

JUDGES

A TIME OF TURNING



A Devotional Bible Study
on the Book of Judges

by Sue LeBoutillier

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❧ *A Time of Turning* ❧ *Judges*

Welcome to our Bible Study on the book of Judges called, **A Time of Turning**. People tend to like alliterations — words that begin with the same first sound, like *Peter Piper, Sense & Sensibility, Dunkin' Donuts*.

In our English Old Testament, there are two books right next to each other that begin with the same sound — **Joshua** and **Judges**. Not only do the names of the books have a catchy flow to them, but the one-word summary of the books forms another alliteration — **promises** and **problems**.

— Joshua is filled with *promises* because God is faithful.

— Judges is filled with *problems* because people are unfaithful.

A faithful God, paired with unfaithful people, summarizes the cycle we will see over and over in this book. For Israel, the first 300 years in the Promised Land were characterized by:

- The unfaithfulness of God's kids (sin)
- The oppression by God's enemies (problems)
- The cry of God's kids (repentance)
- The faithfulness of God (deliverance)

We call this the *cycle of sin*, and we'll read about it seven times in twenty-one chapters.

- Each time the people turn away from obedience to God, they encounter problems.
- Each time they cry out to God, He helps them by raising up a leader, called a judge, to act as His deliverer.
- Each time they are delivered from their problems, they return once more to the beginning of the cycle — unfaithfulness!
- Each time we read through a cycle, we silently scream — *NO! Stop! Don't do this again — haven't you learned anything from history?*

If we're honest, we will be able to see a familiar reflection of our own image in the pages of Scripture and in the cycle of sin. We'll realize

that we too have a propensity to be unfaithful to the instruction of the Lord, which creates problems in our personal lives.

This cycle can easily be seen in our national life as well. Certainly, in our country, we are encountering problems that have been caused by turning from God's ways. We are a severely oppressed nation at the moment, and our greatest need is to move to the next phase of the cycle, which is repentance.

This study is titled, *A Time of Turning*. The first *turning* we find will be Israel's *turning* from obedience to God and that will be a bad thing. But there is an important blessing to be found when we embrace the idea that God is long-suffering and gives His kids opportunity to *turn once again* toward Him in repentance; that is always a good thing. Turning is always a choice — either for bad or for good. Lord, may we become better equipped to *turn* the right direction!

I'm glad you are joining us on this journey through the book of Judges and I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into a greater understanding through each page of Scripture, so that you can walk in faithfulness and obedience to His call in your life!

Many Blessings,

Sue LeBoutillier

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To watch the video teachings for this Bible Study go to:

ccontario.com/womens-studies

or

[YouTube.com/calvarychapelontario](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvYchapelontario)

*The best translation of the Bible to use is the one you understand the most easily — and using more than one translation can be a great aid to study! This study guide was created using the ESV (English Standard Version), which may be a helpful tool as you work through your study.

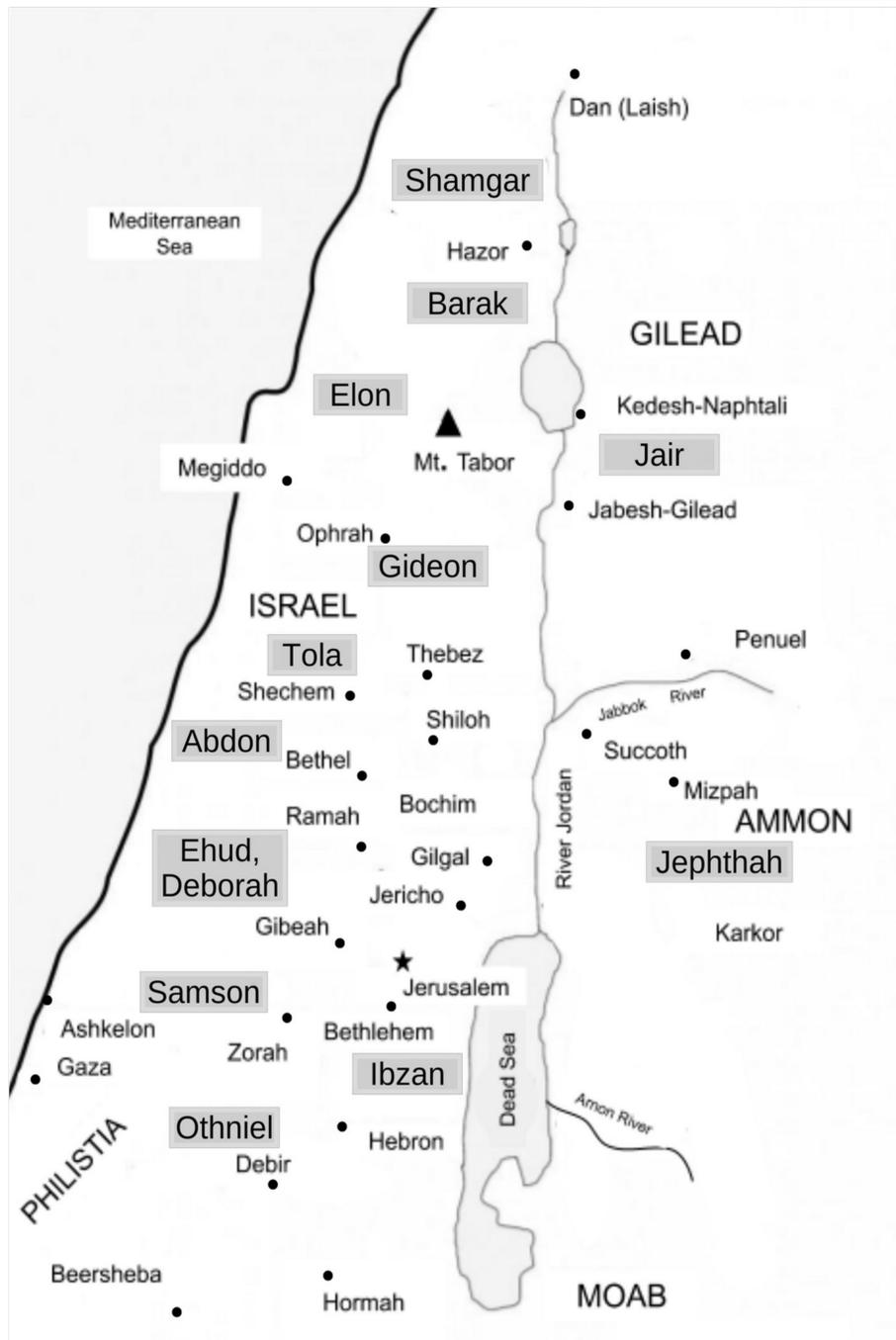


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Our Study of Israel's Judges

- Week 1: Chapters 1-2 — Turning from God
— Introduction to Judges
- Week 2: Chapters 1-3 — Turning to Idols
— **Othniel — Ehud — Shamgar**
- Week 3: Chapters 4-5 — Turning to a Helper
— **Deborah & Barak**
- Week 4: Chapters 6-7 — Turning from Fear
— **Gideon (Part One)**
- Week 5: Chapters 8-12 — Turning to Pride
— **Gideon (Part Two)**
— **Tola — Jair — Jephthah — Ibzan — Elon — Abdon**
- Week 6: Chapters 13-16 — Turning from Purpose
— **Samson**
- Week 7: Chapters 17-21 — Turning from Perspective
— Epilogue

Map of the Judges of Israel



Introduction to Judges — Turning from God

Use these pages as you listen to the Week One teaching video.
(www.ccontario.com/WOW-Judges).

If you are studying in a group, the questions on page 8 may provide some good discussion starters following the video.

The book of Joshua represented a time of _____.

The book of Judges represented a time of _____.

In Judges, we note that Israel *turned* from doing what was right in _____ eyes, to doing what seemed right in _____ eyes.

The book of Judges covers approximately _____ years from the leadership of _____ to the coronation of _____.

The author of this book is never disclosed, but many attribute the writing to _____.

There are ___ minor judges and ___ major judges for a total of ____.

Contrary to assurances given by today's secular, progressive culture, when a nation departs from a Godly worldview, the honor and treatment of women spirals _____. This we see in the book of Judges.

“They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so.”
— Judges 2:17 (ESV)

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. **Judges 2:10** tells us that a new generation arose after Joshua, *who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel*. What *did* God do for Israel in previous generations? What may have contributed to the next generation forgetting these things?
2. God's covenant with Israel meant they should honor Him as their only God. Instead of rejecting pagan gods and practices, they became *familiar* with them and then *comfortable* with them. How is this a warning to us about becoming *familiar*, and ultimately *comfortable*, with the ungodly aspects of the culture around us?
3. READ **Psalm 106:34-41** (which is a difficult read). Discuss how this Psalm depicts the days of the Judges.
4. Why do you think Israel seemed to walk more faithfully with God while a judge was alive, and then faltered again once the judge was out of the picture? What/who could potentially have a positive influence in your life to help you stay closer to God?
5. In what ways can you be proactive to ensure that future generations *know the Lord and the work that He has done for us*? Give at least one practical idea.

Judges 1-3 — Turning to Idols

Are you ready to launch into the book of Judges? This study will be both **historical**, since we'll walk through Israel's story of redemption; and it will also be devotional, because we'll apply these lessons to our own spiritual journey. The book of Judges will remind us how our personal choices play into God's work in our lives.

Before we're even introduced to the first judge, we have a thick overlap this week from the book of Joshua. Here's what it looks like:

- **Chapter one** gives the facts of Israel's successes and compromises, before and directly following the death of Joshua.
- **Chapter two** summarizes *why* Israel found itself oppressed by the neighboring nations.
- **Chapter three** begins to chronicle the cycles of turning from the Lord.

This is a five-day-a-week Bible study. The first day's assignment will often be reading, while the remaining days will focus on particular passages to help us understand history, and consider how to apply the passage to our own lives. The final page with **Questions for Thought and Discussion** will be useful in your discussion groups.

Remember to pray before you begin your study each week. Don't underestimate the power of God's Holy Spirit to enliven your heart, mind, and spirit to better understand the Holy Scriptures.

Day 1:

📖 READ **Judges 1-3**. List three phrases from these chapters that seemed particularly important or relevant to you:

-
-
-

Day 2:

✞ READ **Judges 1:1-26**. In the Promised Land, the nation of Israel had relied on Joshua for leadership. Under his command, God had granted them ownership of the entire land, but they had not yet taken possession of it all. There was still work that needed to be done!

Once Joshua was gone, Israel inquired of the Lord as to who should lead the way in continuing to take possession of what they had been given.

- Who was to lead Israel against the Canaanites?
- What was the assurance given by the Lord in **v.2**?
- What offer did Caleb make for the one who would attack and capture Debir (**v.12**)?
- Who was successful in that battle (**v.13**)? (Note him for future reference.)

In general, these verses summarize the success of Israel's conquest in the Promised Land. But they also hint at impending compromise:

- From **v.19**, what advantage did the inhabitants of the plain seem to have over Israel and how did this play into the first small sign of weakness or failure on Judah's part?
- And, from **v.21**, what was Benjamin's failure?

It sure doesn't seem like a very big deal yet, but we'll find out in the next passage, how the compromises quickly accelerated.

📖 READ **Judges 1:27-36**, and as you read, log each verse number below, where the enemies of Israel were allowed to live — whether they were *put to forced labor*, or were just flat out allowed to *live among* Israel:

Canaanites put to forced labor:

Canaanites allowed to live among them:

A new student of the Bible might find it difficult to understand why allowing the Canaanites to live would be a bad thing. For the sake of a brief review, let's read two passages

— God's word through Moses: **Deuteronomy 7:1-6**

— God's word through Joshua: **Joshua 23:4-8**

- Summarize the plain instructions given by the Lord through His servants and the reason for the instructions:

Have you considered those small areas of obedience in your life that God has pointed out? Have you ever found yourself in the situation of obeying half-way? Maybe you've obeyed 90% and left just a few of those Jebusites in Jerusalem. It doesn't seem like a very big deal in the moment, but wait till we're done with tomorrow's passage! We'll see how those small compromises have a way of growing overnight!

"God is perpetually at war with sin. That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites."

— G. Campbell Morgan¹

Day 3:

I think it could be said that the first step in *turning* from the Lord may be *partial obedience*, and the second step may be *passive obedience* — put simply — apathy toward God’s Word.

As parents, when our kids only half obey us, or lose interest in obeying us altogether, we respond and take action. Chapter two explains how God *responded* to Israel’s choices.

As we read this chapter, we need to remember that chronology is more important to Western readers than to the original audience. So to help us out a little, read the following passages in this order:

📖 READ Judges 2:6-13, Judges 2:1-5, Judges 2:14-15.

In these verses, Israel not only *turned from the Lord*, but they *turned to fake gods!* They were a special people who belonged to the one true God, but they exchanged worshipping Him for worshipping *imitations*.

- How was the next generation’s spirituality described in **v.10**?
- What reasons do you think may have contributed to that?
- Explain the spiritual choices Israel began to make in **v.11-13**:
- From **v.14-15**, describe God’s practical response:

- In **v.1**, we read God’s symbolic response — the *Angel of the Lord* left _____ and went to _____.

In the Old Testament, the *Angel of the LORD* was often a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. This understanding transforms this passage, from an angel’s mere change in location, to a weighty, disappointing symbolism of the shift of God’s presence with His people.

Gilgal was the place in Joshua Chapter 5, where Israel yielded in obedience to the work of God in circumcision. God declared there that, *He rolled away the reproach of Egypt from them*. Jesus appeared there to Joshua in the form of the *Commander of the army of the Lord* to impart courage.

Bochim basically means *weeping*. When God’s people turned from their worship of the one true God to worship imitations, there was nothing left but weeping. We do read that they sacrificed to the Lord, which produces a small glimmer of hope for the reader — but it quickly fades as we realize that wet eyes don’t necessarily equal repentance. Their eyes dried soon enough and they continued on as before.

 READ **Judges 2:16-23**.

There is a phrase in **v.17** that forms our theme for this study:

“they soon turned aside from the way...”

That phrase implies that Israel was headed in the right direction — but they made a choice to **turn** from it.

God gave His people a land to live in, He promised victory over their enemies, and He showed persistent attention to their welfare. But Israel still *whored after other gods and bowed down to them* (**v.17**).

Whether we call this ‘*a time of turning*’ or ‘*a cycle of sin*’, the circular pattern is obvious, and if we’re honest, we might even be able to identify a similar cycle in our own lives.

Chapter two reads like a thesis statement given to us, before we read all of the specific examples of Israel’s chronic turning from the Lord.

Let's identify the parts (or phases) of the *cycle of sin*. From **v.11-19**, fill in the missing words:

PHASE 1: *The unfaithfulness of God's kids* (sin)

v.11 Israel did what was _____ in the sight of the Lord.

v.12b They _____ other gods...and _____
to them. And they _____ the Lord to anger.

v.13 They _____ the Lord.

PHASE 2: *The oppression by God's enemies* (problems)

v.14 He _____ into the hand of their surrounding enemies.

PHASE 3: *The cry of God's kids* (repentance)

(This phase isn't detailed in the summary of chapter 2, but we read it often in *real-time*, as we move along in Judges.)

PHASE 4: *The faithfulness of God* (deliverance)

v.16 Then the Lord raised up _____, who _____
them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

RETURN TO PHASE 1: (this is a cycle after all)

v.19 But whenever the _____ died, they _____
and were more corrupt than their fathers, _____
other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

We'll become very acquainted with this pattern by the end of Judges!

Day 4: _____

📖 READ **Judges 3:1-6**.

I think this is a good place to point out two important concepts:

1) God is Faithful:

As Christians, when we say *God is faithful*, we usually refer to something wonderful God has done or will do to benefit us.

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Faithfulness is part of God's character. But one aspect of faithfulness we don't often celebrate, is that He is faithful to His promises to discipline His kids. Through His servants, God warned Israel many times about what would happen if they turned away from Him. In the book of Judges, when Israel DID turn from God, we saw His faithfulness to bring oppression.

2) People grow in times of struggle:

We intuitively think peace time would create the most fertile ground for spiritual growth, but this book shows us that *seasons of safety* often devolve into *times of turning*. Even in Joshua's day, God left enemy nations for Israel to conquer, because people grow stronger and their faith becomes larger when they have battles to fight. Battles are often a good thing.

This can be true in our lives — we try so hard to achieve peace and safety, that we sometimes consider it a failure if *all* is not victory and stability in our lives. But I wonder if the Lord allows, even perpetuates, some of our struggles in order for our faith to continue to grow.

📖 READ Judges 3:7-11 — Othniel.

As we read the first detailed account of Israel's cycle of sin and God's chosen judge/deliverer, I want to point out a few useful tips for studying through these cycles:

- 1) During each *time of turning*, we'll meet some repetitive phrases like
 - *Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.*
 - *But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD,*
 - *The LORD raised up a deliverer.*

If you mark those in your Bible, they will help you identify the cycles.

- 2) The map on p.5 identifies the region from where each judge arose. It's both important and interesting to remember that God's judges were not like kings or presidents. Israel was not united at this point — *everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

- 3) There is a chart on p.9 to complete for each judge. You can see Othniel has been done for you as an example. I think you'll find it interesting to fill in the chart as you move through this book.

Let's investigate the days of Othniel...

- Who did God raise up to oppress Israel (**v.8**)?
- How many years were they oppressed?
- Where did you hear about Othniel before and why might that be significant?
- What impressed you most about Othniel?
- How many years of rest did Israel enjoy under Othniel?

Day 5: _____

📖 READ **Judges 3:12-30** — Ehud.

Mark the repetitive phrases in your Bible and complete the chart on p.9.

- Who did God raise up to oppress Israel (**v.12**)?
- READ **Deuteronomy 34:3**. What is the familiar name for the City of Palms?

Can you imagine the disappointment, maybe even shame, to live under a foreign king, who *set up shop* for 18 years in the city that symbolized Israel's initial victory in the promised land?

- What was unique about the judge (deliverer) whom God raised up?

Give a short summary of Ehud's story from these verses:

•3:16-18

•3:19-20

•3:21-23

•3:24-26

•3:27-30

- Explain how God capitalized on Ehud's uniqueness for victory.

I purposefully called Ehud's left-handed condition *unique*, but in his day, it was a *handicap* — a weakness. Clearly, we can appreciate several aspects of God's work: 1) a handicapped man saving Israel; 2) God's choice to use Ehud as His servant in the first place; and 3) Ehud's willingness to rise above victimhood, and simply trust in God's strength.

- How does that speak to areas of your life that you perceive as weaknesses or even handicaps?

- Did Ehud seem to hesitate at all when God gave him an opportunity to fight for Israel?

- In what ways might *you* hesitate if you think you don't have what it takes for the task God has set before you?
- How many years of rest did Israel enjoy after Ehud?

📖 READ Judges 3:31 — Shamgar.

Our third judge, Shamgar, gets just one verse! The text doesn't even use the word *judge* or *deliverer* but it does say, '*after him*' (referring to Ehud) **was Shamgar**. On your chart on p.9, fill in as much information as you can find.

- Who did God raise up to oppress Israel?
- Since Israel had been stripped of their weapons, what was left in Shamgar's possession with which to deliver Israel?

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."
1 Corinthians 1:27

Both judge #2 and #3 seemed to function completely out of weakness—Shamgar's only weapon was a seemingly useless farming tool. An ox goad was a long pole, with one pointed end to prod the oxen, and a shovel on the other end to clean the plow. Once again we realize that God chose an unlikely deliverer, with an unlikely tool, who took a risk and offered what he DID have for the Lord's use. Well done, Shamgar!

What unlikely tools do you have at your disposal to offer to the Lord?

Pray through these lessons from today and tell God that you believe HE is able even if you are disabled!

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. List some important concepts to understand about God and His relationship to His people in chapters 1-3:
2. We noted that partial obedience was the first step in Israel *turning from God*. Read **Luke 16:10**. How do these words relate to the opening chapters of Judges and what relevance do they have in your life?
3. In what ways can you relate to Othniel, Ehud or Shamgar?
4. What specific character traits found in these men would you like to see increased in your life?
5. How are you inspired about the hidden potential of Christians when they willingly surrender themselves to God's power?
6. After each judge, Israel enjoyed a period of *rest* — but it was never permanent because the people *turned* once more. How can you plan to not squander a season of *peace* or *rest* that God may provide?

Judges 4-5 — Turning to a Helper

Day 1:

The first few judges had some courageous character qualities but, as we make our way through the full line-up of deliverers in the book of Judges, we're going to find them getting more and more complicated. They are a mixture of heroes, heroines and helpers, seasoned with failures and flaws.

This week's judge, Deborah, is unique among the judges in that she is a woman! And as a bonus, this passage contains a co-heroine!

 READ all of **Judges 4 & 5**.

Chapter 4 is a historical narrative written in **prose**, while chapter 5 retells the story in **poetic** form. To help organize this drama in your mind, as you encounter its robust cast of characters, write a short description of each person as you meet him/her:

Jabin:

Sisera:

Deborah:

Barak:

Heber:

Jael:

- List one of the most surprising elements of this narrative:
- List one of the most troubling elements of this narrative:

Day 2:

📖 READ **Judges 4:1-5**. Mark familiar phrases that are part of the cycle of sin, and fill in the chart on p.9 with any information you find.

- What people group did God raise up as oppressors for Israel this time?
- What did the enemy possess that was frightening to Israel?

Jabin was likely a title, like Pharaoh or Caesar — It's doubtful this was the same Jabin, who ruled in Hazor from Joshua's day (**Joshua 11:1**).

- READ **Joshua 11:13**. What had Joshua done to the town of Hazor?

Then, how could the town of Hazor still be around in **Judges 5**? How could Jabin be reigning in Hazor again? Well, go back to **Judges 1:19**.

- What kept Judah from completely driving out the Canaanites?

I guess you can burn the city, but if you don't remove the people, they can probably rebuild as many times as you can tear down. This is a clear demonstration of the warning God gave about the Canaanites becoming *thorns in their sides* (**Numbers 33:55**).

- How long had Israel been oppressed by Jabin (v.3)?

As always, when God's people cried for help, God rose up a judge. This time, the judge was already...judging! Deborah was a prophetess, a wife and a mother. She was the only one among the dozen judges, who seemed to have a role in decision-making, or pronouncing judgments.

Here we find her under her palm, counseling and guiding the people even before God raised her up as a deliverer. She will remain true to herself in the coming narrative — counseling and guiding her people.

Day 3:

🌀 READ Judges 4:6-10.

Deborah was a prophetess, so it's no surprise that she had a word from the Lord for Barak.

- What was Barak to do?
- What did Deborah promise to do?
- What was Barak's reservation/request?
- What did Deborah predict would be the outcome?

Deborah's plan sounded a little superhero-ish: *"You go up on the mountain, I'll draw out the bad guy, you catch him!"* What could go wrong? That's just the thing, when God determines it— it will happen! Just not always how we think.

- Write her exhortation to Barak from **v.6**:

🌀 READ Judges 4:11-16.

- What effect did the news of Barak's army on the mountain have on Sisera?
- Summarize Deborah's second exhortation to Barak from **v.14**:

- Summarize the outcome of the battle:

READ **Ephesians 5:17**. As Christians, we need discernment and we need to understand the times in which we are living. We must ask God to help us decipher His will.

Day 4:

Even though Jabin was king, it seemed his commander, Sisera, was the real threat. Even though Barak was the general of the army, it seemed Deborah was the real inspiration. Even though the tent belonged to Heber, it seemed the real heroine of this story was his wife, Jael!

✞ READ **Judges 4:17-24**.

- Why did Sisera take refuge in Heber's home in the first place?

- What do you think caused Jael to invite Sisera into her tent?

Look at the map on p.5 to appreciate the scope of this battle. It was an unlikely victory, but again, when God ordains a thing — it happens!

- What words might characterize Deborah's role in this event?

- What words might characterize Jael's role in this event?

- What similarities do you see between Deborah and Jael?
- Who got credit for the victory on that day (v.23)?
- Unlike the days from **Joshua Chapter 11**, what did Israel do to Jabin this time around (v.24)?

God was victorious and brought deliverance to Israel once again, but we shouldn't move on too quickly, before appreciating the extraordinary role of two women in His plan of deliverance. Does this surprise us? It's the reason I titled this week, *Turning to a Helper*.

READ **Genesis 2:18**. The word *helper* in the Hebrew is *Ezer* (pronounced Ay-zer). In God's divine design, He created the **woman** to be a *helper suitable for the man*. It's a glorious design. Woman was not a lesser creation or a second thought, she was made for a distinct purpose — to do what a man could not — specifically to be a life-giver.

But there's so much more to the nature of a woman. Did you know that the Spirit of God is also referred to by that Hebrew word, *Ezer*? (See **Deuteronomy 33:29**, **Psalm 118:7**, **Psalm 121:1-2**)

- In what ways might you describe the deliverance of Israel through two women as a positive function of a *helper*?

- In what ways might you see the reliance on a *helper* to be a negative commentary on the current condition of the men of Israel?

Day 5:

 READ **Judges 5**.

The people of Israel would sometimes break into song to commemorate impressive acts of deliverance. For example, Moses did this after God opened the Red Sea in **Exodus 15**. A song preserved important information for the next generation, and it was also an appropriate response of praise, after benefitting from God's generous victory.

- What themes does Deborah's song seem to celebrate the most?
- In **v.6-8**, what further insights do we gain about Israel's life just prior to this deliverance?
- Describe how **v.2** might be put into practice in our world today:

READ **Numbers 10:35, Psalm 68:1-3, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10**.

- Describe the unity you see in these passages with Deborah's final request in **v.31**:
- How many years did Israel have rest?

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. What do these chapters teach us about God's providence?
2. With whom do you identify most in these chapters — Deborah, Barak, or Jael (or what combination of the three), and why?
3. How would you describe Barak's trust in God? Why do you think he would only move forward if Deborah was with him?
4. In what ways does the life of Deborah inspire you to grow in discernment or perspective, so that you can encourage others?
5. In what ways does the quick thinking of Jael inspire you toward courage?
6. Even though they are not husband and wife, in what ways might Deborah and Barak demonstrate good teamwork in a marriage?
7. If you wrote a song about God's work in your life, what might be its theme?

Judges 6-7 — Turning from Fear

Running into familiar Sunday School stories can be one of the biggest blessings and also the greatest challenges in studying Judges. Gideon is one of those quintessential flannel board characters, so we'll need to remove all of the imaginary flannel pieces and start from scratch, to discover what the Holy Spirit wants to show us in this study.

Day 1:

🌀 READ **Judges 6 & 7.**

After reading all of the *movements* of Gideon's story, which episode intrigues you the most and why?

Day 2:

🌀 READ **Judges 6:1-10.** In your Bible, mark the phrases related to the sin cycle. Then, begin to fill in the chart for Gideon on p.9.

The Midianites and Amalekites oppressed Israel simply by bullying them.

- What did they do to their crops and herds?

- Where did Israel create places of refuge?

Being taken captive to a foreign land must be devastating, but a slavery of fear in your own homeland has got to be equally challenging.

- When Israel cried out to the Lord, whom did God send (**v.8**)?

- What key elements of the prophet’s message should have helped them connect the dots between their actions and their situation?

✞ READ **Judges 6:11-24**. Here we meet the *Angel of the LORD* again.

- Describe His greeting to Gideon in v.12?
- Explain the irony between the words of the greeting and the location of their meeting:

Threshing involved tossing wheat into the air with a rake-like tool. The heavy inner kernel of wheat would fall to the ground as the wind blew away the outer chaff. For this to work properly, a person had to thresh in the open. To thresh inside a winepress with its high sides blocking the wind would be extremely frustrating. Gideon must have been desperate about hiding.²

Based on Gideon’s response to the Angel, it seemed that, either Gideon didn’t know about the **prophet’s** message, or he failed to understand it. But the **Angel’s** message was very clear. Write the message from the Angel to Gideon from these verses:

V.12

V.14

V.16

We could rightly title this lesson, “*The Call of Gideon*”, because, once more, we witness God raise up a judge out of weakness and limitation, in order to highlight God’s ability and power.

- Summarize the events of the meal they shared from **v.19-23**:

- What was Gideon’s final interaction with the Angel (**v.22-24**)?

The Bible tells of other servants of God, who needed a bit of time to warm up to His calling, like Moses (**Exodus 3**) and Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 1**). God had to remind others that they were known and chosen, even from birth, for a special purpose in His plan of redemption, like Paul (**Galatians 1:15**).

- Write out **Psalm 57:2**—

Consider the purpose for which YOU were created. Now, write a brief prayer, asking God to fulfill His purpose in you:

Day 3:

🌀 READ **Judges 6:25-32**.

- What specific instructions did Gideon receive from the Lord?

- Why did Gideon take care of his mission at night?
- What does the reaction from the townsmen tell us about their spiritual condition at this time?
- What was the nickname given to Gideon, and what did it mean?

📖 READ **Judges 6:33-40**. It's interesting that God first met Gideon privately, and gave him his first assignment right at home. Only after that success, do we read about him calling up troops from most of Israel, in order to save the nation.

- Describe the current threat to Israel:
- God had promised earlier to *be with Gideon*. How is that promise described in **v.34**?

The act of **laying a fleece before the Lord** is something Christians refer to even today. Some people think it's a good way to find the direction of the Lord. *After all, they say, it's in the Bible.* But we should remember that not everything in the Bible is necessarily intended to be duplicated, just as it's recorded.

- How did the positive signs give Gideon the confidence needed?

This may have been a genuine act of seeking assurance from the Lord — after all, it wasn't that long ago that he was hiding in a winepress, and this mission would require an entirely new level of faith.

- How did God respond, and what does that teach you about God's benevolence?

Day 4:

✞ READ **Judges 7:1-11**. Do you remember Jabin's *900 iron chariots* in the times of Deborah? Certainly, any outsider would have laid money on the Canaanites as the clear winner in any skirmish.

We tend to think more is better, but God thinks and acts differently. In the case of Gideon's army, God wanted Israel to know their victory would not be due to the sheer number of their soldiers — but it would be God's victory. List the total number of men...

...at the spring of Harod: _____

... who returned home from fear: _____

...who voluntarily remained to fight: _____

READ **Deuteronomy 20:1, 8** for additional insight.

- Describe the method of separating the remaining men in **v.5-7**:

This was not a *readiness test*. There was nothing militarily superior about those who lapped the water. The test was a means to segregate the smallest possible number of men with which to move forward in battle.

How many men were finally remaining? _____

What percentage was that of the original number of men? _____

Gideon hasn't exactly been a pillar of faith since we've met him, but God has been gracious. He has not belittled Gideon, but has compassionately helped him overcome his fear.

- Who was Gideon instructed to take into the camp with him?

This is interesting — a *'two-are-better-than-one'* principle in action! And can't we all use a friend, a comrade, a partner, an encourager, a helper to **strengthen** us for the task God has called us to?

Read the following Scriptures and note how important the gift of companionship or encouragement can be:

Exodus 17:8-12:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11:

Philippians 2:19-20:

1 Thessalonians 5:11:

Day 5: _____

📖 READ **Judges 7:12-25**.

- Describe the contrast between the enemy army in **v.12**, and Gideon's army at this point:

How would you feel right about now, if your *massive army* of 300 men was about to battle this horde? No wonder God graciously gave Gideon one more sign to inspire his courage.

- Briefly summarize the Midianite's dream and interpretation:

- What effect did this midnight eavesdropping have on Gideon?

- How many men had trumpets and jars?

Three groups of 100 men each, sparsely surrounded the enemy. In a normal military advance, only the leaders would have trumpets. The startled Midianite army likely presumed the sound of 300 trumpets would signal about 30,000 soldiers. The sudden light from the torches probably reinforced their guess!

- Describe how the battle was won that night:

- Summarize the remaining verses of the chapter:

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. In **Judges 6:16**, God told Gideon, *I will be with you*. When God gives you a specific assignment, do you usually have a sense that God will be with you? How does that effect your resolve in the task?
2. Describe a time when, like Gideon, you had an *I-just-need-to-be-sure* moment. In what ways did you seek counsel from God?
3. God reduced Gideon's army to a small fraction of its original size, in order that they might not rely on their own power. In what mission or activity are you most likely to automatically rely on your own strength or abilities?
4. What does the story of Gideon tell you about the type of people God chooses to complete His purpose?
5. In what specific way might you need to step out, take a risk and obey what God is calling you to do right now?
6. If someone asked you to share a significant tip on how to have victory over debilitating fear in your life, what would you tell them?

Judges 8-12 — Turning to Pride

We're going to pick up the pace this week and study one chapter each day. These passages cover the remainder of Gideon's story, as well as the lives of six judges and one failed king. I've added a subtitle for each day, to help put the whole narrative into perspective.

Day 1: When success goes to your head

📖 READ **Judges 8:1-3**—Regarding the men of Ephraim:

We read in chapter 7 that the men of Ephraim *had* actually been called to help. They captured Oreb and Zeeb. But since they were absent for the main battle, they missed out on some of the spoils of war. We're reminded that, even in victory, someone will surely complain!

- What do you think Gideon meant by his diplomatic response in v.2?

📖 READ **Judges 8:4-17**—Regarding the men of Succoth and Penuel:

Right about now, we sure do miss that timid version of Gideon, with his big appetite for assurance from the Lord. He's morphed into a different kind of man — not exactly bad, but not good either. He's become just as complicated as the times he lived in.

- After God had been gracious and long-suffering in dealing with Gideon's own reservations and fears, how did Gideon turn around and treat the men of Succoth and Penuel?
- READ **Matthew 18:23-35** and share the parallels you see:

- Explain how Gideon followed through on his threat.

📖 READ **Judges 8:18—35**—Regarding Zebah and Zalmunna:

- Who did these men admit to killing at Tabor?
- How did Gideon deal with them?
- What did the men of Israel suggest for Gideon after this revenge?

Gideon *sounded* so righteous by declining the kingship, but then he seemed to live just like a king. Gideon even went so far as to live like a priest — making for himself an ephod.

- READ **Exodus 28:1-4**: In God’s original design, who was to bear the ephod, and for what purpose?
- How did Gideon’s ephod become a problem for Israel?
- Gideon’s son by his concubine was named: _____
(Save that name for the next chapter!)

“There is a way which seems right to a man,
but its end is the way of death”
— Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)

Put a #1 or #2 (or both) before words that describe Gideon in his two phases of life: #1 = Gideon from the threshing floor through the battle; #2 = Gideon from the battle until his death:

___ fearful ___ authoritative ___ obedient ___ popular
___ vindictive ___ dependent on God ___ humble ___ angry
___ heroic ___ self-confident ___ prideful ___ wealthy

Gideon was called by God to *judge* Israel, but despite his initial success, he made no real, lasting impact on the nation, and even caused them to fall into spiritual idolatry. **Legacy** is a word that comes to mind when someone has been given the opportunity to influence others.

- Write one sentence to sum up Gideon’s legacy:

- Describe three different areas in which you would like to do better than Gideon, and leave a positive legacy for righteousness:
 -
 -
 -

Day 2: When the enemy is within

Chapter nine is all about Abimelech (Gideon’s son) and just to be clear, Abimelech was NOT a judge — he was a wannabe king — and God did not raise him up for either position, he raised himself up!

We don’t have a record of an outside oppressor during this period, the oppression and tyranny came from inside Israel — Abimelech himself oppressed Israel and made their life difficult!

 READ **Judges 9:1-6.**

- Name the region of Gideon’s home (and his 70 sons):

- Name the region of Abimelech’s home (and his mother):

Have you heard the saying *'Repeat something often enough and people will believe it'*?

- What propaganda did Abimelech ask his Shechem kinfolk to spread?
- How did Abimelech gather a following?
- Once he gathered a small army, what did he do?
- How was Abimelech made king?

📖 READ Judges 9:7-21.

Abimelech had eliminated all threats to his reign, save one — Jotham! Do you remember the amazing acoustics between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim from our study of Joshua (**Joshua 8:30-33**)? Well, Jotham got the idea to use that platform to speak a parable to those who crowned Abimelech.

In his parable, he described the value of different types of trees:

- What value could there be from an olive tree?
- What benefit would be produced from a fig tree?
- What resource comes from the vine?
- What is the bramble good for?

Even if you're not an arborist, it's easy to see there is only one tree in this parable that offers no comfort; even drawing close to it would be painful. What a great illustration of the reign of Abimelech.

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- Explain how God avenged Abimelech:
- Explain how God avenged the men of Shechem:

For a modern American, retribution can be difficult to accept. Read the following verses, and note what you learn about God's justice:

Genesis 18:25

Deuteronomy 32:35

Job 42:2

Habakkuk 2:3

Galatians 6:7-8

Even in dark and difficult times, we can trust God to show Himself faithful to those who humbly submit to Him and honor Him with their lives.

Day 3: When you take blessings for granted

📖 READ Judges 10:1-5.

Fill in the chart on p.9 with any information found for **Tola** and **Jair**. Very little is written about these two judges, but the amount of peaceful years that Israel enjoyed must have had something to do with their dedicated leadership. Sometimes short bios are the best legacy — there's often not much to write about people who squelch drama before it even starts!

Unfortunately, the blessing of peace isn't always leveraged to its best advantage. People have a tendency to take peace for granted. Rather than seizing the opportunity for spiritual growth and holiness, we may squander the years of blessing in pursuit of our own pleasures. Israel's pleasure dropped them off on the front door of idolatry. It can be the same with us. As Solomon said, *'there is nothing new under the sun'*.

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🌀 READ **Judges 10:6-18**.

In your Bible, mark the familiar phrases related to the sin cycle. Then, begin to fill in the chart on p.9 from this chapter (even though we won't be introduced to the name of the judge until chapter 11).

- To emphasize the extent of the spiritual adultery, list all the nations from **v.6**, whom Israel joined in worshiping their wicked gods

God was accustomed to hearing about His people's regret and remorse and their cry for rescue; but what He longed to hear was their repentance. God would not be mocked. He knew His people well and He knew they were not repentant in this moment.

- Write out the stinging response God gave them in **v.13-14**:
Therefore...

When Israel ***put away the foreign gods and served the Lord*** once again, God relented and provided a way out. The parallels between the history of Israel and our own spiritual lives are obvious. God's holiness and mercy were both held in tension with Israel, and God's holiness and mercy are both satisfied for us at the Cross.

- READ **Ephesians 2:4-7** and describe any parallels you see between God's mercy in Judges and His mercy in our lives:

The chapter ends with the leaders of Gilead seeking a commander, as the Ammonite army camped on their doorstep. Remember, the Ammonites are distant relatives of Israel, descended from Abraham's nephew Lot (**Genesis 19:38**).

Day 4: When you speak before you think

✎ READ **Judges 11:1-11**. We're now introduced to the next judge of Israel by name, so continue to fill in the chart on p.9.

- List one admirable attribute of Jephthah:
- List one objectionable attribute of Jephthah:

Complicated. Compromised. Careless. Those words describe the days of Israel during the judges. Add '*complex*' and we have a good description of the judges themselves — neither all good nor all bad — and often marching to the familiar drum beat of family dysfunction.

- What do you think it was about Jephthah that caused the elders of Gilead to want to recruit him to be their commander?

- Under what conditions did Jephthah accept?

✎ READ **Judges 11:12-27**.

The king of the Ammonites had a beef about Israel living in the land he thought belonged to his people — he wanted it back.

Note — how Jephthah denied the Ammonite king's claim, with a very accurate account of how Israel actually came into possession of the land on the east side of the Jordan River. (**Numbers 21:21-35**)

Note — how Jephthah overturned the attempted rewrite of history, by pointing out that Israel actually won the land from the **Amorites**, not the **Ammonites**, since God had forbidden Israel to take land from their relatives in **Deuteronomy 2:19**.

Note — how Jephthah pointed out that Israel had already lived in the land for over 300 years. *Now* they wanted to claim it was theirs? If their god, *Chemosh*, wanted them to have the land, maybe he should have done a better job of providing it for them!

- Based on that diplomatic meeting, how would you characterize Jephthah as a leader?

📖 READ **Judges 11:28-40**. Up until now, we sort of liked this guy! He's the type of diplomatic leader that any nation would be proud of (no wonder the leaders of Gilead sought him out). AND, as a bonus, **v.29** tells us that the _____ of the Lord was _____ Jephthah!

What could go wrong? One simple, careless vow at Mizpah in an attempt to bribe God — that's what went wrong.

- Describe the vow in **v.30-31**:
- Describe the battle in **v.32-33**:
- Describe the homecoming in **v.34-35**:

A vow like that was *never* encouraged in God's law.

- What/who do you think may have influenced Jephthah?

It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows. — Proverbs 20:25

Day 5: When words create a civil war

🔗 READ **Judges 12:1-7**. Enter the *day-late-and-dollar-short* men of Ephraim, who stirred up trouble again. (Remember **Judges 8:1-3**?)

- What was their complaint?
- How did their words spark a great conflict?
- Who won the conflict?
- Ironically, only the correct pronunciation of what word would give an Ephraimite a pass to escape to the west side of the Jordan?

Hasty words — accusative words — complaining words — they are all likely to cause problems — even to create a civil war. Words are often at the root of family conflict, misunderstandings between friends, or tension at work. The wise Christian will endeavor to speak carefully!

🔗 READ **Judges 12:8-15**. List as much information as you can find about the next three Judges on your chart on p.9. Honestly, these verses are a welcome reprieve after what we've read. Three simple, ordinary men, whom God raised up to rule His people.

Turning to Pride is the theme we choose for this week. For many of us, pride is lurking, just one or two thoughts away from taking control of our lives. Consider these preludes to pride and mark those you want to pray over, so you don't *turn to pride* in your own life.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| ___ needing to be recognized | ___ relying on previous success |
| ___ needing to be in charge | ___ relying on personal ability |
| ___ needing to be included | ___ concealing my weaknesses |
| ___ minimizing other people's efforts and contributions | |

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. We often talk of overcoming fear. But Gideon's story reminds us that triumphing over fear is just the first step. What needs to happen, *after* fear is handled, to live a successful life for God?
2. Unlike Deborah, we don't read of any special thanks or spontaneous praise to God after the Midianite victory. Explain how giving God credit for His work in our lives benefits us.
3. The dark reign of Abimelech could have been avoided if the men of Shechem would have said *no* to him. Jotham *did* act on his convictions, when he spoke up on Mt. Gerizim. In what area do you need courage right now to stand up for your convictions?
4. Have you ever made a hasty decision or promise that you needed to change later? When is that appropriate and when is it not?
5. The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is unconscionable. How do you think God would have responded if Jephthah would have confessed his hasty sin and sought God's mercy and forgiveness? What stopped him from doing that? What stops you sometimes?
6. Discuss the areas of life that can cause pride to grow stronger in a Christian's life. Then discuss practical ways to subdue that growth.

Judges 13-16 — Turning from Purpose

Day 1:

🌀 READ **Judges 13-16**.

For the rest of this book, we won't find Israel crying out to God for rescue. Maybe they wrote their own playbook for so long that they no longer recognized sin. Maybe they sunk so far that they forgot whom they belong to. Maybe they simply lost faith. Regardless of the reason, God was faithful in the midst of their faithlessness.

Has that ever been true in your life? Has God stepped in to help you, to rescue you, to save you even before you asked? He has done that for me and I am so thankful. God sees and He knows, and He will fulfill His purpose for each of us. It's part of His character.

Day 2:

🌀 READ **Judges 13:1-7**.

In your Bible, mark any familiar phrases related to the sin cycle. Then, begin to fill in the chart on p.9 with the information found in **v.1**.

- Describe the good news the Angel of the Lord gave Manoah's wife:

- What specific instructions was she given?

- What additional information do you find out about a Nazirite vow by reading **Numbers 6:1-12**?

- In what way would the life of Samson have been slightly different from someone taking the Nazirite vow read about in Numbers?

📖 READ **Judges 13:8-25**. The calling of Samson as a judge of Israel was unique. We're given a lengthy nativity narration, where Samson's purpose was made clear before he was even born. This reminds us that God has a solution *long before* we realize we have a problem.

This section makes me smile since we're given a glimpse into the personalities of Mr. & Mrs. Manoah. God already told the *Mrs.* what the life's work of her child would be and how they were to raise him.

- What type of questions did the *Mr.* ask of the Angel of the LORD?

It sort of makes you wonder if he was even listening to his wife, or if he believed her, when she first told him about the Angel's message.

- Describe the similarities between Gideon's food offering to the Angel of the Lord and this one.

Another humorous part of the story lies in **v.22-23**. I think that God sprinkles interesting personality tidbits in Scripture for our pleasure!

**“The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.”
Psalm 138:8 (ESV)**

Day 3:

At the end of chapter 13, Samson was a grown man. The last sentences built excitement and promise for his future:

And the LORD _____ him.

And the Spirit of the LORD began to _____ him.

🔗 READ **Judges 14:1-7**. Also READ **Deuteronomy 7:1-4**.

- Explain how Samson's actions in these verses are out of agreement with God's law and are a disappointment to us, based on the verses we completed above:

Consider these statements:

V.2 "I _____ one of the daughters of the Philistines..."

V.3 "Get her for me, for she is right in my _____."

V.7 "he talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's _____."

Samson was clearly indoctrinated by the surrounding culture, who were all doing whatever was *right in their own eyes*. It's sad to read, especially after knowing that God specifically *called* Samson, even from the womb, for His purpose.

- Consider **v.4** and READ **Genesis 50:20**. Why do you think it's difficult for us to accept the fact that God can still accomplish His purpose, in the midst of disobedience and sin?

🔗 READ **Judges 14:8-20**.

- From **v.5**, where did the incident with the lion happen and why might that not have been a great place for a Nazirite to be found?

- What additional problem do you see in **v.8** for a Nazirite?

Samson showed a complete disregard here for his calling and purpose in life. He was found going where he wanted to go, touching and eating whatever he wanted, and marrying whomever he desired.

Samson seemed to fit right in with the Philistines, which isn't a compliment. They were an even match — the Philistines had a bullying problem and Samson had an anger problem.

- **V.19** tells us that the _____ of the LORD rushed _____ him. God had granted him strength for a purpose, but how did Samson end up using God's strength in that moment?

There is always a personal application in Scripture. God lavishes gifts on His kids for a purpose. We can choose to use those gifts wisely for His Kingdom, or foolishly and without restraint, for whatever seems right in our own eyes. I've often heard a secular music artist and thought, '*he was meant to be a worship leader*', or heard a persuasive salesman and thought, '*he is supposed to be teaching the Scriptures*'.

What about you? Reflect today on the skills God has granted you for His purposes. Are you using what He's given you for His Kingdom? Are the gifts He's given you under the control of the Holy Spirit? Are you seeking to be a wise steward of what God has entrusted to you?

- What effect did Samson's lack of control have on his *heifer*, I mean, his new wife?

Day 4:

🔗 READ **Judges 15:1-8**. After a cooling off period, Samson decided to resume his marriage right where he left off. Certainly, he thought, *With a gift like a goat, what girl wouldn't be excited to see me?*

- What surprise awaited Samson regarding his wife?
- What was he offered as a replacement for her?
- Describe Samson's retribution from **v.4-5**:
 - Do you think his actions were justified and/or in proportion to the harm done to him?
 - Do you think the Philistines' reprisal to burn a father and daughter was in proportion to the harm done to them?
 - Do you think each party was doing what was right in their own eyes at the moment, and had a list of justifiable reasons for their actions?

Once these things begin to escalate, they can become almost impossible to contain. When each party can be labeled both *victim* and *aggressor*, things become difficult to sort out.

- Is there an area of your life where you see yourself as the victim?
- Does that embolden you to pay back, in some way, for the wrong done you?
- What does a person do with these feelings of justification?

 READ Judges 15:9-20.

The men of Judah seemed to be allying themselves with the Philistines in this conflict, by binding Samson and taking him captive.

- Why did Samson tell them not to attack him themselves?

V.14 tells us that the _____ of the LORD rushed _____ him, just as we read before.

- What was Samson able to do with the power of the Lord?

Samson was a wild, undisciplined, donkey of a man, and we may have a hard time believing God placed His Spirit upon him. This is *not* the type of judge we wanted for Israel. It just seems like he doesn't deserve to be used by God. But, in this moment, at least he knew who the oppressor was. The men of Judah, on the other hand, thought it wise to bind their deliverer in order to appease their oppressors. They had gotten so used to their abusers that they actually began to protect them, fearing a sense of loss without their authoritarian rule.

We're not finished with the story of Samson and yet **v.20** seems to give a closing statement that he ruled Israel for 20 years.

- What significance do you think there may be in this statement being positioned right here at the end of chapter 15?

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the heart. Proverbs 21:2 (ESV)

Day 5:

List some of Samson's shortcomings or weaknesses up to this point:

📖 READ Judges 16:1-22.

Clearly, one major weakness in Samson's life was women.

- Summarize the events of **v.1-3**:

The last woman in Samson's life was Delilah. The text doesn't say that she was a Philistine, but if not, she was at least a sympathizer. We wonder if she ever loved Samson, or if the silver was her real love. Interestingly, the amount given was equivalent to about 140 pounds of silver, which would fetch roughly a half million dollars today.

- What was the first method, in **v.7**, that Samson said would subdue him?
- What was the second method, in **v.11**?
- What was the third method, in **v.13**?

I don't know if there's something us modern girls are missing in these conversations, but I just can't figure out why Samson didn't dump this lady and run out the door the first time. Maybe he was addicted to the cat and mouse game in some bizarre way. But Delilah kept pressing day and night until finally, he shared his past, his purpose, and his promise.

- What did he tell her in **v.17**?

- How good of a Nazirite had Samson been during his life? (Share some examples)
- Do you think the Lord left him because he shaved his hair?
- Do you think the Lord returned his strength because his hair grew back? Why or why not?

What a dreadful life for Samson to be doing women's work for the enemy! What a discouraging headline for Israel: "**Blind Samson Grinds Grain for Israel's Overlords.**"

📖 READ **Judges 16:23-31**.

- Describe what happened in the house of Dagon:
- How does the statement, "*the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life*" reinforce the Angel's message to his mother (**Judges 13:5**) before he was even conceived?

Like many of our judges, Samson's legacy was confusing. Yes, he began to deliver Israel. Yes, he destroyed a great number of the enemy. But I personally see no joy or sense of purpose in his life. We wonder how things may have been different, if he would have fully submitted himself to the purpose for which he was created. Samson oozed with potential but lacked character.

As we close this week, in what areas do you sense your potential is stifled because of character issues? These are the types of questions we want to ask ourselves, as we look into the mirror of Scripture. God is faithful to do a mighty work, even in areas that have been weak for years! A Time of Turning — Copyright 2021 — Sue LeBoutillier

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Can you describe a situation in your life when God prepared a solution, long before you even knew you had a problem? Explain:
2. Samson demonstrated a sad disregard for his calling and purpose. In what way might a Christian need to say 'no' to certain things, or 'yes' to others, in order to fulfill their God-ordained purpose?
3. Samson was a very *reactive* man — we might call him a *hot-head*! What are some ways a Christian can learn to submit their reactions to the control of the Holy Spirit?
4. The concept of Samson's power being connected to the length of his hair was superstitious. In what ways might a Christian be misled to wrongly attribute some gift or ability to the wrong source? How can that thinking be corrected?
5. If someone told you they didn't believe God had any purpose for their life, how would you respond to them?
6. What are some ways to gain clarity on God's mission for our lives when we're in the thick of day-to-day living?

Judges 17-21 — Turning from Perspective

No one would describe these last five chapters as *encouraging* Bible study — but history is not supposed to encourage us as much as inform us. These chapters will be HARD reading but they WILL inform us as to what a society becomes once its moral decay has reached a certain level. When that level is reached, when people have consistently done *what is evil in the sight of the Lord*, reality becomes stranger than fiction. That is what we're about to learn.

It's important to note that the historical chronology of this book has ended now that we've arrived at chapter 17. What remains is a sort of appendix, an epilogue intended to put an exclamation point on the dreadful conditions that face a nation when they *turn from God*.

The events narrated in these chapters happened earlier in Judges, perhaps sprinkled over the entire timeline. They provide texture to our study, as we read how this great apostasy affected both individual lives and all of Israel.

Day 1:

On the 300+ year timeline of the judges, most scholars would pin the story of Micah and the Levite around the same time as **Othniel** (Chapter 3). Interestingly enough, we titled that chapter in our study, '**Turning to Idols**' and that is exactly what is narrated in chapter 17.

📖 READ Judges 17:1-6.

It's interesting that the sum of *1100 pieces of silver* surfaces again — the same amount offered to Delilah in the last chapter. Do you remember how much money that represented? You're right — a lot of money!

We read, in **v.2**, that the mother had pronounced a *curse* on whoever stole her silver, but once she heard it was her son...

- How did she respond with her words?

- How did she respond with her actions?

Now, what mother among us would reward our kids for stealing our stuff? But this epilogue exposes how right becomes wrong, and how wrong becomes honored in a degenerate society.

Write out **v.6** here:

If these events actually did happen around the time of the first judge —Othniel, then that statement forms the first bookmark for the time of the judges. We'll copy the exact statement as a final bookmark, when we get to the last verse in the book.

This lesson is titled, **Turning from Perspective**. One dictionary definition of the word perspective means, "*the state of one's ideas*". Where do our ideas come from? From what position do we establish our *view* of life?

When our perspective comes from **God** (today we call it a *Christian world view*), then success comes from *doing what's right in the eyes of God*.

When our perspective comes from **ourselves** (today we call it a *humanist view*), then success comes from *doing what's right in our own eyes*. *By the way*, we don't use the term *humanist view* — we call it *following your heart* or *being true to yourself*.

God has always desired that His people would desire **His perspective**. It's why He gave Israel the Law on Mt. Sinai. It's why Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Our lives should be marked by always turning to **God's perspective** and acting upon that perspective.

If the foundations are destroyed,
What can the righteous do? Psalm 11:3 (ESV)

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🌀 READ **Judges 17:7-13**. Enter the Levite! Levites were granted no ownership of land in Israel. They were to be supported by the offerings brought to the tabernacle. Yet, here, we meet this Levite wandering around the country, presumably looking for work.

- Explain how Micah's perspective (the way he saw things) aligned more closely with how the pagan culture around him did religion:
- Explain how the Levite's perspective (the way he saw things) allowed him to be so easily hired:
- Explain how it may be possible for a modern church's perspective (the way they see things) to degenerate from godliness to humanist, when everyone does what's right in their own eyes:

Day 2:

Micah now had a shrine, an ephod, an idol and an authentic Levite to be his priest. In his eyes, he had collected all the lucky charms necessary to prosper. But he was lacking a true perspective from the God of Israel, so his religious superstition was sure to doom him.

He's not the only one. In this chapter, an entire tribe was found following their own perspective, rather than God's. As **v.1** reminds us, Israel was lacking a king, no one was following the rule of law or the Law of God, everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

🌀 READ **Judges 18:1-10**.

On your map, note the location of Zorah and the city of Laish (Dan), north of the Sea of Galilee. It might not be completely obvious what's going wrong here, as Dan is *seeking their inheritance*. Can I translate? They were seeking an easier time in life! The assignment they had been given proved difficult for them (**Judges 1:34**), and rather than persevering in faith, they sent a delegation to pursue other options that might not be quite as hard.

Well, Dan's story is compelling on its own, but it's the interaction they have with Micah and the Levite, which forms the interest.

- What does **v.3** suggest about the Levite's accent and why do you think the men stopped and drilled him with so many questions?

- After visiting with the Levite, they began to treat him as a *seer* and asked about their future. What do you find ironic about the words the Levite used to answer their question in **v.6**?

📖 READ **Judges 18:11-29**.

- Why do you think the army of Dan wanted Micah's idols and ephod?

- Explain the irony of Micah's idols and ephod being stolen:

- What words would you use to describe the Levite since he willingly left Micah and took up with the men of Dan?

☞ READ **Judges 18:30-31**. These two verses remind us of that point in a movie, when the villain rips off his mask to reveal his identity. It's obvious that the author previously concealed the identity of the Levite in order to create this disturbing finale.

- The name of the Levite from Bethlehem was: _____, son of _____, son of _____.

I suppose we're never exactly shocked at corruption, but really? Moses' own grandson serving as a religious man for hire, with fake gods and a home-made ephod? This is one puzzle piece of the epilogue of Judges that should both offend and sadden the reader.

- What can this chapter teach us about each generation's responsibility to walk with God?

Day 3: _____

☞ READ **Judges 19:1-9**.

- What was the home city of both the Levite from the previous chapters and the concubine from this chapter?
- Which two characters held all the dialog and decisions in **v.3-9**?
- What might that suggest about how these men viewed the relevance or importance of the woman?

☞ READ **Judges 19:10-21**.

- How did the Levite describe Jebus in **v.12**?

Day 4:

📖 READ **Judges 20:1-11**. As if they had received a summons to court, the leaders of the people presented themselves to hear the opening statement at Mizpah. The defendant in the case was the tribe of Benjamin and the Levite, the plaintiff, the judge and the jury.

Note in **v.4-6** all of the *I, my, me* words spoken by the Levite.

- Explain what elements of his ordeal he conveniently left out of his testimony and how he portrayed himself as the victim.

Israel didn't require much convincing — just three verses worth of testimony, and off they went to avenge this man's loss.

Don't we see a similar public response today? Something shocking happens, but we rarely wait for the details. We listen to the equivalent of three verses of testimony from the victim, and in our outrage, we rush to fix the wrong. It is almost universally true that, in our haste, we do more damage than good through unintended consequences.

📖 READ **Judges 20:12-20**. To Israel's credit, they did give Benjamin an opportunity to turn over the evildoers, but Benjamin chose a *clan-nish* approach, and decided they would defend the molesters, rather than allow them to suffer the consequences of their actions. So, nothing remained but to draw up battle lines and let the fighting begin.

📖 READ **Judges 20:21-48**. We're not going to detail the battles and the losses and petitions to the Lord. The toll on both sides was way too high. Too many people got drawn into this, for there to be any positive outcome. Let's suffice it to say, civil war is *always* the worst possible kind of war — there are no winners — nothing is proven.

- Of the 26,700 men of Benjamin who boldly defended the criminals of Gibeah, how many men remained by **v.47**?

Day 5:

This epilogue has revealed to us the deep moral decay that Israel experienced, not very long after entering into the Promised Land. It grieves us to read these details...

- A mom rewarding her son's theft.
- A Levite willing to play priest with carved idols (for \$\$).
- A tribe stealing idols to use as lucky charms.
- A Levite turning his concubine over to rapists.
- A town in Israel acting like Sodom.
- A Gibeonite choosing hospitality over fatherhood.
- A tribe protecting the criminals within.
- A civil war that leaves women and children destroyed.

These are all symptoms of deep spiritual problems. These are all signs of a nation, who has lost its perspective. These are all examples of things that grieve the Lord — nothing escapes His notice.

Nothing can be done about the past, but as the next and final chapter begins, there is one problem facing their future, *"How can the tribe of Benjamin be saved from extinction with no wives?"*

It doesn't sound like it should be a really difficult dilemma to solve — at least not for a logical, God-fearing people. But those type of people are in short supply at the moment, everyone doing what's right in their own eyes and all. So brace yourself — the solutions laid on the table will include: murder, kidnapping and rape!

 READ **Judges 21:1-14**.

It seems that during one of those convocations, Israel had sworn a vow not to intermarry with the Benjamites (Note **v.1, 7**). Presently, they had pity on them and also didn't want to see them snuffed out.

Rather than break their vow (which was a sin in their own eyes), they decided to avenge those among their countrymen, who didn't show up for the war. They would steal their virgins (which apparently was be a sin). GAH!

- Israel suddenly realized that, during their war with the tribe of Benjamin, there was an absence of fighting men from what specific area?
- After a cruel battle, what did Israel steal from these people to present as a peace offering to the remaining men of Benjamin?
- What was the one problem presented in the final words of **v.14**?

 READ **Judges 21:15-24**.

It's so ridiculous to read, "***and the people had compassion on Benjamin***", because we want to ask, "*where was your compassion before the civil war?*" "*Where was your compassion toward the men of Jabesh-Gilead?*" "*Why are you so selective in your compassion?*"

When people begin to do what is right in their own eyes, they become selective and fixated on whatever is in front of them. They make up rules and hold on tight. They have lost perspective.

- Summarize their plan to find 200 more wives for the remaining men of Benjamin:

- READ **Deuteronomy 22:28-29**, and explain their twisted justification using this part of the Law:

Abruptly, we come to the second *bookend* that forms the other boundary to the epilogue for Judges. Write out all of **v.25**:

The book of Judges does not have a satisfactory ending. It's really not supposed to. There is no way for a *happily ever after* ending in a dark time such as this. The intention of history is to inform us, and we have studied 21 chapters that have highlighted the unfaithfulness of God's children through their cycles of sin and the faithfulness of God, as His mercy is extended, time and time again.

In closing, we return to the title of our study — *A Time of Turning*. The final questions we should ask ourselves would be questions related to which direction we are turning!

- are we always *turning* closer to the Lord, His ways, His calling on our lives?
- or are we *turning* away and walking more closely with the world, in a similar way as we've studied in Judges?

Our united prayer is that we would indeed enter a *time of turning* and, in that *time of turning*, our eyes would be fixed upon Jesus!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.
— Helen H. Lemmel

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. The tribe of Dan was tired of *doing hard things*, so they left to do something easier. In what ways might you be tempted to abandon the hard things God has given you to do for those easier?
2. Hiring the Levite seemed to satisfy Micah's superstitious idea of religion. What types of modern superstitions can make their way into our thinking today?
3. It's not difficult to identify the vulnerable in these chapters — those who should have been protected, but were violated. Perhaps this hits close to home. Perhaps you were that victim. How does a Christian woman turn that scenario of trauma into a mission of mercy?
4. It's easy to get people stirred up when something terrible happens. Read **Proverbs 1:16-18**. What can a Christian do to avoid jumping into the fray, and rushing to hasty judgments or actions?
5. Is there some area of your life, where you have *turned your perspective* and begun to do what was *right in your own eyes*? What change in perspective is necessary for you?
6. Share one aspect of the book of Judges that has made the biggest impact on your spiritual life.

REFERENCES

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- 2— LifeChange Series, *Navigators. Judges*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishers, 2014. WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

Women of the Word Bible Studies

The following WOW Bible Studies written by Sue LeBoutillier are available through the **Calvary Chapel Ontario bookstore**, and through our online store at www.ccontario.com.

Old Testament:

- **Genesis** —Divine Design, From Eden to Egypt
- **Exodus** —Divine Deliverance, From Egypt to Sinai
- **Numbers** —The Wilderness Way, From Sinai to the Jordan
- **Joshua** —The Path of Promise, From the Jordan into Canaan
- **Judges** — A Time of Turning
- **Ruth** — Rescue and Rest
- **1 Samuel** — The Coming King
- **2 Samuel**— The Reigning King
- **1&2 Kings (Part One)**— Solomon and the House of the Lord
- **Jonah** —The Call of Compassion

New Testament:

- **The Way of Jesus** —The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew)
- **Simply Jesus** —The “I AMs” of Christ (John)
- **Acts** —Walking in the Spirit, The First Days of the Last Days
- **Galatians** —Finding Grace in a Demanding World
- **Philippians** —Finding Joy in a Disjointed World
- **Colossians** —Finding Stability in a Changing World
- **Titus** —While We Wait
- **James** —Real Faith for Daily Life
- **1 & 2 Peter** —Hope, Holiness and Humility in a Hostile World