD would show him these signs?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

It's easy to criticize Gideon for his doubts, but I've doubted as well. I have seen God work in my life, enabling me to do things that I would have thought impossible. But then I still doubt that I can do the next thing. I look at myself and my resources, and I feel inadequate all over again, convinced I can't accomplish what's before me. I know that for me, further physical weakness and loss are constants. When I consider the future, I often cry out, "Lord, I can't do this. I'm not as strong as you think I am."

The Lord wants to save Israel by Gideon's hand, but Gideon wants proof. Twice. He first wants the fleece to be wet on the dry ground, and then wants to see dry fleece on the wet ground, just to be extra sure. From our perspective, Gideon might seem overly skeptical. Why does he keep asking for proof? But then I think about all the times I keep asking for assurance from God. When I feel inadequate to face something, I ask for signs, encouragement from friends, verses that apply to my situation. God understands my frailty; he deals with my weaknesses just like he did Gideon's — without scorn or chastisement. The Lord remembers that I am dust. ...

Moses parted the Red Sea and delivered the Israelites from their Egyptian pursuers, but when God first called Moses, he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). This was immediately *after* God had assured Moses, "I will . . . teach you what you shall speak" (Exodus 4:12). When God called the prophet Jeremiah, his first response was, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth" (Jeremiah 1:6).

Paul wanted God to remove this thorn in the flesh, but the Lord reminded him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul then said, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Today, if the Lord is calling you to a task for which you feel inadequate, remember that the Lord isn't looking for your strength, or bravery, or natural gifts; he wants your reliance on him. His power is made perfect in our weakness. We know that God saw Gideon as mighty. In the celebrated Hebrews "Hall of Faith," we are reminded that Gideon conquered kingdoms and the Lord made him strong out of weakness (Hebrews 11:32–34).

We too will be made strong out of weakness when we put our trust in the Lord. As the hymn "Come Ye Sinners" beautifully reminds us, "All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him."

— Vaneetha Rendall Risner, in an article titled *God Wants Your Weakness*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-wants-your-weakness>

Study 6

GIDEON (pt.2)

Judges 7:1-25

WHY GOD GIVES US MORE THAN WE CAN HANDLE

BY JON BLOOM

The next time someone says that God doesn't give us more than we can handle, point them to Judges 7. God's instructing Gideon to take on over 100,000 enemy soldiers with just 300 fits in the "more than you can handle" category. Imagine how Gideon and his servant, Purah, must have felt trying to come to grips with a humanly impossible assignment.

Standing on the side of Mount Gilboa, Gideon gazed over the Valley of Jezreel, which sprawled beneath him northward toward the hill of Moreh. The valley was a sea of tents, teeming with more than 100,000 Midian warriors.

That morning, the Lord had judged Israel's army of 32,000 too big to face Midian's. Israel would think more highly of himself than he ought to think when God gave him victory. So Gideon had sent home whoever was afraid. When 22,000 hit the road, Gideon had to quiet his own fear. Now Israel was outnumbered ten-to-one. But God was with them and armies had overcome such odds before.

Oddly, the Lord considered these odds still too much in Israel's favor. So in obedience to the Lord's instruction, Gideon brought his small, thirsty army down to the spring of Harod. And he gave his servant, Purah, the strangest command of his brief military career: "Observe all the men as they drink. Have every man who laps his water like a dog stand off to the side."

Gideon supervised the selection, but when so few were being chosen, he just let Purah finish the count and he climbed back up Gilboa to pray and survey.

It wasn't long before Purah emerged from the trees. "So what's the total?"

"Three hundred, sir," said Purah.

Gideon chuckled to himself. "Three hundred." He looked back toward the human hoard in the valley and was quiet for a moment. "That's less than I expected."

"Yes, sir," said Purah. "But thankfully, three hundred doesn't reduce our strength much."

Gideon breathed deeply. "No, Purah. The three hundred are not the reductions. They're the army. The others are the reductions."

Purah stood dazed for a moment, staring at Gideon. "The three hundred are the army?"

Gideon nodded slowly, still looking into the Midian-infested Jezreel.

“But that’s not an army! That’s how many should be guarding an army’s baggage!”

Purah stepped up beside Gideon. Together they watched smoke columns rising from ten times more cooking fires than they now had warriors. Purah shook his head and said, “Even if we were all like the mighty men of old, three hundred could not overcome 100,000.” He paused. “And we aren’t mighty men.” Another pause. “And there’s more than a 100,000 down there.”

Both were silent for a while. In the quiet, the Lord spoke to Gideon, “With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home.”

Then Gideon said to Purah, “During the exodus, how many mighty men did it take to destroy Egypt and its army or part the Red Sea?”

Purah thought briefly. “None.”

“How many did it take to tear down Jericho’s walls?”

“None.”

“How many did it take to feed two million of our people in the wilderness every day for forty years?”

“None. I get your point.”

“In our people’s history, the mightiest have not been the strong warriors,” Gideon said. “The mightiest have been those who trusted in the Lord and obeyed him, no matter how impossible things appeared. He has promised us that Midian will be defeated. He has chosen only three hundred of us. We will obey; he will act. And when Midian falls, it will be clear to everyone who felled him.” Then he looked at Purah and smiled. “Maybe the Lord just needs us to guard his baggage!”

Purah didn’t laugh. He only replied, “Should we dismiss the others?” Gideon nodded.

Later that night, in the tiny camp, Gideon lay praying. Every plan to mobilize 300 against 100,000 seemed ludicrous.

Suddenly, he was aware of the Presence. He sat up, his heart beating fast.

The Lord said, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.”

Purah woke to Gideon’s nudge and whispered words, “Let’s go.”

“Where are we going?” Purah whispered back, getting up quickly.

“To the Midian camp, just you and me. The Lord has something he wants to show us.”

They quietly crept toward the nearest Midian outpost, veiled by the clouded sky, and saw two inattentive guards talking. Just as they got within earshot, one said, “I had a strange dream before being woken for duty tonight.”

“Tell me,” the other said.

“This cake of barley came tumbling into our camp, crashed into the tent, turned it over, and flattened it.”

The other guard looked at him alarmed and said, “I know what that means! The cake can be none other than Gideon, the son of Joash! God has given us all into his hand!”

Gideon and Purah looked at one another with the same stunned expression.

Cast Your Cares

With renewed faith, Gideon and Purah roused their mini army and launched a night attack. This threw the Midians into a panic and they slaughtered each other in confusion. It was a rout. Not one of Gideon’s three hundred perished in the battle. God gave them more than they could handle to force them to rely wholly on him.

When we’re confronted with an impossible situation or trial, Gideon’s three hundred preach to us that “salvation . . . is from the Lord” (Psalm 37:39) and “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). These are no domesticated platitudes. God really intends for us to cast our all on these massive truths and for them to give us more-than-conquerors confidence and peace (Romans 8:37), no matter what we face.

It is not hyperbole to say that the defeat of our sin that Jesus accomplished on the cross dwarfs Gideon’s victory. Compared to overcoming God’s wrath against our sin, defeating 100,000 Midianites was very small. And if God “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)?

God certainly does give us more than we can handle. And he does it “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). If you’re facing some overwhelming adversary or adversity and you wonder how God could possibly deliver and work it for your good (Romans 8:28), then take heart. He is granting you the joy of experiencing the reality of Judges 7, Romans 8, and 2 Corinthians 1.

– Jon Bloom, in an article titled *Why God Gives Us More Than We Can Handle*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-god-gives-us-more-than-we-can-handle>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-3**. Who is going to be responsible for the victory over the Midianites? What reason does the LORD give to Gideon for whittling down the army to a smaller number? What can we learn from this? How does **Deuteronomy 20:5-8** help us further understand the LORD allowing people to go home who are fearful?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 4-8**. In what ways does the LORD tell Gideon to test the men in order to make the army smaller in number? What can we learn from this?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. Read **verses 9-18**. Why does the LORD tell Gideon to “go down to the camp with Purah your servant”? What does the LORD show Gideon and why? How does Gideon respond to the assurance the LORD gave him in **verse 15**? What can we learn from these verses?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **verses 19-25**. What did the the three hundred men do in order to bring about the destruction of the Midianite army? What did the LORD do to bring about the destruction of the Midianite army? What can we learn from this concerning the importance of faithfulness to the LORD?

[illegible]

Although Gideon has been transformed into a leader, he still doubts the mission. One final sign remains to turn that key. He creeps near the enemy camp, close enough to overhear a conversation between guards. One relates to the other his dream of a rolling barley cake (signifying Gideon—he probably smiled, recognizing God's poking fun at him for threshing grain in the grape press). The cake rolled into the camp with great force and flattened a tent. The second guard interprets the dream: Gideon will surely destroy Midian. The image of the fallen tent symbolizes the nation of Midian falling (see Amos 9:11). At this, Gideon is finally converted. He worships God then and there, and with full conviction calls on Israel to a sure and certain victory, heedless of the seemingly insurmountable enemy hordes. (This might be a good illustration for a Calvinist. First, Gideon was invested with the Spirit. But he was still seeking and doubting. Sometime after that, he came to a faith that saves.)

What happened? Such a simple dream, to have this great effect on Gideon? The state of affairs was this: it was a matter of faith for the enemy, too. Before the battle was fought, Midian was already spiritually defeated. This realization moves Gideon to faith—he now becomes gutsy. Spiritually Gideon has already won the war.

Moses had sent spies into the Promised Land, and except for Joshua and Caleb, they returned with an evil report. The inhabitants there were giants and made the spies feel like “grasshoppers” (Num. 13:33). The Israelites were already spiritually defeated before any fighting could begin; as a result, they wandered for forty years. But a new generation arose, and when they in turn spied out the land, it was Canaan that was fearful. Under Joshua and Caleb, Canaan was already spiritually defeated before Israel set foot there (Josh. 2:11). Now it is the Midianites who are the grasshoppers, primed and ready to take flight. All Gideon really has to do is to jump up and yell, “Boo!” And he knows it.

– Schwab, George M.. *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12) (pp. 106-107). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Study 7

GIDEON (pt.3)

Judges 8:1–10:5

TEACHING A LESSON BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

Ephraim is one of the more powerful tribes in Israel, and Gideon had called them out to help him cut off the fleeing Midianites (7:24-25). But the Ephraimites are unhappy with him: “Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight Midian?” (8:1) In fact, it’s unlikely that they would have been willing to march under Gideon’s command: they were one of the strongest tribes, economically and militarily, and he was from the weakest clan in the tribe of Manasseh (6:15).

Their criticism here is born of frustration at having missed out on the glory of the victory. Ironically, it reveals two truths: first, that God was absolutely correct to say that Israel would want to “boast against” him and glorify themselves in victory; second, that Ephraim would not have respected or deferred to God’s chosen judge.

Gideon’s response to them is respectful and diplomatic. He points out how much more powerful their tribe is than his clan (8:2)—and that they (unlike him) have already captured and killed two Midianite leaders (v 3). Ephraim’s snub and scolding must have been hard to take, but he holds his tongue—and, with their desire for glory and praise satisfied, “their resentment against him subsided” (v 3).

We might want, at this point, to praise Gideon for his humility and peacefulness—but the next section shows that these were not what drove his diplomacy toward Ephraim. Exhausted from the pursuit of the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna (v 4), Gideon asks the people of the town of Succoth to feed his men. But they refuse to help (v 5). Like the Ephraimites, they show a complete lack of gratitude to Gideon for defeating their enemy. Essentially, they say to him: Do you have these Midianite kings in your hands yet? No? Then don’t look to us for help! They know that if Gideon isn’t able to catch and kill their leaders, then the Midianites will regroup and return—and any towns who helped Gideon will be destroyed. Ephraim was annoyed Gideon hadn’t called them out earlier—Succoth would rather he hadn’t called on them till later! And, as Gideon moves on with his men, he finds the same response from Peniel (v 8).

Gideon answers Succoth and Peniel very differently from Ephraim. “When the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers ... When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower” (v 7, 9).

This reveals that Gideon’s diplomacy regarding Ephraim was not because he did not want to strike at them, but because he could not. And it reveals that, despite God making sure that the victory was so miraculous that everyone

should have seen that it was given by God, not earned by Gideon, Gideon himself has forgotten “the lesson of the 300.” He feels that he ought to receive admiration and honor for what he has done. Gideon’s anger at the people of Succoth and Peniel shows that he expects to be given glory for his achievements (which he is forgetting were, in fact, God’s). When Succoth and Peniel fail to trust that Gideon will triumph over Midian, he does not say to them: Yes, I know it is hard to believe we can beat them. But God in his grace is using us to win the battle, so don’t trust my strength, but do trust in his. Instead, he says: *You dare to doubt me? I’ll show you my power when I get back. You’ll learn to have respect for me.*

And so, when he has returned from again routing a far stronger force with his three hundred men, and capturing Zebah and Zalmanna (v 10-12), Gideon is as good as his word. He seizes a member of his own people, Israel (v 14), discovers the names of the elders of Succoth, reminds them that “you taunted me” (v 15), and then “taught the men of Succoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers” (v 16). In Peniel, things are even worse—he “pulled down the tower ... and killed the men of the town” (v 17).

Verses 18-19 add a new detail to the narrative: that the Midianite kings had killed Gideon’s own brothers, and that their deaths are what have made him so determined to catch them. Gideon’s ruthless, remarkable pursuit has been motivated less by a desire to complete the deliverance of God’s people than by a drive for personal vengeance—for the honor of his own family. This is why Gideon asks “Jether, his oldest son” to “kill them” (v 20)—he wants to humiliate these kings by having them killed by a mere boy. In the end, Gideon performs the execution himself (v 21), and with their deaths, victory is complete. But its manner points to a future under Gideon which will not be marked by real peace.

– Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God’s Word For You)* Location 1253 of 2989. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-3**. Why were the men of Ephraim upset that Gideon did not include them in the fight against Midian? In contrast, why did the LORD only allow 300 men to fight? What can we learn from these verses?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Read **verses 4-21**. How do the officials of Succoth and Penue! respond to Gideon asking for help as he fulfilled what the LORD commanded? How does Gideon respond? What can we learn from this? How do **verses 11-12** contrast sharply with what we saw in **chapter 7**? What else stands out to you in **verses 4-21** and why?

[illegible]

3. Read **verses 22-28**. Who do the men of Israel give the glory to for victory in **verse 22**? Is this a holy response—why or why not? How does Gideon respond to their asking he and his son to be king over them in **verse 23**? What can we learn from this? What did Gideon do in **verses 24-28** and what was the result? How should this make us long for Jesus?

[illegible]

4. Read **verses 29-34**. How did Gideon finish his course? What did the people do after Gideon died? How should both of these answers make us long for Jesus?

[illegible]

5. Read **chapter 9 verses 1-21**. Though Gideon has plenty of apparent sins, how is he contrasted with his son Abimelech? What can we learn from Jotham's words to the leaders of Shechem?

[illegible]

6. Read **verses 22-57**. What do we learn here about Abimelech's pride? What do we learn here about the LORD'S justice? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

7. Read **chapter 10, verses 1-5**. After all of the apostasy of the people of Israel, how does the LORD respond to their misery?

[illegible]

Jesus came to teach the people of Israel about their divine Father, to whom the name Abimelech points. Jesus is his only-begotten Son, who from eternity could always say that his divine Father is King. But what sort of King is Jesus?

All power in heaven and earth is his—since he was obedient even at the cost of death on a cross. Jesus' sovereign command of Matthew 28:18–20 is to teach and make disciples, since he has all power in heaven and on earth. This leads us to contemplate what the Abimelech passage means today. What sort of leadership ought we to follow? What sort of leaders ought we to be? Should we lead by lording it over our fellow Christians, or by force, or under threat? There is much here to think about by way of application.

But someday judgment will fall on the Abimelechs and the “empty men” who follow those like him. Someday the One whose divine Father is King will judge the world. Someday fire will break out against all who live under the curse—and who are unaware that the curse on their sin is driving events forward both in their individual lives and in the whole history of the world.

Not only is Israel denied a secular history, but we and even the world are disallowed one. A covenant curse against sin still drives history forward to its inevitable conclusion. See to it that, like Jotham, you stand in the Father's integrity and denounce sin, rather than being caught up in it. “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). Be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit, and then proclaim the truth like a Spirit-endowed Jotham.

– Schwab, George M., *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12) (pp. 129-130). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Study 8

JEPHTHAH

Judges 10:6–12:7

LEARNING FROM FLAWED FAITH BY DAVID MATHIS

The book of Judges—what a mess! It starts bad and gets worse and worse, then ends so poorly that it's awkward to read in public.

Yet God put it in the Book and means it to be for “our instruction” (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4). The author of Hebrews even goes so far as to mention Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah in his faith hall of fame (Hebrews 11:32). What are we to do with this?

Tremper Longman and Ray Dillard help us see how Judges is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16)—and for pointing to Jesus.

What a collection of human beings in the book of Judges! Strange heroes they are—a reluctant farmer, a prophetess, a left-handed assassin, a bastard bandit, a sex-addicted Nazirite, among others. It is easy at a distance to point out the foibles and failures of the leading characters in this downwardly spiraling story.

But lest we get too proud, Paul reminds us, “That is what some of you were” (1 Corinthians 6:11). With similar mixtures of ignorance, frail obedience, and tangled motives, we, like them, were “washed, sanctified, and justified” by the grace of God. For all of their flaws, we are to learn from their faith. For it was in faith that Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samson “conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised” (Hebrews 11:32–33).

In spite of their failures, their faith was not misplaced. They become a part of that great cloud of witnesses calling for us to persevere and to fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–2). We too need a champion to fight our battles for us, one raised up by God and invested with his Spirit in full measure; we too need a leader to secure for us the inheritance that God has promised, one who will perfect our faith. (*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 143)

– David Mathis, in an article titled *Learning From Flawed Faith*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/learning-from-flawed-faith>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 6-18**. What words does the writer use to reveal Israel's actions and thoughts? What words does the writer use to reveal what was done to the LORD'S people by their enemies? What words does the writer use to reveal what the LORD did to, and thought about, the people of Israel at this time? What can we learn from these verses?

[illegible]

2. Read **chapter 11 verses 1-28**. In what ways is Jephthah an unlikely savior for Israel, considering **verses 1-3**? According to **verses 4-11**, who establishes Jephthah as “head and leader” over Israel? How do **Judges 3:9, 4:6, and 6:14** help clarify what happening here with Jephthah? What do we learn about the people of Israel in what Jephthah said to the king of the Ammonites in **verses 12-28**?

[illegible]

3. Read **verses 29-40**. What exactly did Jephthah promise the LORD? Why did Jephthah promise this? Why did he then keep his vow? What can we learn from this horrific scene?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **chapter 12 verses 1-7**. Why do you think the men of Ephraim were angry that Jephthah did not call them to fight? What reason does Jephthah give them? How is this conflict like and yet different from the conflict depicted in **Judges 8:1-3**? It is important to note that after this defeat the Ephraimites never again played any important role in Israel's history. What stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

5. Read **verses 8-13**. What stands out to you in these verses and why? What can we learn from these verses?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WHY DID JEPHTHAH MAKE THIS VOW? BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

This is a terrible story—perhaps the worst in what is an increasingly terrible portion of Israel’s history. It begs three questions:

Exactly what had Jephthah promised God? Many people have interpreted Jephthah as promising God an animal sacrifice—so he was expecting an animal to come out to meet him when he returned, and was planning to offer up that animal. But there are three reasons why that is not a right reading. First, it is unlikely that such homes had animals inside (“out of the door of my house,” v 31). Second, if an animal was meant, the noun would have been in a different form—appropriate for a “neuter” object—but it is not. And third, if Jephthah had promised God an animal, then when his daughter came through the doors he would never have considered the promise to have had any binding force with regard to her.

A few other well-meaning interpreters have read his daughter’s lament that she would never marry (v 37-38) and suggested that all Jephthah vowed was that she would be condemned to perpetual virginity. But the request for a two-month reprieve (v 37) before the sentence is carried out makes no sense unless he literally sacrificed her life. In short, Jephthah did promise to make a human sacrifice to God if God gave him victory. He obviously expected it to be a servant or someone else—not his only child. Jephthah promised human sacrifice to God.

Why did Jephthah promise this? Deuteronomy 12:31 says that human sacrifice is “detestable” and something “the Lord hates.” There is no doubt about God’s will in the matter. Why then does Jephthah make the vow?

First, Jephthah had clearly been deeply de-sensitized to violence by the atrocious cruelty of the pagan cultures around him. This is a most vivid and horrible example of how believers can profess faith in God and hold on to some truth, yet let the world squeeze them into its mold (see Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24). Because the culture around Jephthah was violent, he let that worldly violence come in and live alongside his other true beliefs. Today, we are more likely to let worldly attitudes toward sex and money come in and live alongside other true beliefs. Paul says: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2, ESV).

Second, Jephthah was not only infected by pagan moral codes, but also by the pagan works-righteousness understanding of God’s character. Human sacrifice was how you could “buy off” a pagan god. A pagan worshipper did human sacrifice to say: Let me show you how impressed and awed I am by your power. But the God of the Bible wants only one kind of human sacrifice—the self-sacrifice of offering God the lordship of every area of our lives. Even this is not to secure his favor, but in response to it: “In view of God’s mercy ... offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). Jephthah thought the Lord needed to be impressed, bought and controlled through a lavish “gift.” The tragedy is that

God had already decided to save his sinful people (Judges 10:16), and to use Jephthah to do so (11:29).

Why did he then keep his vow? This is the hardest one to answer. The best answer is an extension of the same reason that he made it. Jephthah seems to have no concept of a God of grace. He sees God as basically like the pagan gods—a being whose favor can be earned through flattery and lavish sacrifices. And when he obviously realizes his rash vow has trapped him (v 35), why does he not simply confess its sinful foolishness and break it and save his daughter? The answer is: he does not trust God. He is trapped by his mistrust of God. He seems to believe that God will strike him down if he doesn't keep it. This is the same pagan, works-righteousness view of God that led him to make the vow.

— Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You) Location 1578 of 2989*. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Study 9

SAMSON (pt.1)

Judges 13:1-25

LEARNING FROM THE JUDGES BY DR. R.C. SPROUL

Certain periods of history stand out to me as particularly instructive for the course of all of history. That is, sometimes we can zero in on one period of time in the past, observe how the entire span of human history recapitulates that particular period, and then learn from that period what we should do today. One of these instructive periods is the period of the judges of Israel. This period, narrated for us in the books of Judges and Ruth and the opening chapters of 1 Samuel, spans a period of roughly three-hundred-and fifty years. If you want a sense of how wide an expanse of time this represents, think back to the middle of the seventeenth century in America. Think of all the history that has transpired in America from a period of one-hundred-and-twenty-five years before the Revolutionary War up to the present day. That's the same time span that the period of the judges covers.

For this period of about three-and-a-half centuries, there was no king in Israel, no single leader of the nation. Israel was living in the land of Canaan as a tribal federation, led by a succession of individuals whom God raised up in times of crisis and empowered to perform particular tasks. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, Samson exercised great physical strength against the Philistines. Deborah and Barak were anointed to defeat the evil King Jabin. And so on.

Now, the reason I believe the period of the judges is instructive for the flow of all history is the pattern we see during those three-hundred-and y years. Repeatedly during this era, the book of Judges tells us, the Israelites would nd themselves in a cycle that began this way: "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." And each time we read that phrase in the book of Judges, we see that God would raise up enemies of Israel—the Midianites, the Philistines, the Moabites, and others—as tools of chastisement against His people. Those pagan nations would oppress the Israelites, who would then cry out for relief and repent of their sins. Then, God would raise up one of the judges who, under the power of the Holy Spirit, would defeat the enemies of Israel and bring deliverance. One scholar calls this a cycle of relapse, retribution, repentance, and rescue. Following each relapse into gross sin recorded in the book of Judges is the retributive justice of God whereby He pours out His judgment and wrath against His own people. Under the weight of that retributive justice of God, the people are then brought to repentance, and they bewail their situation and await their rescue by God, who redeems them.

The grim history of Israel's sin in the period of the judges goes against what the people pledged. When Joshua brought the people together to renew their covenant with the Lord just before his death, the Israelites promised two things,

one positive and one negative. Positively, they promised to obey God. Negatively, they promised not to forsake Him for idols.

And this is significant in light of the promise God made again and again to the patriarchs. When He committed Himself to Jacob, for example, He said, “I will not leave you” (Gen. 28:15). This covenant pledge of God to those who are in a relationship with Him is a key theme of Scripture. The book of Judges attests to that, that even though God chastened His people, He was chastening His children whom He loved. And though they felt forsaken for a season, God did not utterly abandon them.

However, the record is that the people forsook Him. That’s the big difference between the God of Israel—the God of the covenant—and His people. God does not forsake us, but we are prone to forsake Him. What provoked the forsaking of God during the period of the judges was the Israelites’ great desire to be like their neighbors. God had called them to nonconformity. God had called them to be a holy nation. God had called them to be godly and to flee from idolatry, but that was unpopular in those days. It’s often been unpopular in church history. And without a doubt, it’s unpopular today as well.

The people of God relived the cycle of relapse, retribution, repentance, and rescue over and over again throughout biblical history. And, dare I say, the church has seen a similar cycle over the past two thousand years as well. But we have a tendency to think such things cannot happen in the life of the church today. We refuse to take note of this recurring pattern of the actions of God, believing that God will not bring calamity upon a people who forsake Him. But the God of Israel is a God who promises both blessing and curse, both prosperity and calamity. We should not be surprised to see trouble for the church when it has been worldly, when it has been unfaithful to the Lord. Sometimes, of course, the church suffers because of its faithfulness, because the forces of darkness respond with hostility against the advance of gospel transformation. At other times, however, the church suffers because of widespread, persistent unfaithfulness. That happened during the era of the judges, and it can happen today as well.

Nevertheless, we read in the book of Judges that when the Israelites repented, God delivered them. No matter how badly God’s covenant people fail, our Lord is quick to rescue His church when she repents. His people forsake Him, but He never forsakes them. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), but it is a judgment that is disciplinary, not destructive. It’s designed to move us to repentance and faithfulness. And the era of the judges shows us that the Lord will not fail to rescue and preserve His church when His church repents and cries out to Him.

—R.C. Sproul, in an article titled *Learning from the Judges*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/learning-judges/>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-7**. What did the people of Israel again do? What did the LORD do, according to **verse 1**? What else did the LORD do, according to **verses 2-7**? Why are **verses 2-3** significant? What is a Nazarite vow? How does **Numbers chapter 6** help clarify? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Read **verses 8-14**. What did Manoah ask the LORD for? How does the LORD respond to Manoah's request? What can we learn from these verses?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. Read **verses 15-20**. Why do you think “the angel of the LORD” did not reveal his name to Manoah? Who do many commentators believe “the angel of the LORD” to be? How did Manoah respond to the commands of the angel of the LORD? What do we learn about the LORD from **verse 19**? What happens when Manoah and his wife offer the sacrifice to the LORD? What can we learn from this scene?

[illegible]

4. Read **verses 21-25**. How does Manoah respond when he realizes he has been talking to “the angel of the LORD”? How does Manoah’s wife respond to her husbands words? What else stands out to you in these verses and why? What can we learn from these verses?

[illegible]

WHAT'S IN A NAME? BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

All this has happened before Samson is even born! But his birth is not in doubt, since it rests on God's promise. And so "the woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson" (Judges 13:24), a name which means "little sun." Since the sun was considered a god by many Canaanites, this is another clue that Israel, while not rejecting the Lord outright, have combined half-hearted worship of him with worship of other nations' deities. It is concerning that a future judge of Israel —a forerunner of God's Son—is himself named after a pagan god, being effectively called "Sun-son."

Nevertheless, God is at work for and through his flawed people. As Samson grows up, he is blessed by God (v 24), and God's Spirit begins to work in him (v 25). This is a boy conceived miraculously, chosen by God, set apart to serve him, blessed by him and shaped by his Spirit. Samson has every spiritual advantage. He is the last judge in this book, the last great hope for Israel. We wait to see how he will rescue and rule God's people in obedience to God.

And in almost every way, we will find ourselves disappointed. Samson's flaws, just as much as his birth, will remind us that God's people need another, greater Deliverer.

— Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You) location 1772 of 2989*. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

SAMSON ENDS UP LIKE ALL THE REST BY GEROGE M. SCHWAB

Samson has pride of place as the last and twelfth judge. Again the people do evil in the eyes of Yahweh. Again what is important is in whose eyes a deed is done. In their own eyes they are always justified, but what matters is how God regards one's actions. In response to their unspecified evil, he gave the Philistines power over Israel for an emblematic forty years. They have now become a serious problem in Judges, mentioned only in passing several times before. This brings the book up to a time contemporaneous with David's political situation; the pressing issue in his early years was the Philistine problem. From the vantage point of Israel's civil war, the Philistines had recently killed Saul, and the people of Israel had no king to lead them against the enemy. The Samson story ends in much the same way, with Israel's savior dead and the nation vulnerable.

— Schwab, George M.. *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12)* (p. 157). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Study 10

SAMSON (pt.2)

Judges 14:1-20

SAMSON: THE WOMANIZER BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

The story of Samson is famous for its potent mix of sex, violence, death and power—exactly the stuff of a contemporary summer action film! But if we read it as part of the whole narrative of the book of Judges, we will find it to be at least perplexing and probably disturbing. As Israel’s spiritual condition grows worse and worse, the scene seems to be set for a great judge/leader, perhaps the greatest of all. And chapter 13, with its annunciation, prepares us for a wonderful, powerful deliverer.

Instead, we find by far the most flawed character in the book: a violent, impulsive, sexually addicted, emotionally immature and selfish man. Most disturbing of all, the “Spirit of God” seems to anoint and use his fits of pique, pride, and temper.

– Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You)*. Location 1797 of 2989 The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-9**. What do we learn in these verses concerning the cleverness of Samson? Where did Samson's strength come from and how is it apparent in these verses? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 10-18**. What light does the *ESV Study Bible* note on **verse 10** shed on the word “feast”? Why is this significant to understand? How do these verses show us the weakness of Samson when it comes to women? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

3. Read **verses 19-20**. What is the result of Samson disclosing the riddle's answer to his wife, and she then betraying him to the 30 men? What do we learn about Samson here? How should these verses make us long for Jesus?

[illegible]

Seems that everyone in Ashkelon dialed 911 at once. Samson had come. Samson had struck down and stripped thirty of Ashkelon's leading citizens, appropriated their attire, and carted it off to Timnah, where he threw it all down among his tipsy companions and stalked off in a fury for Zorah.

Our impulse is to attribute the slaughter of Ashkelon to Samson serving 'in the flesh' (whatever that means). But the text will not allow us to do that. It insists that 'the Spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him' and so he 'went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men.' Now the Spirit is not giving Samson power to tear up lions (vv. 5-6) but to strike down Philistines. Here now was the occasion Yahweh was seeking (v. 4). Here is the climax of the story (see discussion on structure at the beginning of the chapter), for even Yahweh's secret is coming into the open. The text then is clear: what we are dealing with is not Samson's temper but the Spirit's power. If this seems brutal, we must simply live with it. We have already seen that when Yahweh delivers his people he does not always dip his saving acts in Clorox and sprinkle them with perfume. To be delivered from evil will frequently be messy.

If we are not offended at how vicious Samson's deed is, we may stumble over how small it is. If Yahweh is saving Israel, what difference can thirty Philistines make? Yahweh promised only that Samson would begin to save Israel from the Philistines (13:5). Here in Ashkelon is the beginning of that beginning. We must not despise it.

I have seen this principle operating in the personal situations of God's people. For example, a family receives a mammoth blow, the sudden death of a spouse and/or parent. Reeling from grief, the one left goes plodding on in confusion. As weeks and months go by, God does not close up the gaping wound or eradicate the dull ache; but the one stricken can frequently relate a small providence here or point to a timely provision there, which, though very small, points to the fact that God's care still hovers near. God's true people always treasure even the smallest of his deliverances.

'And he went up to his father's house' (v. 19b). After Samson 'went down' all through the chapter (vv. 1, 5, 7, 19; cf. v. 10), he finally 'went up.' And Samson's wife is given to the best man. Everything seems solved. All is quiet in Timnah tonight.

— Davis, Dale Ralph, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Chapter 17. <https://www.logos.com/product/18456/judges-such-great-salvation>

Study 11

SAMSON (pt.3)

Judges 15:1-20

SAMSON'S SPECTACULAR SIN BY DAVID MATHIS

In the book *Spectacular Sins*, John Piper writes about how God uses even (and especially) his people's most tragic sins to work his global purposes for the glory of his Son, and for his people's good. Judges 14 picks up on the tune.

There Samson bids his parents secure him a wife, a particular Philistine woman who has caught his eye. And, as you probably know, in ancient Israel, the Philistines are usually the bad guys. This marriage would be worse than Montagues and Capulets.

His parents, good Israelites, push back—but not as strongly as we might expect. Their response is surprising restrained: “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?”

But Samson has made up his sinful mind. “Get her for me, for she is *right in my eyes*.” (Judges 14:13).

Yikes. “Right in my eyes” is not a phrase to let pass your lips, especially when someone might record it for Scripture. Exhibit A is Eve, who listened to the serpent, and then saw that the off-limits tree “was good for food, and that it was *a delight to the eyes*, and that the tree was desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). Absalom shows a similar kind of decisional rebellion and self-reliance, over against God-reliance, in 2 Samuel 17:4. In strategizing against his father David, he hears Ahithophel's advice, and the text says, “the advice *seemed right in the eyes of Absalom* and all the elders of Israel.”

And, back to Samson, his brash self-reliance sets off a refrain in the latter part of the book of Judges. After 14:3, Samson's phrase is echoed in 17:6, and then the last line of the book sums up the whole mess: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

It is a serious mistake for Samson to take a wife from among the unbelieving Philistines, but God hasn't lost control. The very next verse (14:4) gives us God's shocking sovereignty over sin:

[Samson's] father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.

And so that we don't miss it, verse 7 tells us again that “she was *right in Samson's eyes*.” Samson is a rebellious sinner, his parents are poor guides, and all the while God is on his throne, bringing to pass his great purposes for the salvation of his chosen people, even (and especially) in their spectacular sins. Even in his downward spiral of sin, it would be “the Spirit of the LORD” who would rush upon Samson to bring about God's victory for his people over the Philistines (14:6, 19; 15:14).

—David Mathis, in an article titled *Samson's Spectacular Sin*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/samsons-spectacular-sin>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-8**. What does Samson do when he learns that his wife has been given to his companion? What does he do to the Philistines who “burned [his wife] and her father with fire”? How does the narrative move forward, with forgiveness and reconciliation or retaliation and retaliation? How should this make us long for Jesus?

[illegible]

2. Read **verses 9-13**. What did the Philistines do when they learned of Samson—that the LORD had raised him up as a judge for Israel? What did “the men of Judah” do when the Philistines told them their plans for Samson? What should they have done for the judge the LORD had raised up to save them? What can we learn from these verses?

[illegible]

3. Read **verses 14-17**. What did Samson do to the thousand men that came to kill him? Where did Samson's strength clearly come from? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **verses 18-20**. This is the first prayer of Samson that is recorded. What can we learn about Samson as we examine his prayer? What can we learn about the LORD as we examine how he answered? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Samson called his victory over a thousand a “great salvation” (Judg. 15:18). This is how he interpreted his own actions; it was not a vendetta born of personal spite. Samson sees himself as a savior. He is alone because no one will join him. This great salvation precedes the comment that he judged Israel for half a stylized generation (15:20). Thus, defeating the Philistines with the jowl was, in fact, delivering Israel from the oppressor. They continue to menace Israel throughout Samson’s judgeship, and he is finally betrayed and delivered to them. But the level of subjugation seems to have been shaved during his administration.

Samson was thirsty, and prayed to God about it (Judg. 15:18). It has been observed that of the judges, only Samson has such a vital and personal relationship with God. God miraculously answered his prayer. What does this mean? Did God approve of what Samson had been doing? Apparently so. He wants his people delivered from oppression, and by Samson’s hand. In Judges 15:19, God split open the “hollow place,” which is Hebrew for “the molar”—that is, “God split open the molar of the jawbone” (cf. KJV). Here is yet a third wordplay in the Samson saga. Note the time reference: “until this day” (15:19). This speaks to the proximity in time between the event and when it was written down.

As a leader, Samson is quite the failure. His judgeship consists of sporadic moments of impassioned ardor—both for and against the enemy. He will rise up and check their power with his own, but he also loves their women and their cities. Israel sides with the enemy against him. And he seems to despise his office of Nazir, doing everything to profane it except cutting his hair.

— Schwab, George M., *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12) (pp. 164-165). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Study 12

SAMSON (pt.4)

Judges 16:1-22

WHY ARE VERSES 1-3 IN CHAPTER 7? BY GEROGE M. SCHWAB

How is the sexual exploit of a whore-mongering biblical hero part of the holy Word of God? One way to answer such questions is to ask how the story would be read differently if the paragraph were not there. That exercise helps to clarify matters. Another way of putting it is this: what positively does the paragraph contribute to the overall narrative? Some suggestions along these lines follow below.

Up until this point, the reader has been treated to what arguably were the beginnings of Samson's judgeship. The Delilah story is his downfall. What was he doing during those twenty years of judging Israel? These three verses may be an indication of what his tenure as judge looked like.

Without this passage, one might regard Samson as having only two love interests in his life: his tragic wife and Delilah. Adding this little pericope disabuses the reader of that notion. Samson is certainly ruttish; he just can't seem to get enough of those Philistine girls. At the same time, it is clear that there was continuing animosity with the Philistines. They kept laying traps for him, but Samson outwitted them. Thus, the Delilah episode is not an isolated case. We saw how he broke down when his wife cried, so he gave in and told her the secret to his riddle. Love continues to be his weakness. In regard to the fair sex, he never seems to learn.

Apparently, Samson was about the business of keeping the Philistines at bay. This made him the object of their ire. They knew that they had to subdue him in order to subdue Israel. His carrying off a part of the gate demonstrates that they had no defense against him; he could do to the city whatever he wanted. Feats of strength such as this apparently characterized his administration as judge. The whole city was helpless when Samson was aroused.

These three verses accomplish one more thing: they introduce the reader to the Philistine city of Gaza. This is where Samson's career is headed.

– Schwab, George M., *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12)* (pp. 166-167). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 1-3**. What did Samson do when he went to Gaza? What has characterized Samson thus far in the book of Judges? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Read **verses 4-9**. How is this scene reminiscent of **Judges 14:15-18**? In what ways are they alike? In what ways are they different? What does Samson tell Delilah when she asks for his secret?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. Read **verses 10-17**. What seems to be Samson's Achilles heel? What else stands out to you in this passage and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **verses 18-22**. What does the writer say happened when Samson had his hair cut off? Does there seem to be some kind of irony here? What did the Philistines do to Samson after his strength left? What does **verse 22** imply? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

Sometimes we get confused about the way salvation works.

Almost by accident, we can fall into a gospel that's heavy on encouraging one another in God's forgiveness and grace and mercy, but woefully light on warning one another of the dangers of diving headlong into sin. This kind of gospel has no word for the brother or sister who gives in to temptation over and over again — who “makes a practice of sinning” (1 John 3:8).

Over time, we avoid the Old Testament with all of its narratives of God's judgment, cherry-pick through the sermons of Jesus and the letters of Paul, then skip passed the harsh warnings of Hebrews and James. We select only the passages that tell us of God's love and forgiveness and joy. But are these warnings in Scripture not a part of God's plan to save, too?

Let's admit the hard truth: *Many of us are failing in the fight against daily temptation.*

Could it be that the warnings in Scripture are actually necessary for victory against sin? Is there real danger in avoiding all the warning signs? How many of us are flying down the highway ignoring the flashing red lights and traffic signs that read: *This way to eternal destruction* (Matthew 7:13)? Let's turn for a moment to one of those passages and see exactly how temptation works.

The Anatomy of Temptation

In Judges 16, the familiar story of Samson and Delilah shows us that temptation thrives among men and women who refuse to heed the warnings:

After this Samson loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, “Seduce him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him. And we will each give you 1,100 pieces of silver.” (Judges 16:4–5)

From the start, the narrator reveals the end of this path. Delilah the temptress has been hired by the enemies of God to lead Samson to the slaughter. Sin is hell-bent on premeditated murder. It will kill you. When we ignore God's warnings in his word, we blind our eyes to the imminent danger.

Flirting with Death

Delilah reels Samson in like a prized bass. What's more, Samson seems to enjoy the fight. He nibbles the lure that should set off alarms in his head, never feeling the sharp hook as it takes hold:

So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you.” Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.” (16:6–7)

Samson is in bed with temptation. He's flirting with her. Delighting in the fleeting pleasure, he toys with danger:

Now she had men lying in ambush in an inner chamber. And she said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the bowstrings, as a thread of flax snaps when it touches the fire. So the secret of his strength was not known. (Judges 16:9)

It’s easy to marvel at Samson’s stupidity, but how often do we act in the very same way? We tell ourselves we can dabble in sin and emerge unscathed: *I am strong enough. I know my limits.* At this point, Samson doesn’t give his whole heart to temptation — just enough to have fun. Temptation has a way of lowering our guard through false sense of security. He makes it out alive this time.

“Sin has consequences. Always.”

The next time, Delilah wants *more*: Then Delilah said to Samson, “Behold, you have mocked me and told me lies. Please tell me how you might be bound” (Judges 16:10). Two more times, Samson flirts with temptation, allowing himself to be bound in various ways, and bursts the bonds. *See, I’m strong enough. This sin isn’t that dangerous. I’ll be just fine. I can stop whenever I want to. I’m in total control.*

Meanwhile, the alarm bells are blaring! It’s obvious to everyone involved that Delilah is leading Samson by the hand toward death. However, every time she becomes more brazen in her attempts on his life, Samson cups his ears a little tighter against the sirens. Each time, he gives in more, inching closer to destruction.

Sin Goes for the Heart

In her final appeal, Delilah goes for the deathblow. She goes for his heart:

And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies.” And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. *And he told her all his heart.* . . (Judges 16:15–17, emphasize added)

Did Samson ever imagine that a path that began with fun and exhilaration would end in trading his vow to the Lord for a Philistine mistress? He who was so mighty gives his heart to a woman bent on his destruction. Temptation wore him down little by little. Each time he was bound, he had an opportunity to turn back, to renounce Delilah, to repent of his sin and return to the Lord. But he ignored the warnings. All of them.

Samson told Delilah about his Nazarite vow and his uncut hair. Samson laid down to sleep in the lap of sin, totally oblivious to the danger as his locks were shorn. Here is what happened:

And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him. (Judges 16:20)

This is one of the saddest sentences in the whole Bible: *But he did not know that the Lord had left him*. Samson so took the Spirit for granted, he so seared his conscience, he was so blinded by his sin that he could not see that the Lord was nowhere to be found.

He assumed all the way down the path of wickedness that the Lord was by his side. But his heart was calloused and hardened against the warning of the Lord; he felt no difference when the Lord quietly departed.

The Consequences of Sin Are a Means of God's Grace

The Philistines ended up seizing Samson and gouged out his eyes, and making him their prisoner in Gaza (Judges 16:22). Do you remember the warning in the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29). The story of Samson teaches us this: *If you will not gouge out your own eye, God will do it for you — for the sake of your soul*.

You may lose your marriage if you continue in that porn habit. You may lose your job if you continue to defraud your company. You may end up losing everything if you plunge headlong into drunkenness. Sin has consequences. Always.

Eyes will be gouged out, one way or another. If the children of God ignore the warning signs, God's warnings will have to get louder and clearer. In Judges, Samson's eyes lead him into temptation over and over again. It's no accident that God's discipline cuts to the source of his sin.

Why God Warns Us

But here is the good news: God's discipline is meant to save us from eternal destruction. God took Samson's eyes so that he would not lose his soul. The episode ends with hope: "But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved" (Judges 16:22).

When Samson was blinded, he saw most clearly. No longer led astray by temptation, Samson was able to follow the Lord. God's discipline is not pleasant, especially when you intentionally ignore the warnings — warnings that are meant to keep you from destruction and death. Do not think you will continue to walk in temptation without consequences. The eye will be gouged out one way or another. Either you can do it, God can do it for you in his grace, or you can fall into eternal destruction.

Brothers and sisters, "As long as it is called 'today,' [be sure] that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin!" (Hebrews 3:13)

— Chad Ashby, in an article titled *How To Stop Flirting With Sin*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-stop-flirting-with-sin>

Study 13

SAMSON (pt.5)

Judges 16:23-31

GOD DOES NOT NEED YOU TO BE STRONG BY JOHN BLOOM

God does not want us to be strong. God wants to be our strength.

Perhaps a better way to say it is this: God wants us to be *really* strong, which is different from the way we might typically desire to be strong. We often want to be strong in a way that reflects well on us. God wants us to be strong in a way that reflects well on him. In a fallen world, these two wants are often at odds.

Now, if we were sinless, our wants and God's wants would be in perfect harmony. We would want to be strong only in the strength that God supplies (1 Peter 4:11). But since we are not sinless, there is often dissonance between the strength we desire to have and the strength God desires to give us.

As a result, we can find ourselves deeply discouraged by the very limitations and adversity that God has actually designed to cultivate in us strong, courageous, and liberating faith.

Trapped in Weakness

In Exodus 12, the people of Israel had been miraculously released from slavery and led out of Egypt by Moses. And by Exodus 14, Israel was encamped by the Red Sea, in a vulnerable and probably puzzling position. God has purposefully instructed Moses to lead Israel there because he had determined to humiliate Pharaoh and the Egyptians one last dramatic time — one more dramatic exclamation point to place on the declaration to Egypt and the world that would reverberate for the remainder of human history: “I am the Lord” (Exodus 14:4).

But the Israelites didn't understand God's purposes. There was probably plenty of murmuring about what in the world they were doing camped at what looked like a dead end. This only grew to fever pitched panic when Pharaoh's army showed up and pinned them all against the sea. It had all the look of a worst-case scenario: death by sword or death by drowning.

And like most of us would feel, the people were scared and angry. They yelled to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?” (Exodus 14:11).

They were trapped in a weak place — a place designed for them by God.

Weakened to Learn Where Strength Really Is

Moses's reply to the panicky people was, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exodus 14:13–14).

And fight for them he did. While holding off the Egyptian army with the pillar of fire, he opened for the Israelites a dry path through the Red Sea. Then he let the Egyptians loose and they chased Israel hell-bent into the sea, which swallowed them.

And on the other side of it all, Moses and the people erupted in a song we still sing today:

“The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.” (Exodus 15:2)

When the Egyptian army showed up, God could have made Israel a nation of Samsons. The Holy Spirit could have rushed upon them all, and they could have whipped Egypt with a bunch of donkey jaws. Why didn’t God do that?

Well, remember Samson? When God gave Samson power to overcome 1,000 Philistines on his own, what was the song Samson sung afterward?

“With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men.” (Judges 15:16)

“I struck down.” There is no hymn to God by Samson after any of his exploits, and he didn’t survive the one that likely got him mentioned as a model of faith in Hebrews 11:32. God was Samson’s strength, but Samson didn’t really recognize it.

God wanted Israel to understand that he was their strength and their salvation so that he would become their song. That’s why he put them in the weak, helpless place.

The Lord Is Our Strength

The exodus was the greatest Old Testament foreshadowing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God delivers us all as helpless children, caught between the forces of evil and the sea of God’s wrath. Jesus is our deliverer, and his cross and resurrection our deliverance.

But the exodus, along with all the other biblical stories of redemption, is also a reminder that God purposefully designs our weak places and assigns us to them. When we feel ourselves trapped in them, we can be deeply discouraged, panicky, and even angry. God’s purposes in such experiences are typically not clear to us at first. Things just look like he’s either made a huge mistake or he’s capricious. But he’s neither.

The truth is that, as sinful people, we don’t really understand what it means for God to be our strength and our salvation until we are put in a weak enough place where he is our only option. At first, this doesn’t feel like a great mercy, but later, sometimes much later, we discover it was a gift of measureless mercy. And then God really becomes our song.

— John Bloom, in an article titled *God Does Not Need You to Be Strong*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-does-not-need-you-to-be-strong>

[illegible]

1. Read **verses 23-24**. Why do the Philistines gather? Who did they sacrifice to? Why did they worship Dagon here? How does the LORD humiliate the idol Dagon and his worshipers in **1 Samuel 5:1-5**?

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2. Read **verses 25-27**. Why did the Philistines bring Samson out in the midst of their rejoicing? How many Philistines, and of what kind, were present? What does Samson do when he is brought out and how does this further show his cunning?

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. Read **verse 28**. What did Samson ask of the LORD? Why did he ask this? Do you think this was the right motivation—how does **Deuteronomy 32:35-36** shed light on the answer? What would have been the right motivation?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **verses 29-31**. What did Samson do after he was placed by the pillars? In what way is Samson like Jesus? In what ways is he different? What can we learn from the life and death of Samson?

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SAMSON AND JESUS: VICTORIOUS IN DEATH BY ALYSSA JONES

When the Israelites were ruled by judges, they fell into cycles of sin. Each time, their enemies overtook them and they cried out to God. So God raised up a deliverer to save the Israelites. (See Judges 3:9,15.) But when the judge died, they fell into sin again.

Samson was the last judge God raised up to deliver His people. At that time, the Israelites were under the control of the Philistines. Samson's life was full of bad decisions, but God did not abandon him. Samson ultimately defeated the Philistines, but the victory cost him his life.

Samson is remembered as a tragic hero, not the admirable man one might strive to emulate. But the story of Samson in Judges 13–16 reminds us of a greater Deliverer—Jesus Christ. Jesus never sinned, but the Lord turned away from Him as He hung on the cross. Jesus gave up His life to secure the victory over our greatest enemies, sin and death.

As you teach kids about Samson, encourage them to think about Jesus, our Deliverer. Use the following verses to talk about the ways Jesus was victorious in His death:

- **Galatians 1:4**—Jesus gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.
- **2 Corinthians 1:10**—He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and He will deliver us. We have put our hope in Him that He will deliver us again.
- **Colossians 1:13**—He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:10**—Jesus ... delivers us from the wrath to come.
- **1 Corinthians 15:54**—Death has been swallowed up by victory.

As Jesus hung on the cross, it seemed as though His enemies had won. But God was in control, and Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was His plan for the salvation of sinners. We can repent and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and He will rescue us from sin and death.

—Alyssa Jones, in an article titled *Samson and Jesus: Victorious in Death*, <https://www.gospelproject.com/samson-and-jesus-victory-in-death/>

Study 14

SHAMELESS

Judges 17:1–18:21

WHY A COVENANT-KEEPING KING WAS NEEDED

BY GEORGE M. SCHWAB

The cycles of twelve judges are now over, but the book is not quite finished. There are two epilogues, balancing the double introduction of chapters 1 and 2.

The first epilogue seems to pick up the story right after Samson. The action begins with Dan and treats Danites. Involved are 1,100 pieces of silver, which is what Delilah was paid, seemingly continuing with the fate of that money. But the Philistines are absent, as if the narrative treats a different time. This different time is made explicit well into the narrative. The first epilogue actually treats the beginning of the conquest of Canaan, and recounts how part of Dan settled to the north of Israel.

Both of the stories feature the one tribe hitherto absent from Judges: Levi. The career of one Levite is part of the first story; another's adventure, the second. Both stories also feature Bethlehem, the city of David. If the book of Ruth once served as appendix to Judges, then together they form the "Bethlehem trilogy."

These stories share another feature in common that also sets them apart from the remainder of Judges: the thrice-repeated refrain that there was no king and that everyone was a law unto himself. Apparently, these accounts are the final argument of the book for why a covenant-keeping king such as David was needed.

— Schwab, George M.. *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12) (p. 182). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

[illegible]

1. **Chapter 17** begins showing the depths of Israel's apostasy. The first section, **Judges 17:1–18:31**, is an example of their *religious corruption*. Read **verses 1-5**. What did Micah confess to his mother? How did his mother respond? What did she do with the silver and who did she dedicate it to? What did Micah do with the carved image? How is this reminiscent of **Exodus 32:1-10**? How does **Exodus 20:4** reveal the foolishness of Micah and his mother? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Read **verses 6-13**. How should **verse 6** make us long for Jesus? Further evidence is shown here of Israel's *religious corruption*. This time it is not a family in general, but a Levite in particular. Why did the Levite become "content to dwell with the man"? Were priests meant to be private servants of families of public servants of the people? What did Micah think would happen now that he had a Levite as his very own priest, according to **verse 13**?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. After showing the *religious corruption* of a family (Micah and his mother) and of a Levite, the narrative now turns to showing the *religious corruption* of an entire tribe, the Danites. Read **verses 1-6**. Why were the five Danites spying out and exploring the land? Where was the Danites allotted territory according to **Joshua 19:40-47**? How does **Judges 1:34-35** help us understand why they did not possess an inheritance? Where did they end up finding lodging? What did they ask the Levite to do? Does anything in the text say that the Levite actually inquired of the LORD? How does **Jeremiah 10:21** shed light on the stupidity of this kind of promise? What does Jeremiah 10:21 say the results of such stupidity would be?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. Read **verses 7-21**. What did the Danites find when they scouted the land of Laish and how did they respond? How should they have responded? What did they end up doing to Micah and the Levite? How did the Levite respond? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

These two chapters give us a great example of the banality of evil. Evil does not usually make people incredibly wicked and violent—that would be interesting, and tends to wake people up. Rather, sin tends to make us hollow—externally proper and even nice, but underneath everyone is scraping and clutching for power, in order to get ahead. We continually just step on each other, as Micah was stepped on by the Danites and his Levite. But after all, he had tried to rob his own mother before these men came and robbed him.

C.S. Lewis called these folk “men without chests” in *The Abolition of Man*. They may have reason (represented by the head) or visceral feelings and drives (represented by the gut), but they don’t have hearts. They are not really choosing, but rather are being driven by their desires for power and gain, by their fears and anger. We are all in danger of being just as banal and hollow and uninteresting, if we insist on making God “tame” and banal! Only by worshiping the real God can we escape this boring fate and know the blessing of coming to the house of God, the Lord Jesus, the One who has the words of eternal life.

— Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You)* location 2408 of 2989. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Study 15

WORTHLESS

Judges 19:1-30

WE SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THE WORST BY DALE RALPH DAVIS

It's a quiet evening in Gibeah, three miles north of Jebus (Jerusalem). The Levite, his concubine, and his servant are enjoying a delightful supper in the home of their generous host (19:22). One of those cosy times that warm memories are made of. Then comes the hollering and the racket, the thumps of bodies throwing themselves against the door, and at last the cries become discernible: 'The man ... have sex with him.' Now the reader realises how very dark it is in Gibeah.

A little reflection, however, reminds us that the writer has skillfully prepared us for this lurid scene. Glancing back we see that we are yet in the wake of a series of contrasts. There is the warm, gregarious father-in-law in Bethlehem-judah (vv. 3–9); no one is his peer in hospitality! He makes the men of Gibeah appear as the calloused tightwads they are (vv. 14–15). The Levite's servant suggested they stay in Jebus (Jerusalem), but the Levite was unwilling to lodge among foreigners who weren't Israelites (vv. 11–12). Did he perhaps say, 'You never know what might happen in a pagan town'? Had he known he was heading for Sodom-in-the-land-of-Israel he might have revised his opinion about Jebus. The one man who did extend hospitality in Gibeah was not actually from Gibeah. He was an import from the hill country of Ephraim (v. 16). The Gibeans were a bunch of social louts. Nor could any Gibeon have said hospitality would have been too much expense; they could see that the Levite carried ample provisions for his needs (v. 19). The mob (v. 22) still shocks us, but as we look back on the writer's subtle contrasts of the Gibeans with the father-in-law, the Jebusites, and the sojourner, we almost wonder if we should not have expected the worst.

– Dale Ralph Davis, chapter 21 *New Sodom, from Judges: Such a Great Salvation (Focus on the Bible)*, <https://www.amazon.com/Judges-Great-Salvation-Focus-Bible/dp/1845501381>

[illegible]

1. **Chapter 19** begins to show the *moral corruption* of the people of Israel. First, this is shown by a Levite and the treatment of his concubine. Second it is shown by how the “worthless fellows” treat these sojourners. Read **verses 1-9**. What is the current setting in Israel that we are reminded of in **verse 1**? What is a concubine—how does the *ESV Study Bible* note on **verse 1** shed light on the answer? How does the concubine’s father treat the Levite when he comes to his house? How does the Levite respond? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Read **verses 10-21**. Why did the Levite not want to “spend the night in the city of the Jebusites” but rather “pass on to Gibeah”? Who offered hospitality to the Levite and his concubine? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

3. Read **verses 22-28**. What do the “worthless fellows” do? How is this reminiscent of **Genesis 19**, when the angels come to Lot’s house in Sodom? What did the master of the house do when the worthless fellows demanded the Levite? What did the Levite do? How does this make us long for Jesus? What should they have done? What did the worthless fellows end up doing to the concubine? What else stands out to you in this passage and why?

[illegible]

4. Read **verses 28-30**. How did the Levite initially respond when he realized his concubine was dead? How should he have initially responded? How did he eventually respond? How should this make us long for Jesus? What else stands out to you in this passage and why?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

HOW SHOULD WE REACT? BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

How should we react to the events recorded in Judges 19? We should mourn. These are God's people. They are our spiritual ancestors. And they show us, to an extent, ourselves. We may have secrets buried deep that bear resemblance in some (perhaps small) way to the conduct of the Gibeonites. Or we may not have committed such things, but (like the Levite) have failed to prevent them, enabling them through inaction. We will have all told ourselves and others a better story about ourselves and our conduct than the whole truth would reveal. And, as the book of Judges has repeatedly challenged us about, we will all have allowed ourselves, unconsciously and even consciously, to be shaped and enslaved by our culture rather than by the Lord, whose name we call on, just like Israel.

Judges 19 should move us and prompt us to mourn, for them and for ourselves. "No one [is] righteous" because we live as though we have "no king" (19:1, 21:25). What we need is a King who will rescue us, rule us and change us. We can only appreciate the gospel—that in Jesus, this is who we have—if we first grasp that we are more wicked and more desperate than we ever imagined.

—Keller, Timothy. *Judges For You (God's Word For You)* location 2510 of 2989. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Study 16

HOPELESS

Judges 20:1-48

IMPRESSIVE YET TRAGIC BY DALE RALPH DAVIS

Israel's unity is both impressive and tragic—and tragic because it is impressive. An exceptional unity indeed, for an exceptional crime, to be sure. Yet it is a unity of Israel against Israel. The story itself breathes an air of tragedy, for three times it remembers that all Israel and Benjamin are 'brothers' (vv. 13, 23, 28). No, Benjamin's wrong cannot be ignored, but there is a sadness about it nevertheless. And it becomes a sadder sadness when one begins to ask: Now why couldn't Israel ever get that united against the Canaanites or the Midianites or the Ammonites or the Philistines? Why is it that when Israel can really get itself together it is against—Israel?

— Dale Ralph Davis, chapter 21 New Sodom, from *Judges: Such a Great Salvation (Focus on the Bible)*, <https://www.amazon.com/Judges-Great-Salvation-Focus-Bible/dp/1845501381>

[illegible]

1. **Chapter 20** reveals further *moral corruption* in Israel, this time by the entire nation subjecting one of their tribes to complete annihilation. Read **verses 1-11**. What does the writer mean by “from Dan to Beersheba”? How did the people of Israel initially respond to “this evil” that had happened? What does the Levite leave out when he tells them of the evil that was done to his concubine by the leaders of Gibeah? How did the people of Israel eventually respond to “this evil”?

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2. Read **verses 12-17**. What did the people of Israel demand from the Benjaminites? How do **Deuteronomy 13:5** and **17:7** shed light on their demands? How did the Benjaminites respond?

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3. Read **verses 18-28**. What admirable thing do the people of Israel do time and time again in these verses? What can we learn from these verses? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

[illegible]

4. Read **verses 29-48**. According to **verse 35**, who defeated Benjamin? What can we learn from this? How far did the people of Israel take this civil war according to **verse 48**? What else stands out to you in these verses and why?

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TOWARD THE ESCHATON (THE END OF THE WORLD)

BY GEORGE M. SCHWAB

The sin of Gibeah is meant to be read in conjunction with Genesis 19, about Sodom. There are many parallels, including destruction by fire and the smoke rising to heaven. In Genesis, Lot's firstborn daughter looked down on the destruction and said literally: "there is not a man on earth" (Gen. 19:31). (It is interesting that this account is followed by that of a people-group perpetuated by means of a vineyard, just as in Judges 21.) To say that there is not a man on earth sounds like the end of the world, i.e., all the men of the land have perished by fire. Jesus connected this destruction with the actual end of the world:

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! (Luke 17:28–32 NIV)

This is the moral that Jesus draws from the type-scene: it is about the end of the world. It will be like that when the Son of Man is revealed. Therefore, flee from the wrath to come, and don't look back longingly at the city. Lot's wife did, revealing where her loyalties were, and she was caught up in the judgment against it.

"Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins," says Revelation 18:4, which also describes the destruction of the city of this world, Babylon, whose smoke goes up to heaven "for ever and ever" (Rev. 19:3).

Israel put the city to *herem* fire. The last word of the Christian Old Testament is *herem*; the prophecy is that the whole world will be *herem*, on the great and terrible day of the Lord (Mal. 4:6). God will judge sin in the end, and this hellfire is what Gibeah experienced ahead of time—and for which the whole world presently waits.

— Schwab, George M.. *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12)* (pp. 216-217). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Study 17

KINGLESS

Judges 21:1-25

THE KING WE NEED BY DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

Many commentators believe that the author [of the book of Judges] is an apologist for King David's rule, and that he is trying promote the importance and support of Davidic kingship. He is saying: Look at the inadequacy of human nature! We need more than these episodic, charismatic military chieftains—we need a permanent king. It may or may not be true that he is aiming to promote David, but he certainly makes a powerful case for the insufficiency of human nature! The book of Judges is not a “book of virtues” or a series of “moral exemplars.” The judges are “heroes of faith” only (Hebrews 11:32-34)—their heroism lies only in the way they trust God to work for, in and through them despite themselves, using them in his grace to rescue his equally flawed people.

The author convinces us that we need a savior—but what kind? God may be using the author of Judges to show us realities beyond his conscious and deliberate intentions. He has shown us that we need a deliverer—but by the end of the book we have come to wonder whether a mere human king will be enough. The histories of 1 and 2 Kings and Chronicles follow a long line of human kings who lead people at best not much closer to, and at worst away from, loving obedience to God. By the end of those books, we know that we need someone beyond David himself.

By the end of Judges—especially in the life of Samson—we first realize that we need a deliverer who can come without being called for, since human beings are not really seeking God (Romans 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:13). We will not be able to choose him; he will have to choose us (John 15:16). Second, we come to realize that this deliverer will have to do it all himself, since we will not be able to contribute anything to our salvation (Ephesians 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-6). Third, we are even given the mysterious hint that this deliverer will himself save us through weakness, through a “victorious defeat”—through his death, not just his life (Philippians 2:1-11). Fourth, we need a king who can “purge” us of evil (Judges 20:13) in our hearts, not just in our society. Surely the author of Judges spoke more truly and wisely than he knew! We need a king, but a greater king with a greater deliverance than any human can be or perform.

It is the psalmist who truly sees all the way to the horizon: “Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth” (Psalm 96:11-13).

Here, the word “judge” is used in its original sense of “rule with justice.” The psalmist realizes that when the true Judge and King returns, all nature (and human nature) will finally blossom and reach peace and fullness. Not until then.

For now, we all search for a king—someone to rule us, someone to rescue us. There is only one man who provides what we are looking for. We must look to the greatest King, the ultimate Judge—or we will serve a false one.

– Keller, Timothy. Judges For You (God's Word For You) location 2624-2641 of 2989. The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

NOTES:

[illegible]

1. Read **chapter 21** and write down what stands out to you as the people of Israel scramble to reverse what they have done to wipe out the tribe of Benjamin.

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2. How does **verse 25** perfectly sum up the book of Judges? What are some scenes wherein you vividly remember someone doing “what was right in his own eyes”?

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3. Look back through the entire study at all of your answers. What was new? What was convicting? What was encouraging?

New:

Convicting:

Encouraging:

Judges is about God's forging a community of faith for himself out of this people. He uses various methods, such as raising up opposition to pressure them to return to faith, empowering judges to lead them out of the consequences of their folly, and harshly checking their self-destructive arrogance and folly. Judges reads at times like a secular history, but it is not. Spiritual principles drive events; behind the scenes God is working to bring about the desired result.

Judges puts on display what Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered saviors can do. Nothing can stand against them. They serve as types of the Spirit-endowed kings, Saul and David. They also continue the work of Joshua. Thus, they model what is possible for Christians, building God's kingdom and his church. The saviors had personalities ill-equipped for the task, yet in the Spirit, the task was accomplished. Christians also are wayward and foolish, and yet the task at hand for the church will surely be completed.

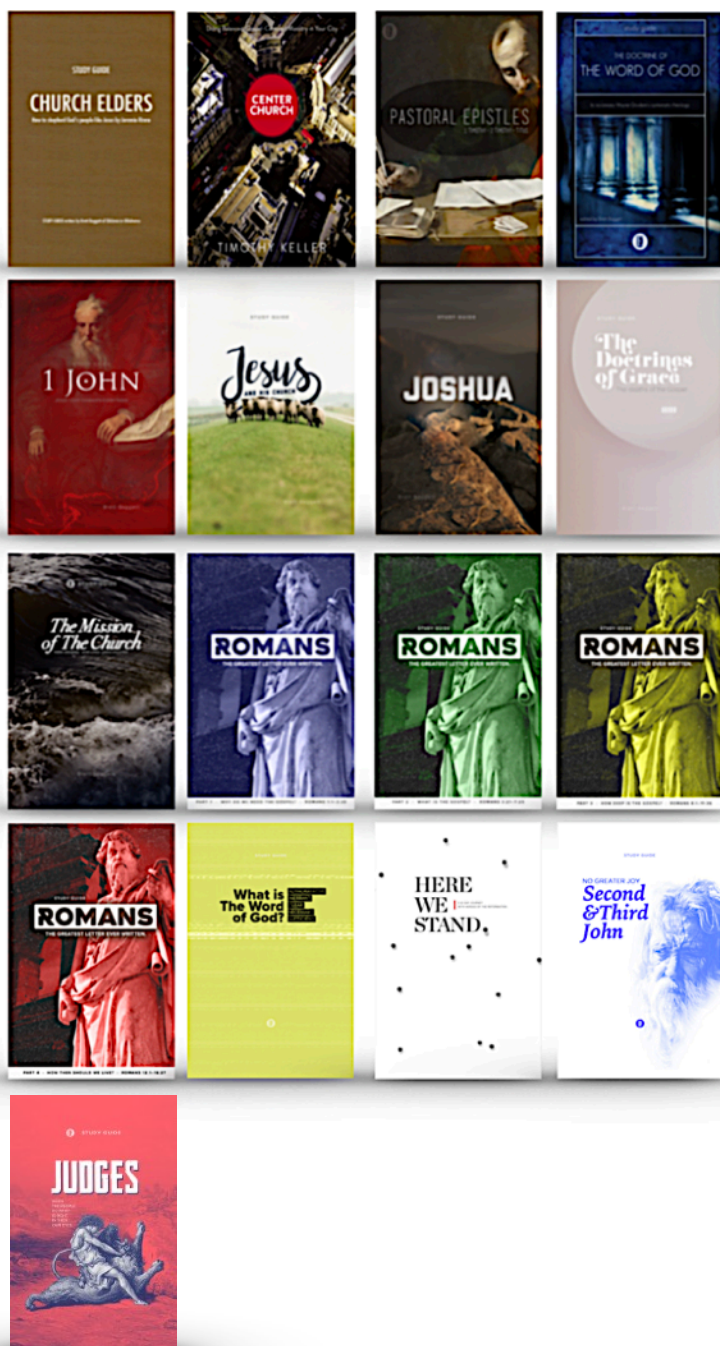
What the text longs for is such a leader, a king like David, who has the Spirit without measure, who never fails, who always leads aright. Thus, Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the book of Judges; he is the Savior extraordinaire who will save his people from the consequences of their sin.

The book of Judges illustrates the operation of Deuteronomy's covenant curses and blessings. Faithfulness leads to blessing; apostasy leads to curse. What is needed is a king who will lead on the path of blessing.

The ultimate meaning of the book of Judges will be revealed when Jesus the Judge and Savior returns: "From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Rev. 19:15). On that day every enemy will be vanquished, and the community of faith will live with a new heavens and a new earth, the ultimate Promised Land, forever and ever. Amen; come, Lord Jesus.

— Schwab, George M., *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel According to Judges* (Gospel According to the Old Testament Book 12) (pp. 219-220). P&R Publishing, Kindle Edition.

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JUDGES

WHEN THE PEOPLE DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES

After the conquest of Canaan, depicted in the book of Joshua, the people of God spent around 350 years in a despicable cycle of joy and sorrow detailed in the book of Judges. Judges tells the sad story of the people doing what was right in their own eyes, which led to constant misery and the need for a deliverer.

In simplest terms, the book of Judges reveals how the LORD'S people are half-hearted at best and full-blown idolatrous at worst.

There is an endless cycle of unfaithfulness, discipline, regret, deliverance, and unfaithfulness again. As soon as a judge dies, the people forget the LORD.

This brings us to an important point—*the story of Judges should ultimately make us long for the true and better deliverer, Jesus.* Jesus is the king who not only rules over his people with justice and equity but also with grace and mercy. He not only delivers us from our great enemies sin and death but also changes our hearts so that we no longer deeply desire to do what is right in our own eyes. By God's grace, Jesus changes us to desire to do what is right in his eyes. He does not simply deliver us for a time but buys for us an eternal redemption by his cross and resurrection. He is the king who—at great cost to himself—delivers us from all danger and rules over us in all joy. He is the eternal king we need and long for.