

JUDGES

The Battle for Satisfaction

by

Dennis G. Bennett

Vickie M. Poole

Morgan W. Jones

CONTENTMENT

Heavenly Father,

If I should suffer need, and go unclothed, and be in poverty, make my heart prize Thy love, know it, be constrained by it, though I be denied all blessing.

It is Thy mercy to afflict and try me with wants, for by these trials I see my sins, and desire severance from them.

Let me willingly accept misery, sorrows, temptations, if I can thereby feel sin as the greatest evil, and be delivered from it with gratitude to Thee, acknowledging this as the highest testimony of Thy love.

When Thy Son, Jesus, came into my soul instead of sin, He became more dear to me than sin had formerly been; His kindly rule replaced sin's tyranny.

Teach me to believe that if ever I would have any sin subdued I must not only labour to overcome it, but must invite Christ to abide in the place of it, and He must become to me more than vile lust had been; that His sweetness, power, life may be there.

Thus I must seek a grace from Him contrary to sin, but must not claim it apart from Himself.

When I am afraid of evils to come, comfort me by showing me that in myself I am a dying, condemned wretch, but in Christ I am reconciled and live; that in my self I find insufficiency and no rest, but in Christ there is **satisfaction** and peace; that in myself I am feeble and unable to do good, but in Christ I have ability to do all things.

Though now I have his graces in part, I shall shortly have them perfectly in that state where Thou wilt show Thyself fully reconciled, and alone sufficient, efficient, loving me completely, with sin abolished.

O Lord, hasten that day.¹

¹Arthur Bennett, ed. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. Banner of Truth, 1975, p.294–5.

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AUTHORS

Dennis G. Bennett is the coordinator of resources for Christian Education and Publications. He has been with CEP since 1986 except for nine years which were spent in South Africa as professor and academic dean at the Bible Institute of South Africa. He is also the president of the Metro Atlanta Seminary. He received his M.Div. from Covenant Seminary and doctorate from Trinity Theological Seminary.

Vickie M. Poole was saved at the young age of nine and her love affair with Jesus and His word began. She has been a life-long in-depth student of the Bible. She has also taught others how to study the Bible for over 20 years. Vickie is employed by the PCA's Retirement and Benefits office in Ministerial Relief.

Morgan W. Jones graduated from Columbia International University (then CBC), Faith Theological Seminary and the Wycliffe Institute of Linguistics. He served for more than 45 years as a pastor, teacher, missionary, and Bible translator. He felt called to missions during a pastorate at Bible Presbyterian Church in Camden, NJ. He then served the Trio Indians in the interior of Suriname, South America and the Inuit People of Alaska before moving to upstate New York where he pastored for 20 years. Morgan was among the founding group that eventually became the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, which joined the PCA in 1982. He served as a translator in Surinam, and also taught at the Alaska Bible College.

DEDICATION

When Dennis and I began to talk about co-authoring Bible studies, we agreed we desired one common goal....*changed lives*. The way we have chosen to help each of you accomplish this, is through inductive Bible studies from the reformed perspective. Our desire is not just for each of you (and the two of us) to walk away armed with facts about our covenant God, Yahweh, but to know Him more intimately. In understanding who He is, how He cares for His children, as well as how He revealed Himself to the nation of Israel (and ultimately to us for today) in *History*, our faith can and will be strengthened. God never sugar coats His heroes. He records them in all of their humanness, sin, mistakes, and failures. In doing so, He gives us both a future and a hope in His Son, Jesus, whom He chose to send to walk the earth and then nailed Him on the cross for our redemption. We thank you, Lord, for doing all of this for us. For without what You did, Jesus, none of us would have any hope.

Dennis and I stand on the shoulders of many people as we write each of these studies. We would like to take the time to thank them.

My (Dennis') Christian life matured under the ministry of Morgan Jones (who went to be with the Lord a few years ago). I learned more sitting at his feet than in seminary. Morgan was a very gifted and unique teacher. Besides pastoring our church in upstate New York, he also taught as many as 16 Bible studies a week on a variety of subjects in four different counties. For each of these studies he produced a page of notes (with freehand drawings on a mimeograph machine). I have been collecting thousands of his notes over the years and have continued to learn from them and teach from them. It has also been a desire to see others benefit from these notes.

I (Vickie) owe a debt of gratitude to Cindy Bennett, Dennis' wife and my friend, for encouraging us to begin writing these studies. A big thank you to PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc. and Rev. Bob Clarke for allowing me to use my lunch hours to write with Dennis. To those I have asked to "help me think through" different passages of Scripture and reason them together - you know who you are- a big thank you. To my late husband, Charles, who was my sounding board for all the years we were married before the Lord called him home. To my daughter, Tiffany, Neil (her husband, a great son-in-law) and my son, Jason. And to Dennis, who puts up with me when I want to "revisit" a passage for the fifteenth (or more) time.

But most of all Dennis and I both are indebted to the Holy Spirit for teaching us so much about ourselves as we attempted to think His thoughts after Him and put them down on paper for you the students of His Word. Without Him, we could not have written.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the hardest jobs involved with writing is critically looking at your own work. Therefore, we are thankful for the help we have gotten on this Judges study from the following people.

Dr. Dale Ralph Davis (upon whose book we depended more than any other). Thank you for taking the time to read through this and make all the comments and helpful criticisms which has made this work better.

Dr. Paul Gilchrist – Thank you for your time with us in phone conversations, emails, the pages you sent us with comments and suggestions, and most of all for your friendship.

Laura McGrady, Samantha Goodman, Tim and Mary Schirm – thank you for the many hours you spent meticulously scrutinizing of the manuscript.

How We Approach This Study

You are about to embark upon a study of what is the very heart of God—His Glory. You will also see this deeply embedded in the heart of the writer, or compiler, of Judges.

Keep in mind at all times the Gospel is not about us, it is about God and the building of His Kingdom. We are the recipients of that Gospel love. The Bible is God's message to us first and foremost about Him. He wants us to know Him, who He is and what He has done. The Bible is not a book about people, places, and events. Rather, it is about what God has done THROUGH people, places, and events. God's philosophy of history is found in Psalm 110.1: *The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."* Our Lord knows His plan for the entire future, and He will carry it out according to what He knows is the best way. Judges contains the stories of God keeping His covenant promises to build a people for His own Glory, Israel's constantly forgetting God, and God, in His mercy, doing all to bring them back.

Translations: We have chosen to use the ESV translation, but we suggest you have students examine what other translations say. Few who go through this study will be fluent in Hebrew, so by comparing different translations you should be able to come as close as possible to the original meaning.

Learning Styles: The tendency of any teacher is to teach according to his or her own preferred learning style. A Learning Style is defined as one's preferred way to process new information. If you are very analytic, then you will thrive on giving many facts, but this will not satisfy the three-fourths of your class who do not share your learning preference. The best approach for any leader to take is to understand that students learn and remember best when *they* discover the answers themselves. So, give them time to work through all the questions and *guide* them to find the right answers instead of giving them the right answers. This way they will remember these truths for many years from now.

We have tried not to fill in every blank because in many cases there are different possible answers that can be given. Do your best, be creative, and allow the students to use their creative thinking abilities also. However, if you really get stuck, we will be glad to help. Email us your questions and we will do our best to help in every way we can. Email your questions to Dennis (dbennett@pcanet.org) or Vickie (vpoole@pcanet.org).

Lastly, do all to the glory of God. Study to His glory, and teach to His glory. If you do, you enjoy Him and your class.

For Christ's Crown and Kingdom,
Dennis and Vickie

Why the Emphasis on Two Levels of Application?

The goal of **all** Christian education is *changed lives*. Therefore, the goal of every sermon and Bible study must be to move disciples from simply hearing the Word to doing the Word. It is not enough to tell them *what* to do if we don't also help them to know *how* to do it.

My mentor taught me that his job was to teach the Bible, and the Holy Spirit's job was to apply it. I have since learned to imitate Paul in the way he wrote books such as Galatians and Ephesians by explaining the doctrine first and then teaching his readers how to put the doctrine into practice in their lives.

As I have the chance to travel around, even in different countries, I find the greatest weakness in how the Word is communicated is in the area of application, even in the PCA.

There are two types or levels of application and both are greatly needed.

Each of the lessons in this book is written in four parts.

Part 1 moves the student to be interested and motivated to want to study the rest of the lesson.

Part 2 is the meat of the lesson—the details, the facts.

Part 3 takes the student to the first level application. It motivates the learner to ask, “What can I do with these facts?”

This part of the lesson moves the learner from facts to an examination of ways to put those facts into practice in daily living. Paul tells Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine.” Why? So older men and women, younger women and men, and even slaves, might live according to the characteristics he lists for each. (Titus 2:1-10) He then says, “For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people, *training* us to renounce... and to live self-controlled...” (2:11-12). The Bible is not a book of facts, so we must not limit our Bible studies to only facts.

Part 4 of every lesson takes students to the second level of application by giving them a practical assignment or task to do each week using one of the first level applications they have just completed. It might say something like: “This week, sit down with one person and ask about his or her view of God.” Then, based on what students learned, next week's message will be a follow-up to help them advance to the next step. By doing this, the students will be trained to expect this type of assignment.

The Holy Spirit's job is to make us into holy saints, not smarter saints.

Bryan Chapell, writes: “Without application, the preacher has no reason to preach because truth without application is useless. [Sermons or lessons] without application are like a doctor giving all the details of what is wrong with you without telling you what you can do about it.” (*Christ Centered Preaching*, p.199, 203)

Think of it this way. You teach a whole series on the Fruit of the Spirit, giving all the great details of what they mean, but what good is what you studied unless your hearers know their role and how to develop that fruit in their lives?

Today's world tells people all kinds of things they need to do. As a result, people are no longer schooled in deciding for themselves how to apply truth to their lives. They need our help. If preachers and teachers are not going to help them, they will remain hearers only, resulting in our teaching having no purpose or results. Is this the legacy we want to leave?

Why the Emphasis on Two Levels of Application?

The goal of **all** Christian education is *changed lives*. Therefore, the goal of every sermon and Bible study must be to move the disciple from simply hearing the Word to doing the Word. It is not enough to tell them *what* to do if we don't also help them to know *how* to do it.

It is commonly taught that the teacher's job is to teach the facts, and the Holy Spirit's job is to apply it. But Paul wrote books such as Galatians and Ephesians by explaining the doctrine first and then teaching his readers how to put the doctrine into practice in their lives.

Perhaps the greatest weakness in the preaching and teaching ministries of the church today is in how the Word is communicated in the area of application.

Each of the lessons in Judges will employ two types or levels of application and both are greatly needed.

Each of the lessons in the book is set in four divisions.

Part 1 moves the student to be interested and motivated to want to study the rest of the lesson.

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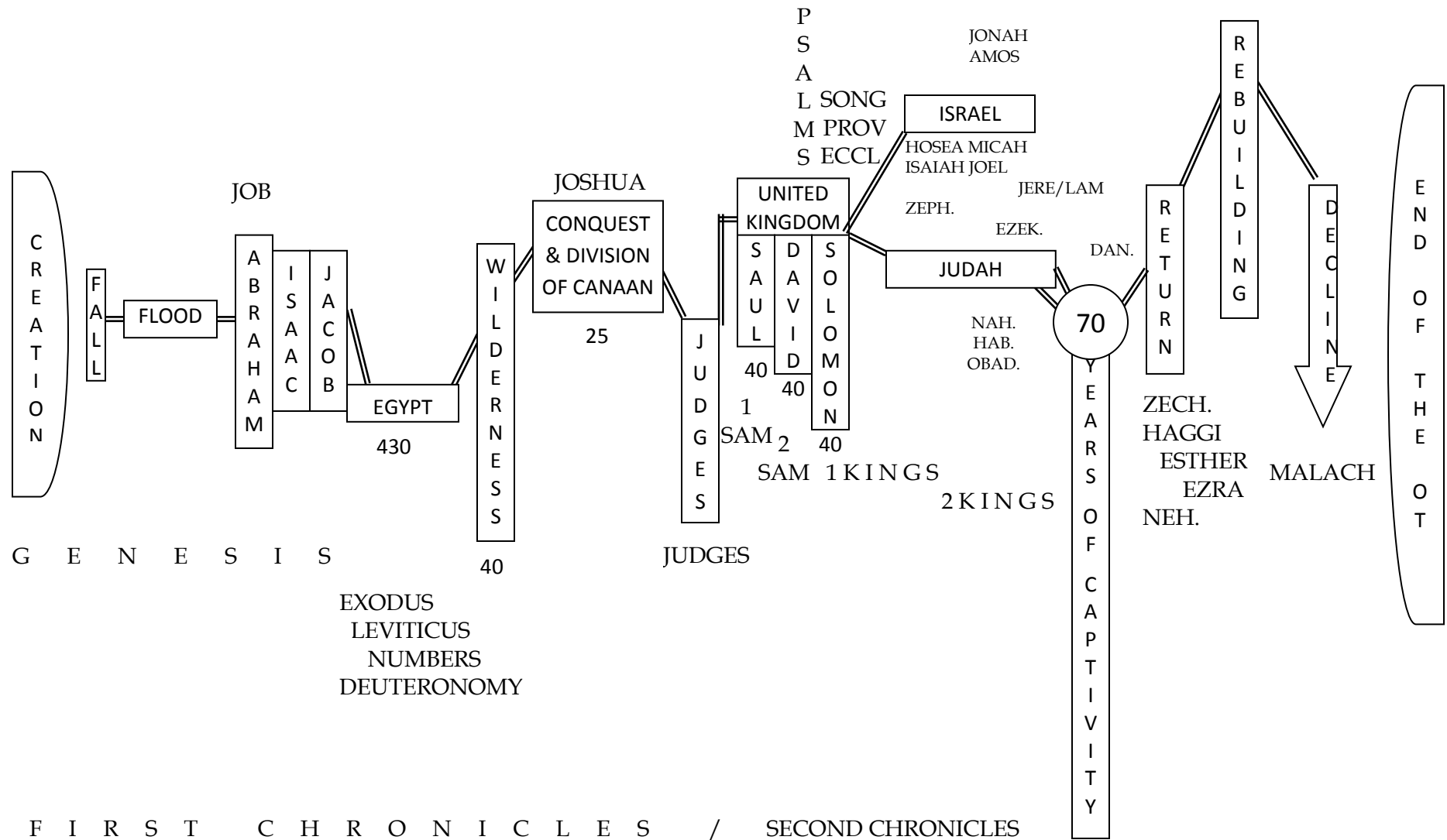
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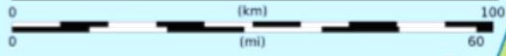
Today's world tells people all kinds of things they need to do. As a result, people are no longer schooled in deciding for themselves how to do this. We need help. If preachers and teachers are not going to help us, we will remain hearers only, resulting in what we hear having no results. It is putting the Word into practice that changes hearts, not getting fat on facts!

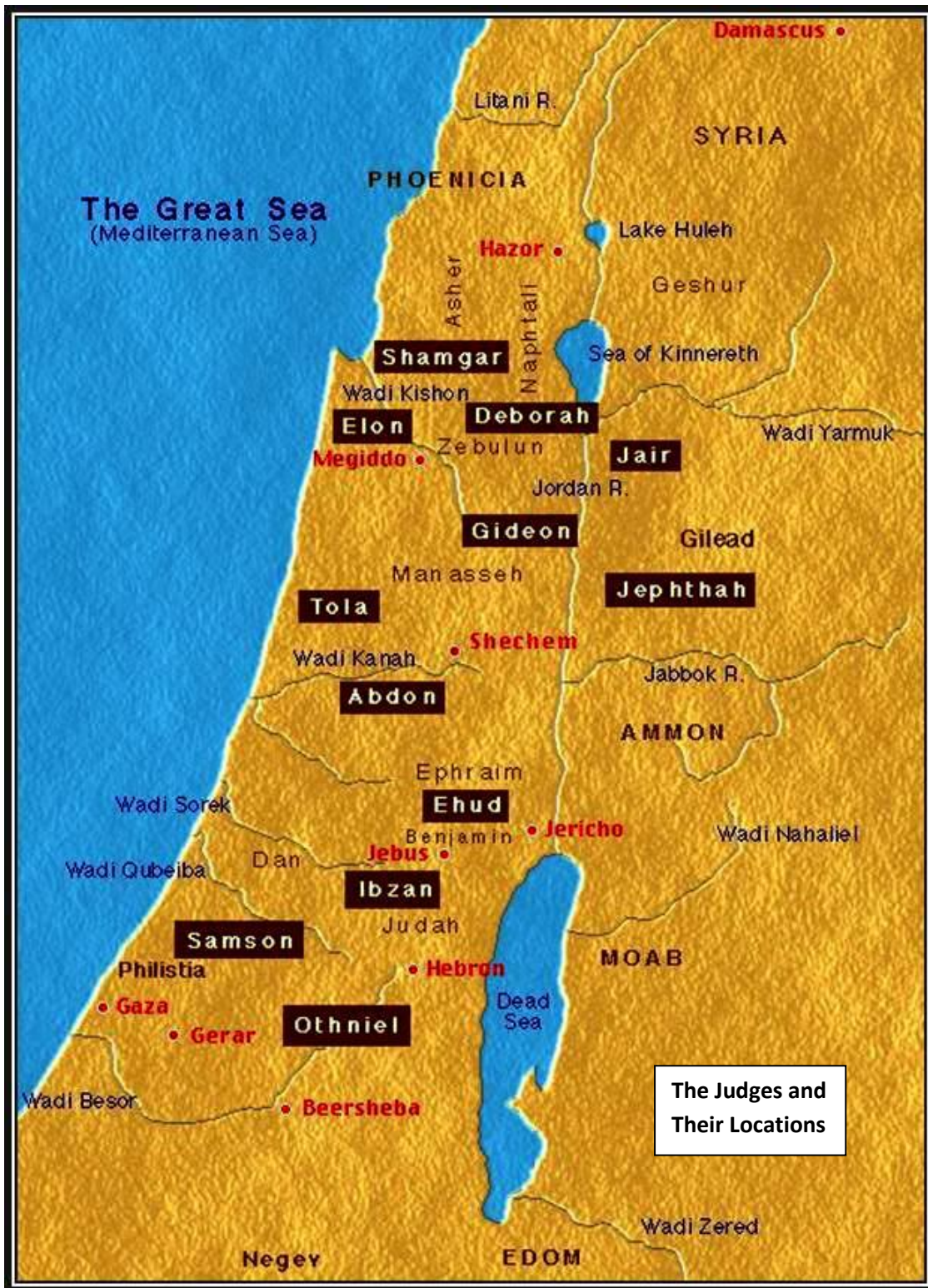
THE OLD TESTAMENT AT A GLANCE



THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Around 1200-1050 B.C.
(according to the Book of Joshua)





The Judges and Their Locations

PRE-TEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

MATCH

Jephthah	King of Mesopotamia
Benjamin	Gideon
Cushanrishathaim	Sisera
Levite	River
Baal	Honey
Eglon	Annihilated Tribe
Kishon	Idol
Mighty Man of Valor	Pillars
Olive Tree	Jael
Tent Peg	Burnt Offering
Warm Milk	Concubine
Samson	Jotham
Lion	Fat Man

WHO WAS...

Caleb (1.12)
 Jerubaal (6.32)
 Jether (8.20)
 Jotham (9.7)
 Manoah (13)
 Micah (17)
 Jonathan (18.30)

WHO...

burned a tower (9)?
 destroyed a tower (8)?
 was not really one of the family (9,11)?
 was left-handed (3)?
 faced 900 iron chariots (4)?
 was a “winepress farmer” (6)?
 had 70 donkey-riding relatives (12)?
 collected earrings (8)?
 was almost killed by a woman (9)?
 was called a “mother in Israel” (5)?
 fought a lion (13)?
 was a Dodo’s son (10)?
 was a son-in-law to Caleb (3)?
 traded 30 daughters for 30 foreign girls
 for his 30 sons (12)?
 has just about nothing distinctive mentioned
 about him at all (12)?

HOW MANY...

in Gideon’s victorious army (7.15)?
 were killed by Shamgar (3.31)?
 were left in Benjamin when war ended (20.47)?
 judges were Nazirites (13.5)?
 brothers did Abimelech kill (8.30)?
 died with Samson (16.27)?

WHO...

was the judge that killed 42,000 men over
 a problem in their accent (12.5-6)?
 was the tribe that began an independent
 religion in Israel (18.30)?
 burned the fields of his enemies (15.3-4)?
 was the general who wouldn’t fight without
 a woman’s presence (4.8)?

WHO SAID...

“...if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us...?” (6.13)
 “...keep quiet, put your hand on your mouth, and come with us...” (18.19)
 “...I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow...” (11.35)
 “...Please let me test just once more...” (6.39)
 “...The trees once went out to anoint a king over them...” (9.8)
 “...If you had not plowed with my heifer...” (14.18)

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

I. THE FAILURE TO FIND SATISFACTION IN GOD, 1.1–3.7

- Abandonment of the Fight against the Enemy, 1.1–3.6
- Alliances with the Enemy, 2.2
- Allurement of the Enemy, 2.3
- Abdication from Teaching the Children to Be Satisfied with God, 2.10
- Accepting the Enemy in Marriage, 3.6–7

II. THE BATTLES FOR SATISFACTION ILLUSTRATED, 3.8–16.31

- The Godly Othniel, 3.8–11
- The Strategist Ehud, 3.12–30
- The Warrior Shamgar, 3.31
- The Faithful Deborah and Barak, 4.1–5.51
- The Low Self-Esteem of Gideon, 6.1–8.32
- The Evil Abimelech, 8.33–10.5
- The Saviors Tola & Jair, 10.1–5
- The Vow-Maker Jephthah, 10.6–12.7
- The King-Makers Ibzan, Elon & Abdon, 12.8–15
- The Weak Samson, 13–16

III. CONSEQUENCES OF NOT BEING SATISFIED IN GOD, 17–21

- Finding Satisfaction in Rituals, 17–18
- Finding Satisfaction in Immorality, 19
- Finding Satisfaction in Man-Made Solutions, 20–21

Lesson 1

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Judges 1.1–2.5

I. Preparation for the Battle

On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate your success in overcoming *your* strongest temptations?

Always defeated 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always victorious

Modern psychology proposes we see ourselves as adequate in ourselves. This would have us believe we can overcome sin in our own strength. God wants us to see ourselves as adequate in Him. Only He can enable us to overcome our sinful heart attitudes toward Him.

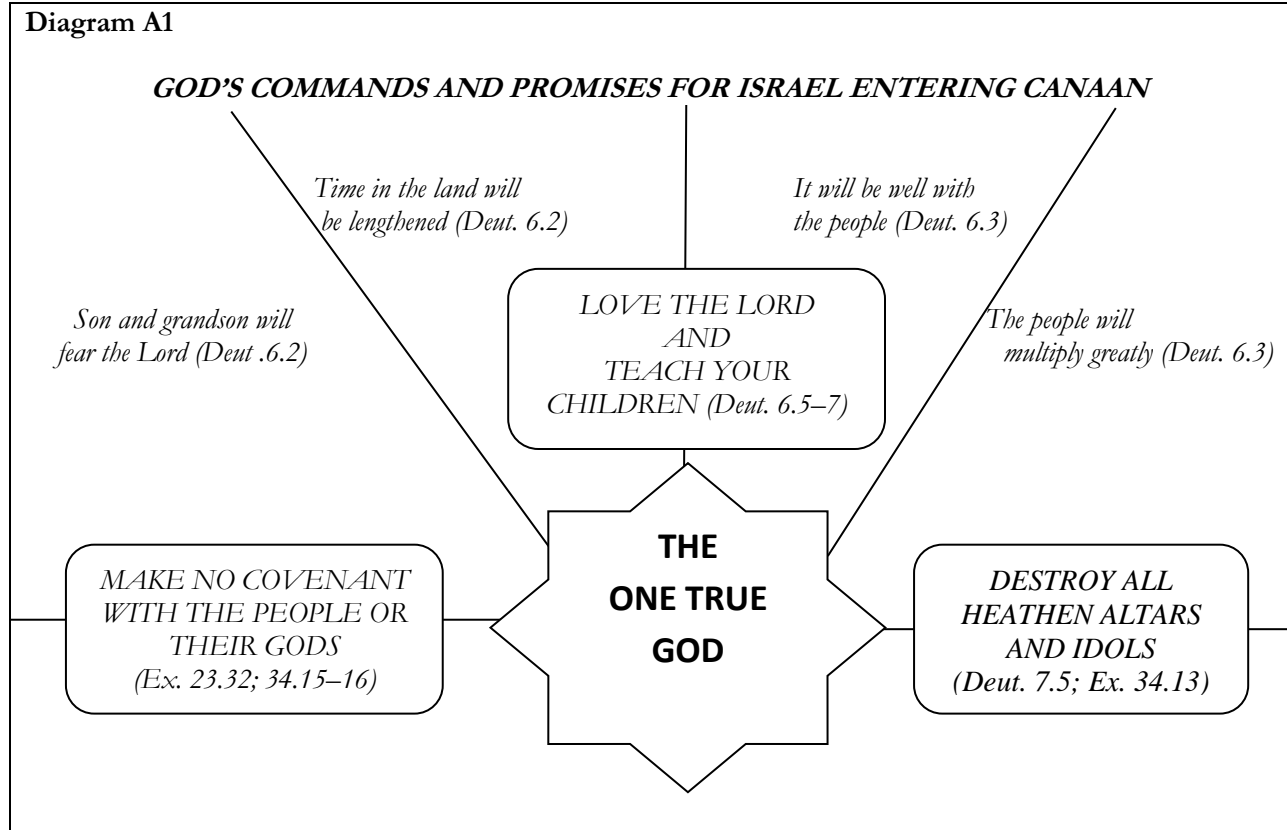
We are at war. The battle rages between Good and evil, and our heart is the battleground. The evil one has one desire - revenge on God; so he does everything he can to destroy us. You will see in this study how these battles are won and lost. You will learn what it is to fight and win (or lose) the same battles every human being has fought since the fall. You will experience the same frustration God feels in dealing with the sin of His people, but God will also be the One to bring about our victories.

In order to understand the book of Judges, please read the book of Joshua first.

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

The book of Judges is a book of tragedy as it looks at the nation of Israel as a whole... A book of meteor-like triumph when looking at some of the faithful individuals that dot its pages...but overall, a book repeating the folly of a nation turning away from being satisfied in God alone when they might so easily have been like the world of satisfied people mentioned in [Psalm 144.12–15](#)...

*May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown,
our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace;
may our granaries be full, providing all kinds of produce;
may our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields;
may our cattle be heavy with young, suffering no mishap or failure in bearing;
may there be no cry of distress in our streets!
Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall!
Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord!*



THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IS THE ONE CONSTANT IN ALL OF HISTORY

All history is God’s story—His-story. He uses the brushstrokes of people, places, and events to record it. The unifying color is His sovereign love, which He expertly weaves from one story to the next. As He moves His brush from one story and character to the next, His unifying stroke can still be seen. He is still sovereign and He is still on the throne. The Bible is the canvas on which He records His story for all of humanity. Another way God moves us through His story is by linking the death of one person to His chosen successor. Look at the line of heroes below and you can see how each successor stood on the shoulders of the previous one, developing their legacy - their teaching the next generation - critical.

At the beginning of Exodus, Joseph is dead
At the beginning of Joshua, Moses is dead
At the beginning of Judges, Joshua is dead
At the beginning of 1 Kings, David is dead

However, as we open the book of Judges, we come across a very important verse: ***And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work He had done for Israel. (2.10)***

The parents of this first generation born in the land failed to teach their children Who God is and what He had done for His people. They didn't spend time telling their children about how God led them in the Exodus and parted the water, enabling them to cross the Jordan on dry land. They didn't teach them about how God led their grandparents for forty years in the wilderness and preserved their shoes and clothing from wearing out. They didn't teach them about having a personal relationship with the LORD Who led them by day in a pillar of smoke and by night as a pillar of fire. They didn't teach their children about His keeping them safe and secure as His special people. And apparently they didn't teach them about the covenant He made with Abraham, which included them. As a result, they were content to live among the heathen and intermarry, seeking contentment in the worship of the false gods of the enemy. This, of course, led to a downward spiral of a nation turning further from God.

In short, their parents did not practice Ps. 71.17–18: ***O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.***

Yet God is merciful and slow to anger. He does not leave us to our own wandering hearts, as we will see. When one character died God moved His brushstroke to the next.

One common misconception is that the judges followed each other chronologically. Instead, God linked them together through these brushstrokes of deaths and events to teach us two things: Who He is and what He has done. God continued to work His will not only through the next character, but in each individual (you and me).

BACKGROUND

If you have read through the book of Joshua and the first chapter of Judges you might be wondering if God dealt justly with Israel's enemies. God tells Israel to wipe them off the face of the earth. Why?

To answer this, let's return to the beginning of the story, in the book of beginnings, and listen to a conversation God recorded between Himself and Abram in Gen. 15.12–16:

Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will begin judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.

As horrible as the sins of the Canaanites were, God gave them another 400 years to repent. Instead they only got worse. Once national sin reaches God's point of no return, He takes action! When Israel started their 40 year march in the desert, Canaan began to fear God's judgment was imminent, but there was still no repentance. They were aware of what God was doing through Israel, as we see from Rahab's conversation with the spies in [Josh. 2.9–11](#).

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

Now the judgment is about to begin...

1. God led Israel out of Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and taught them to demonstrated His trustworthiness to them as they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. He led them through the Jordan River and gave them victory in all the major battles to possess Canaan. Under the guidance of God, Moses and Joshua divided the land among the tribes. The promise of [Gen. 15](#) was fulfilled as Israel settled in the Promised Land.
2. Joshua's generation died out, and the succeeding generation reached maturity.
3. The book of Judges covers a long period of time. Read [1 Kings 6.1](#), and then work back (wilderness 40 years, conquest 25 years) to come up with something in the neighborhood of 350 years. [Acts 13.20](#) adds the years of the priest Eli.

THE FAILURE OF JOSHUA'S GENERATION

Can you find THREE simultaneous failures to obey the commands shown in diagram A1?

[Judges 2.2a](#) – They formed alliances with heathen people around them.

[Judges 2.2b](#) – Israel failed to destroy the heathen altars.

[Judges 2.10](#) – Israel failed to teach their children about God.

What was the downward spiral of the generation following Joshua's generation—the first generation born in the land?

1. [2.10](#) – They did not know God, or what God had done for Israel.
2. [2.12](#) – They turned their backs on the Lord to follow the gods of the land.
3. [2.13](#) – They formally exchanged the true God for idols.

4. 2.18-19 – They turned from the judges God raised up to deliver them.
5. 2.21 – They allowed themselves to be held hostage by God’s enemies for another long period of time.
6. 3.6 – They mixed with the heathen, and then intermarried with them.
7. 3.6-7 – Once they intermarried, they became fully embroiled in idolatry.

Israel, trying to unify and grow their own way instead of God’s way, failed so miserably they decided they needed a new course of action - one which took them even further from God. See what it was, as the period of the judges ended, in 1 Sam. 8.5-8... ***Behold, you [Samuel] are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.***²

As you read through the book of Judges, describe the images you get from the following verses about the people during this time regarding their social and moral life.

The situation in the streets, 5.6 – it was too dangerous to travel anywhere

The attitudes toward conquered women, 5.30 – they were little more than spoil for the men

The fear of getting involved by helping others, 8.6 – the situation was too uncertain even to lend a hand to brothers in need

Murder for political reasons, 9.4-6 – he killed his own brothers for political position

Highway robbery, 9.25 – literally

Drunkenness and idolatry, 9.26-27 – and big speech which followed resulted in 28-30

Treachery in the home, 16.15-21 – manipulation disguised as love

Anarchy and lawlessness, 18.1; 19.1; 21.25 – each did what he wanted

Lack of hospitality, 19.18-19 – no one shared what they had with the needs of others

Sodomy, rape, and murder, 19.22-28 – sexual misconduct on all sides—evil toward fellow mankind

Merciless attitude towards violence, 19.28-30 – showing the depths of depravity

Unwilling to practice justice, 20.13 – allowed sin no matter what

Civil war to settle problems, 20.14-18ff – sin allowed to fester and led to fighting each other

Murder and kidnapping used to solve problems, 21.8-12 – all this just to find wives

Hasty promises that left no way out but sin, 21.16-24 – two wrongs don’t make a right

² Dr. Paul Gilchrist, in an email reviewing this manuscript, noted: “In Deut. 17.14–20 God had already promised to give them a king—but they were asking for a wrong kind of king, not the king after God’s own heart. ‘A king like all other nations’ meant despotic, tyrannical, dictatorial, not accountable to anyone (and certainly not to God).”

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The period of the Judges was perhaps the lowest point in Israel's history. It forms the bridge between Joshua's time and the time during which the people asked to be ruled by a monarch. Judges shows the results of what happened when the previous generation did not continue to follow the Lord, nor did they teach their children and grandchildren about the Lord (2.10), resulting in the nation repeatedly turning from God to become a nation *like all other nations*. Some would say this is the only reason Judges is in the Bible. However, it is not just a historical account of Israel.

God chose to teach the new generation Who He is and what He could do, and He chose to do that through war, as evidenced in 3.1.

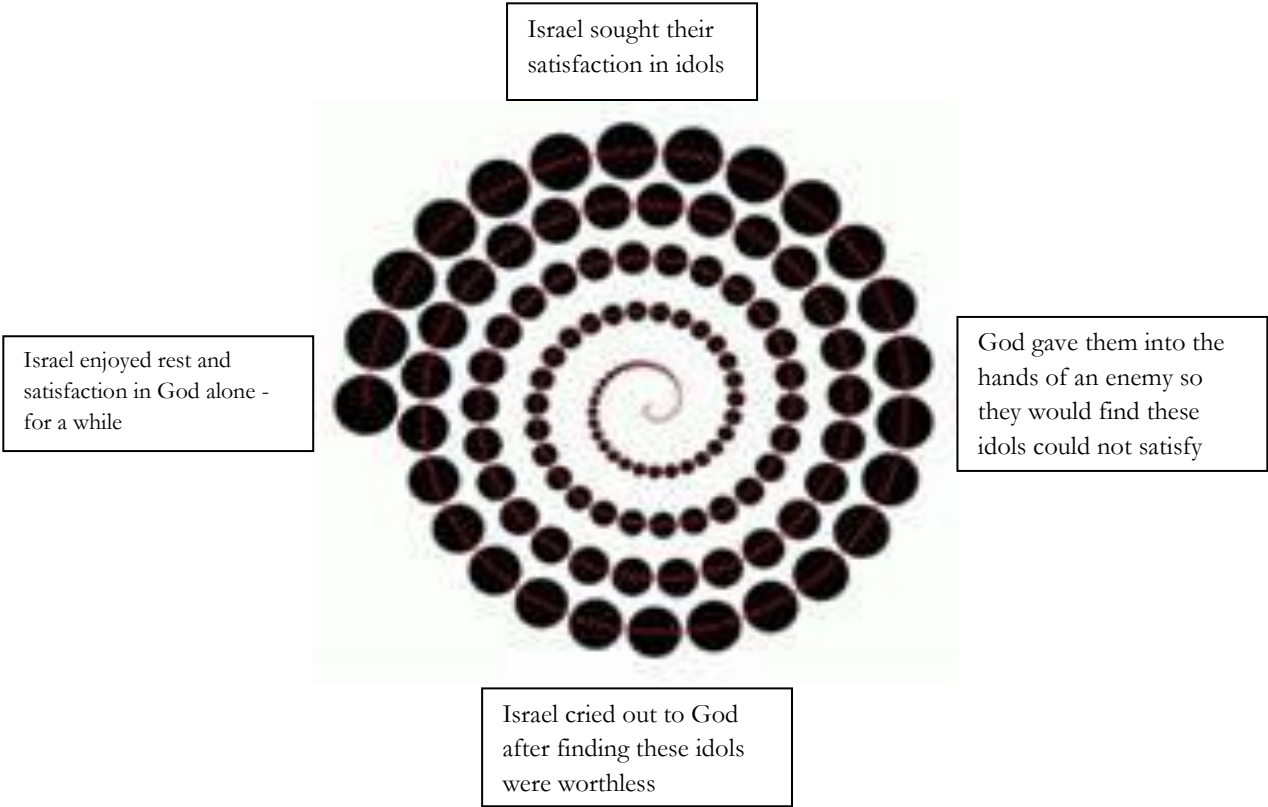
For some, this reads as only a book of judgment. However, to say this misses how God demonstrated His tender mercies, which were new every morning, His jealousy for His people, and His desire to provide and protect His covenant people.

For us today, Judges teaches us about the battle that takes place in the heart of every believer, which is spiritual warfare. This is a battle for satisfaction—either with God or the idols that deceive us into believing they can do what only God can do for us. This should keep us on our knees in prayer. “You will never know what prayer is for, until you know that life is war.”³

THE REPETITIVE NATURE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

1. There is a spiral which repeated itself, with few exceptions, all through the Book of Judges. Israel did not learn from previous mistakes. These accounts show us a downhill spiral as each finds Israel slipping further away from God.
2. A simple illustration of this spiral is found in 3.7–12. In this short passage, can you pick out one entire spiral PLUS the start of the next one?

³ John Piper. *Let the Nations be Glad*, p.70.



THE FOUNDATION LAID BY IDOLATRY

Through the centuries, Israel constantly moved in and out of idolatry, and eventually became so desensitized that it became a way of life. When the time came in God’s calendar for Israel to go into captivity and vanish from history, idolatry played a major role in God’s decision. See this in 2 Kings 17.7–18.

ISRAEL’S FAILURE TO FIND THEIR FULL SATISFACTION IN GOD ALONE

A. INCOMPLETE MILITARY VICTORIES, 1.1–36

As we look into this record - a repetition of failure - tribe by tribe, let’s see what we can learn from the principles the author of the book is illustrating....

1. **Judah’s** attempted conquest (1.1–20)—complete or **incomplete**?

2. What was the place of the Lord in the following verses?

1.1 – There were still some in Israel who knew enough to call upon God.

1.2 – Even though many had turned their backs on Him while Joshua was still alive (see Josh. 24), God still answered their prayers.

1.4 – God not only told them what to do, He empowered them to the point of victory over every enemy as long as they obeyed Him.

1.19 – The Lord continued to give them victory as long as they followed His commands. But, as soon as they stopped, they failed, and it would haunt them from then on.

What was their failure? (1.19) – They failed to complete the job as God had told and enabled them.

3. **Benjamin's** attempted conquest (1.21)—complete or **incomplete**?

What was their failure? (1.21) – They failed to complete the job as God had told and enabled them to do.

4. **Manasseh's** attempted conquest (1.22–27) – complete or **incomplete**?

What is the place of the Lord in 1.22? They chose to go up in the strength of the Lord.

What was their failure? (1.27) They failed to do the job **at all!** The most they did, which was not good, was to make the enemies their slaves.

5. **Ephraim's** attempted conquest (1.29)—complete or **incomplete**?

What was their failure? (1.29) – They failed to defeat their enemies and instead chose to make them their neighbors.

6. **Zebulun, Asher & Naphtali's** attempted conquest (1.30–33)—complete or **incomplete**?

What was their failure? (1.30,31,33) – None of them did as they were told, but instead chose to live with their enemies either as slaves or as neighbors.

7. **Dan's** attempted conquest (1.34–36)—complete or **incomplete**?

What was their failure? (1.34) – Dan not only failed to defeat their enemies, but their enemies became their slaves.

Summation: After reading this, why was it important enough for God to tell Israel to *completely* destroy their enemies?

1. God was using Israel to perform His judgment.
2. Failure to defeat what is God's enemy becomes our constant enemy, turning us away from God as we, over time, become more relaxed "hanging around" them.

B. STRATEGIES FOR DEFEATING THE ENEMY—from Diagram A1

THE Battle Plan:

You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

Ex.23.32–33

For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him, then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours. Your territory shall be from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the western sea. No one shall be able to stand against you. The Lord your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as He promised you. Deut. 11.22–25

The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the Lord will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Deut. 31.3–6

”Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deut. 6.4–7

Strategy #1: *You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. Ex.23.32*

What did God command of Israel before they entered Canaan?

Clearly, God knew what He was talking about when He told them not to form any business or relational alliances with anyone who was not within the Covenant. He knew it would turn them away from Him.

Strategy #2: *...be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to Him... Deut.11.22*

What common denominator can you find running throughout the incomplete conquests in Part A? Some believed and trusted God, and others didn't. Their biggest problem was they forgot what they saw God do through every battle in the book of Joshua. Their faith was small to non-existent because they forgot God's works during the 12 years they spent settling in the land!

Strategy #3: ...drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than you... Deut.11.23

What might have been Israel's heart attitude for not completely defeating the enemy?

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
Deut. 6.5

Their dependence upon God for the ability to love Him in this way was missing.

Understanding the types of desires residing in our own hearts, [such as] coveting, envying, jealousy, [which] strike at the core of our beings for they move beyond the outward actions of our lives and pierce the inward affections of our hearts.⁴

Strategy #4: ...the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Deut. 31.5

God makes it clear: incomplete obedience is no obedience at all! Why is it so difficult for us to obey when we are told the battle is already won?

This is what spiritual warfare is all about. It is the tugging at us from all sides, promising real satisfaction if we will only surrender.

What led to the next step?

The first step away from God is our feeling like we are missing something, and so we give in to what is drawing us away from God. We then begin to compromise with the world, the flesh, or the devil. As long as we keep resisting, we are still in the battle. Once we have given in, sin gets easier and easier. That is why this is war!

C. "TOLERANT" ATTITUDE TOWARDS IDOLS, 2.2

1. How did disobedience to the covenant lead to this tolerant attitude toward idols in 2.2? See also Ex. 34.12-16.

⁴Melissa B. Druger, *The Envy of Eve: Finding Contentment in a Covetous World*. Christian Focus Publications, 2012, p.21.

¹²Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. ¹³You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), ¹⁵lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

We are told today we must tolerate (be politically correct toward) everything regardless of what God says about it. Israel took a very tolerant attitude toward idolatry and refused to remove all that pulled them away from finding satisfaction in God alone. God had warned them what that would lead to, but they did it anyway.

2. Why not just let the altars and idols stand, and ignore them?

The battles we fight are not against flesh and blood. This is spiritual warfare. God commands us to love Him with all of our heart, mind, and soul. He warns us that keeping idols around us will cause a battle for our heart and mind—drawing us away from Him.

What led to the next step?

Deliberate disobedience! This was triggered because they had not been taught what God had done for His people in the past. If they had learned this, they might have been more willing to obey.

D. FAILURE TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN, 2.10

1. What **two** things are we told about this “first generation born in the land”?

- a. They did not acknowledge God.
- b. They did not know the things that He had done.

2. What does this tell us about how fast a nation can fall from God?

This is a lesson we must learn even in our own country. It takes only **ONE** generation for a nation to fall from God. And this book teaches how it happens!

3. While living in the wilderness, Israel lived in the midst of all the ceremonies, offerings, and festivals ordained by God. How could they not know the Lord?

Simple; most Israelites stopped celebrating most of these joyous events; the few that did practice became as meaningless as the religious ceremonies of the pagans around them.

4. They also considered what God had done for Israel. What would this include, specifically?

Think back on all the miracles found in the book of Joshua: the crossing of the Jordan; the fall of Jericho; the sun standing still, etc. Have the class look through the headings in the first 12 chapters of Joshua.

5. Can you imagine not wanting to share with your children and grandchildren all you had seen God do? Why wouldn't Joshua's generation teach their children these things?

The generation who witnessed all the great things soon turned their backs on God by the second half of Joshua—a period that lasted about 12 years. As time passed, these events took on less importance for them as only the present and their search for immediate satisfaction mattered.

6. Would you say the generation following Joshua's generation was punished for the sins of their fathers? Chapter one deals with Joshua's generation. They had no excuse after all they witnessed God doing for them. The generation after Joshua was not taught much about who God was or what He had done for their parents.

This is a great question that should bring some interesting discussion from the class. In one sense, we could say they were innocent because they were not taught. But, God never allowed this excuse as there was always a remnant who was faithful to the Covenant and its God.

7. Israel made the choice to sin and then failed to teach their children the truth. What was the next downward step?

Totally sinning the way the world did when God called a halt to everything with the flood. But, this time, in His mercy, He kept working with His people in spite of their ongoing rebellion against being satisfied with Him.

E. INTERMARRIAGE WITH THE HEATHEN, 3.6–7

1. What sequence can you find as God warned His people in:

Ex. 34.12 – They were not to make any covenants with the enemies of God.

34.13,14,15 – **All** the idols were to be torn down.

34.16 – **No** intermarriage—The command/instruction was: “Don't intermarry because they are unbelievers who will lead you into their idolatry, i.e., forsaking YHWH”. However, should they turn and trust the Lord, then it would be okay to marry them—examples: Rahab and Ruth.

2. What consequences happened as a result of Israel failing to obey by not intermarrying? In Judges, this generation was reaping the consequences of not being taught.

As we will see, God did whatever was necessary to show Israel the only real satisfaction in life is to be found in Him. He will do this by bringing them physically into war in the physical world to demonstrate the reality of the on-going spiritual war being fought.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

1. In light of this lesson, how important is it for us to spend our lives seeking to constantly find our satisfaction in God alone?
2. According to what you have read in this lesson, how important is it for us to teach and model what it looks like to be satisfied in God for our children and grandchildren?
3. What is the most significant thing you have learned from your study so far?

How will this help you love Jesus more with all your heart, mind, and strength?

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

Evaluate your heart:

1. This week, start developing a list of the ten most important things in your life. Rank them from 1–10 with 10 being the most important.

If you are having trouble ranking these things, think back to the last time you had to do without one of them. How strong was your reaction?

2. Do any of these cause you to be more satisfied in them rather than God? If so, they are an idol living in your heart, which is also where the Holy Spirit lives - which is why your heart is a battleground. What plan will you make to correct this before it drags you further from God as it did Israel?

Lesson 2

OUR PERSONAL SEARCH FOR SATISFACTION

Judges 2.6–3.6

“Because you have made us and drawn us to yourself,
our heart is unquieted until it rests in you.”

St Augustine

Back to the Beginning

In Gen. 15, God told His friend, Abram, his descendants would go into Egypt for 400 years. Once they had grown into a nation, He would bring them out and give them the land to which He had brought Abram. Yet they did not inhabit the land until the fourth generation. Why?

Gen 15.16 tells us...*the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.*

In other words, the people of the land were so full of sin, God chose to start a new nation through Abram. Abram’s descendants would later return with God’s judgment on these people. This was to be God’s battle, and Israel His army. But what a rag-tag group He picked! He sent them to Egypt where He grew them innumerable. Their size was seen as a threat by the Egyptians, which caused them to be enslaved as brick-makers.

Before the Exodus, God began Israel’s education - He wanted them to learn who He is and what He was capable of doing. They would learn many lessons for them over their 40 years in the wilderness.

As they entered the Promised Land, a new generation arose who had not experienced life in Egypt or the miracles God performed earlier through Moses. Therefore, they needed to experience God’s power for themselves, and they were taught this by seeing God give them victory after victory on the east side of the Jordan River.

Finally, they stood poised on the bank of the Jordan ready to cross into what they had heard about all of their lives, that is, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Their first battle was against Jericho. God gave them the strategy on how to win—follow His instructions. All spoils of the conquered cities belonged to God—no one was to keep anything. However, one man, Achan, felt so drawn by what he saw, he quietly helped himself to what he wanted. As a result, Israel lost the next battle.

God wanted Israel to learn the battle was totally His. He would fight for them. This whole war was God's judgment on the Canaanites, the people of the land. He gave them 400 years to repent, but instead they went deeper into their sin. God would not tolerate sin in these people or His own. Achan was put to death for his sin just as the people of the land were to be put to death for theirs. God takes sin seriously!

After this lesson, God inflicted His judgment upon the people of the land through one battle after another. As part of this, He taught great lessons to His people about who He is and what He can and would do. The sun stood still. Hail fell on a battle fought hand-to-hand, but hit only God's intended victims. This generation had such great stories to tell their children.

Once the major battles were completed, God sent His people to their new homes in the land. They moved into houses they did not build, they ate the crops they did not plant. They drank from the vines they did not grow. They experienced *many* blessings from God as He desired to deepen His relationship with His children.

Had they continued to do what God told them, by carrying out His judgment upon these people, this was what they were promised:

The Lord will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. And all the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today... Deut. 28.8–13

What **one thing** was needed by Israel in order to receive **all** that God had for **His** people?
Obedience!

So what went wrong?

They were constantly being lured away from God.

This lesson will help you understand where Israel went wrong and how we follow their example today.

I. Preparation for the Battle

A. Personal Qs

What is there in my heart that keeps pulling me from following God with all my heart, mind, and strength? The Bible points out there are three enemies working against us at all times—the world, the flesh, and the devil. This is known as spiritual warfare. We spend our time battling with the world we can see, but there is a world beyond in which we are *seemingly* “pawns.” One side wants us to succeed, the other to fail. To become better warriors, we must be aware of how both sides operate.

Jesus said the world hated Him, and He told us to expect it will hate us also. (John 15.18) Therefore, we should not expect the world to work in ways which will promote God’s will. Sadly, Satan has convinced many in the church the things of the world will satisfy us.

Our flesh also works to keep us from obeying God at all times. When we are saved, God begins the work of reconciliation in four areas of our life:

Spiritually—He begins the healing process between us and Him.

Psychologically—He begins the healing process within us mentally (i.e., who am I? I am a child of God).

Sociologically—He begins reconciling us to each other.

Physiologically—He gives us the privilege of praying for supernatural healing.

However, in none of these areas are we healed completely—yet! This will be realized in the New Heaven and New Earth in Rev. 21–22. Until then, we have war battling in our flesh. Satan will use the world to do whatever it takes to defeat us in all four of these areas. When the Bible speaks of our flesh, it is usually referring to our entire being (heart, mind, and soul), not just our body.

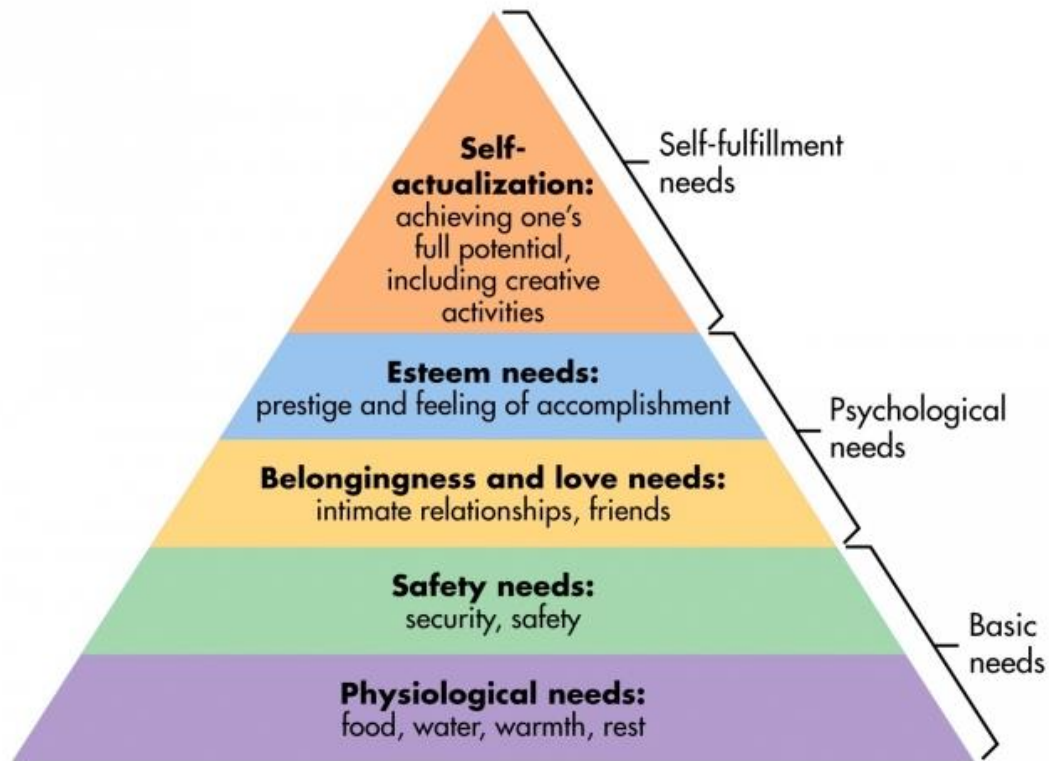
This should help us begin to understand the allure of idols.

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

Hierarchy of Human Needs

Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) was a professor of psychology in America. He developed what has long been used and known as his *Hierarchy of Needs*. His findings showed people do not obtain personal meaning by seeking after material possessions. He was not a Christian and had a view of humanity not based on what the Bible teaches; however, with a few adjustments we will see he was not far from the truth.

The book of Judges raises many questions about why Israel refused to find their full satisfaction in God but instead kept abandoning Him for idols. An examination of this chart will show why following after anything but God does not make sense, and it will help us understand how strong the spiritual battles we face are.



First: God Desires to Satisfy the Needs of Each One of Us

God has built within each of us basic needs. When these needs are *perceived* as not being met, we do everything possible to find a way to be satisfied. When we have no food and genuinely understand what it is to be starving, our only focus in life is to find a way to meet that need. Once level-one needs are met, we move on to making sure higher level needs are met, and we are motivated to achieve more.

Our responsibility is to align our wills to meet His, regardless of the circumstances or outcome. We struggle to do this because we live in a fallen world. As such we have three forces fighting against our finding full satisfaction in God—the world, the flesh, and the devil. All of these forces are prominently seen in every account in the book of Judges and in every one of our lives today.

Second: Satan Deceives Us Through Idols

Definition of an idol: “It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”⁵

Satan, from the very beginning of creation, used creation itself (i.e., the serpent) to deceive Adam and Eve. He has done the same ever since.

God makes it very clear an idol is nothing—1 Cor. 8.4: ***Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”***

However, an idol is empowered by demons—1 Cor. 10.20: ***No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.***

Israel reduced God to an idol when they took the Ark of the Covenant into battle (1 Sam. 4-5). They lost the battle and the Ark. However, God’s presence with the Ark still caused the demons behind Dagan to bow before Him.

A man-made idol (god) is offered the choicest foods, placed in a home of its own (a temple), served by people, prayed to by its creators as if it had ears that could hear. They are believed to grow crops, control weather and pregnancies, predict the future, win wars, etc. There are personal, family, and national gods.

Third: The Allure of Idols

What caused Israel to be drawn in by these idols in the following verses?

1. Deut. 31.20 – **Materialism**—***For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant.***
2. Deut. 23.17 – **Free sex**—with temple prostitutes—***None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, and none of the sons of Israel shall be a cult prostitute.*** See also 2 Kings. 23.7 and Hosea 4.14. Part of the horrible idolatry of Baalism was homosexuality—temple prostitutes. The Ugaritic materials make this very clear. Cf. Lot and the three angelic beings.
3. Jud. 2.17 – **Spiritual Adultery**—***...yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. 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.***
4. 1 Kings 11.2-4 – **Intermarriage**—***...from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.”*** Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.
5. Jer. 7.9 – **Multiple sinful failings**—***Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known...?***

⁵ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*, p. xvii.

6. Amos 2.7 – Putting ourselves before all others— *...those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned.*
7. 1 Kings 12.28 – Political persuasion—*So the king [Jeroboam] took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”*
8. 1 Kings 20.23 – Superstitious factor—*And the servants of the king of Syria said to him, “Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we. But let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.*
9. 2 Chron. 25.14 – Conquest of other nations—*After Amaziah came from striking down the Edomites, he brought the gods of the men of Seir and set them up as his gods and worshiped them, making offerings to them.*
10. 2 Chron. 28.23 – Power—*For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.*

In the following, rate yourself in each category. For example, do you lean more toward self-centeredness in the world, flesh or devil? If so, where are you on the scale with 1 being the best and 5 needing real help. Rate yourself in the “content with Christ” category also. You might want to list out to the side what you can do to help move yourself out of the world, flesh and devil side to the content in Christ side.

Be honest. This is the only way to begin to deal with these areas.

Circle where you rate yourself under each column	World, Flesh, Devil	Content in Christ	Comments
Self-centeredness	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Contentedness	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Belonging	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Safety	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	
Physical	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	

Physiological needs: When Israel entered the Promised Land, every need was met as God had promised. They did not have too difficult a time moving into houses they did not build; and eating food they did not plant. After all, this was the land they had longed for over 40 years—a land flowing with “milk and honey.” Lev. 20.24: *But I have said to you, “You will inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.*

Safety needs: Here Israel began to falter. God told them through Moses and Joshua the land was theirs for the taking. Every battle they fought God’s way would be a victory. Midway through the book of Joshua the land was distributed to the tribes. They simply had to follow through and finish destroying God’s enemies in the land. But, when they saw things like 900 iron chariots, they doubted God’s ability to bring victory, so they chose to walk by sight rather than trust God.

Psychological need for belonging and love: These needs could not be met as they broke fellowship with God and pursued relationships with their enemies of over a decade. They were also lured by the gods of the land, which had done nothing for them, but to suppress the truth. They were deceived into believing these pieces of wood could provide what God would not.

Self-Actualization: Maslow identifies eight characteristics of a person who has achieved this pinnacle:

1. clearer, more efficient perception of reality
2. more openness to experience
3. increased integration, wholeness and unity of the personality
4. increased spontaneity, expressiveness, full functioning, aliveness
5. a real self, a firm identity, autonomy, uniqueness
6. increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self-actualization recovery of creativeness
7. ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness
8. democratic character structure
9. ability to love unconditionally

Maslow, however, was not a Christian. His findings may not have been based on the Bible but were not far from the Truth. Maslow's goal was to find true identity in the achievements of the individual. As Christians, our ultimate goal is to find our true identity in Christ, our all sufficient One.

But, because Israel did not accept God as sufficient to meet their needs for safety and love, they never knew victory.

Westminster Shorter Catechism question #1: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

John Piper restates the catechism this way: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

A. What was God's desire and plan for His people?

When we seek to be satisfied in God...

1. Our basic human needs are met (commandments 1–3).
2. We find rest when we enjoy His Sabbath (commandment 4).

3. Our need for safety and security is met. We have no fear of being murdered, stolen from, or lied about (commandments 5–10). Ps. 4.8.—*In peace I will both lie down and sleep; so you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.*
4. When we follow these commandments (5–10), we experience His love and have the ability to love and respect others.
5. Our self-actualization is met by understanding who we are *in Christ*.

B. How would this have met the basic human needs of the people according to the pyramid?

From here, we take them back to God's goal for Israel: to obey and enjoy Him as they lived in the Promised Land where they would have had every level of the pyramid of needs met.

C. Why did they turn their backs on God each time by trying to satisfy their needs elsewhere?

Show them what the people were like and why they chose to replace satisfaction in God with a piece of wood carved into a likeness by human hands. Their hearts were prone to wander. In God, their every need would be met, but their hearts refused to obey and constantly moved them away from true satisfaction.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

Fourth: Overcoming the Allure of Your Idols

1. At what point do we stop being content with something we have been given? If God gave us fully furnished houses and cabinets full of food, how long would it take before *our* wandering hearts would begin to envy the bigger house next door?

2. At what point does contentment move to dissatisfaction?

Lesson 3

THE BATTLE FOR SATISFACTION ILLUSTRATED

Judges 3.7-31

Defeat after defeat, military AND spiritual, swept over Israel as they failed to find their contentment in God alone. Each time they fell, they fell further, and each time they rose up, they rose less. This lesson will examine some of these events and discover principles explaining why this happened, how it could have been avoided, the domino effect upon the children, and, most importantly, what we can learn about God through each event.

One thing we see from the beginning, God knows the struggles of our human hearts, yet, because of His covenant love for His people, He chooses to deliver us anyway.

For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give their fathers, and they have eaten and are full [Hebrew: content or satisfied] and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. Deut. 31.20

I. Preparation for Battle

Chronology in ancient times - In the western world we measure history and events by time. The ancient and non-western world (2/3 of the world) sees the event as more important than the time it took place, or the sequence in which it took place. When we read the events in Judges, we are tempted to think one judge followed another. Look at 3.11: Othniel dies and Ehud's story begins. We would assume Ehud followed Othniel right away. However, once we understand the writer is connecting the stories and not chronicling a timeline, we see these events took place at different places throughout Israel, and at times they will overlap.

What is a judge? When we think of a judge today, we see a black-robed imposing figure sitting on a bench ready to pass judgment on the accused. The people we will look at in this book served two purposes as judges. God showed Himself and His power through each judge as he, or she, in Deborah's case, led Israel to military victory over an enemy God left to test them. The judge was also responsible to minister within his/her own territory of the Promised Land by judging cases brought by those needing a mediator.⁶

⁶ Dr. Paul Gilchrist believes the Judges were the executive officers of the land—including administration, military leadership, as well as the judicial authority. As judges, they were not priests in the temple. Samuel, though, held all three offices - prophet, priest, and king (in the sense of an administrator/judge).

Judges 2.10 tells us about this first generation born in the Promised Land. Read 2.10 with Deut. 6.4–8. What was the basic cause of the horrible situation in the book of Judges?

God made it clear; parents were responsible to teach their own children Who God is and what He had done for His people. They were told this when they were poised to cross the Jordan River. These parents were eye witnesses to all the miracles God did for Israel over the twelve years they spent fighting to possess the land. But, for some reason, they failed to teach their children much of anything about Him. This, however, did not leave this next generation less responsible before God.

Judges 3.1—How did God teach this new generation, the first to be born in the land, Who He is and what He can do?

He taught them the gods (idols) they chased after could not do anything for them. He raised up an oppressor to force them to see these gods had no power to help them. He gave them as much time as they needed to come to the point where *they recognized* their need for Him, and then He raised up a deliverer and displayed His power through that deliverer. What they never grasped was they were fighting a spiritual war, not just a physical one. It was through fighting those wars they came to know the power and nature of God. God was steering their discontented hearts back to finding true contentment in Him alone.

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

A. Israel's Failure to Find God Sufficient

The very first commandment requires we not allow anyone or anything in our lives to become more important to us than God.

Why must He be first in everything?

God is the only one in the universe Who can say to all, "I am the most important; I want all the praise and thanks given to Me," and not be sinfully egotistical. For, when we give Him the praise and thanks He so rightly deserves, He gives back to us abundantly more. We don't give praise in order to get from Him; we give Him praise and thanks because He first loved us.

Why is God jealous when we worship other gods? (Isa. 42.8: *I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.*)

He knows who is getting the glory instead of Him—Satan. Why should He tolerate Satan being praised when it was He who did it all for us?

What does God call the one who goes so far as to claim to be an atheist in Ps. 53.1? See also Isa. 32.6. *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. (Ps. 53.1) For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity, to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied. (Isa. 32.6)* A fool is one who thinks and acts with a depraved mind.

How does God respond to those who pursue other gods in Ex. 20.5; and 34.14?
His real anger and wrath are aimed at those who find gods to replace Him! God is jealous. Jealousy comes from His love for those He has created and redeemed *at great cost*. Idolatry is an attack on God's exclusive right to our love, trust, and obedience; and it demonstrates a mistrust of God's goodness and sovereignty!

Which one does God call the worst and why?

God describes the sin of idolatry in two ways:

1. God is the husband married to His bride (His people) who keeps going off to find satisfaction in someone (something) else. (See the picture of this in the book of Hosea.)
2. He describes Himself as a King commanding exclusive love, devotion, trust, and confidence in His ability to provide for and protect His people. (Read 1 Sam. 8.7–8.) (See also Matt. 6.24–34.)

Does Is. 44.13 help you understand why they were (we are) foolish for going after idols as a replacement for God?

The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. If a man makes the god, who is more powerful? Could they not see the logical fallacy of their actions?

1. In 3.7, God tells us the people of Israel did evil in His sight.

What two evils are they said to have done?

- a. They forgot the Lord.
- b. They served the Baals and the Asheroth. (See their descriptions in Appendix I.)

Can you think of a time in your own life when you “ignored” God in order to find satisfaction in *your* “idol”? What was your idol, and what was the outcome?

What made you think God could not be your satisfaction? Did He fail you in the past? Did you just forget? Why were you not willing to wait on Him to answer?

2. When the Scripture says that Israel “forgot” God (3.7), it means ignored. They understood so little about Him, they saw no wrong in what they were doing. Therefore, they ignored or suppressed what they knew in favor of what was in front of them. It would have been easy to rationalize what God had told their fathers—not marrying those in the land was helpful for their time, but things had changed. Israel was now friends with these surrounding nations. They thought the people had some strange ways but figured they could *tolerate* each other.

Remember what these gods were like! What does Paul tell us are behind each of these so-called gods (1 Cor. 10.18–20)?

Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

The word *forgot* can also be translated *ignored*. Since parents failed to teach them about God, this generation ignored what little they were taught. The result was they did not know Him as their personal God. God created us to worship Him. Israel chose to worship, but the wrong god.

This story is not just about an event in history, it is about the spiritual war *we* fight every day. It is about Israel living and loving God as He deserves, or pursuing the lure of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In every battle, there is a choice: to believe God and follow Him or ignore Him and go our own way, giving the victory to Satan.

B. God Refuses to Allow Israel to Find Their Satisfaction Outside of Him

For us to get an understanding of how God taught Israel, we have to understand three terms:

Justice—means getting *all* you deserve

Mercy—means not getting all you deserve

Grace—means getting what you don’t deserve

Israel had seen God’s justice as He used Israel to punish the Canaanites with all they deserved.

They witnessed His mercy as He pardoned Rahab.

They again saw His grace in action when He rescued them from the hand of their oppressor.

Later in the book, God made His point very clear: ***Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.***(Jud. 10.14) God told Isaiah, people ***have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep on praying to a god that cannot save.***(Isa. 45.20b)

What is the significance of the eight years referenced in 3.8?

God in His mercy did not force Israel to obey, but He did whatever it took to get their attention back on Him. Because of His love, mercy, and longsuffering, He allowed them to take eight long years to realize the gods to which they were crying out were no gods at all. The demons behind these idols had no desire to help them. Only the true God who loved them and had made a covenant with them would want to save these sinful people.

Israel's downfall began when they stopped believing God was able and desirous of satisfying them. They began seeking satisfaction elsewhere by compromising with the world. They tried to have God *and* their idols. As a result, 3.8 says: "The nostrils of the Lord spewed fire against Israel." The picture we get from the Hebrew is a fire-breathing dragon. When Scripture uses the word describing God as **longsuffering** it literally says He is "long of nostrils," meaning, from the time God thinks about His anger to the time it spews fire on the people, it has dissipated. With an image like this, no wonder they finally turned to Him for help.

C. Israel's Cry for Deliverance

You would think it would not take eight years for Israel to come to her senses. But through this you see the lure and the hold sin has on the people. Sin brings pleasure and enjoyment, but only for a time. The only true satisfaction we can ever fully enjoy comes from finding our contentment in Him.

The people weren't taught much about God, yet they learned enough about Him to cry out to Him for deliverance.

D. God Raised Up a Deliverer

OTHNIEL—3.8–11

Othniel, mentioned in 1.13, was not born in the Promised Land. He was there for the crossing of the Jordan and all the battles fought under Joshua's leadership. He was an eyewitness to all God had done for Israel. He was there when the land was divided among the twelve tribes. And he also witnessed the decline of Israel as they failed to take the land from God's enemies. He watched them slide further and further from all God's commandments. Othniel had a great mentor to follow in Caleb.

For us today, Othniel stands as a model of the judges in the way he exhibited what God does through someone who totally lives for Him.

As you study this passage, it is surprising how little detail is given about the battle. The story, from beginning to end, is about God's mercy and His desire to restore Israel's relationship to Him.

Othniel

Tribe

Judah

Meaning of his name

God is force or power of God

Territory fought in & for

Not told

What were the idols?

Baals and Asheroth

Who was the enemy God used?

Cushan-Rishathaim (name means doubly-wicked; blackness) king of Aram (modern day Iraq)

How long oppressed and at rest?

8 years of oppression

40 years of rest

1. What triggered Israel's deliverance (3.9a)?

Israel reached their lowest point of frustration. Not only had they taken enough from their foreign oppressor, but the gods to which they had prayed and sacrificed ignored them in the same way Israel had ignored God. Once they reached rock bottom, the only way left was to look up. In other words, once they realized these idols could not satisfy their needs as only God could do, they turned back to seeking Him.

2. What God-given characteristics and/or talents might Israel have seen in Othniel which would have shown them what God was like? 3.9–10 (See also 1.12–13.)



Othniel was a leader, and a military man

Othniel was consecrated as God's man—and did not worship idols

Othniel was willing to fight for the one he loved

Othniel was one of four judges of whom the Scriptures say “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him”

Othniel delivered Israel from their worship of idols and enabled them to have rest (contentment) in God for 40 years

3. Remember the statement in Lesson 1. “History is not about people, places, and dates. Rather it is God working in and through people, places, and dates.” 3.10 is the perfect example: ***The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.***

This event is not about Israel or Othniel; it is about God! Whatever type of character Othniel was before, now he would be capable of doing things he never would have imagined. This passage clearly teaches us God is in sovereign control of all these events. He was not caught by surprise when Israel sinned. We are told He was the one who raised up this oppressor. Now He will sovereignly work His will through this obedient and willing servant, Othniel.

What changes about the work of the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament to the New?

There are two works of the Spirit of God often confused by the Church today. The first is the work of the Spirit regarding salvation, and the other is His empowering work. The saving work of the Spirit **does not change from the OT to the NT!** This MUST be clearly understood. What does change is His empowering. In the OT, He “comes” upon people and is also said to “leave” them. In Ps. 51.11, David said, “Take not your Holy Spirit from me.” He did not mean, “Take not your salvation from me,” but “Do not take the divine empowering from me so I cannot do this job as king as you have anointed me.” The Spirit came and went in this way in the OT upon mainly prophets, priests, and kings. In the NT, this empowering comes and stays in every believer.

4. Israel, for the most part, failed to teach their children. In contrast, Caleb, a leader and a military man, left a spiritual legacy as one who followed God. He was one of the OT's heroes who left a great legacy to Othniel. Othniel proved himself to be a great leader in his own right, conquering a city in order to win the hand of Caleb's daughter. Was this why God chose Othniel?

God chooses whomever He wants. He does not have to look for someone who has the needed gifts; **He gives them the gifts He wants them to have.** The story of this first judge starts with one who had lived through all of God's miracles from the wilderness through the dividing of the land. He not only witnessed what God could do, but he was also a believer, unlike many in the rest of this book. God took this man, already His child, and empowered him to exhibit the truths about God which their fathers failed to teach them.

Read [Psm.71.17-18](#) to the class. ***O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation.***

5. Read [3.1](#). Put that information together with this story. What do you think Israel learned about God through all that happened?

This God, of whom they knew only a little (what little their parents had told them), was more powerful than the gods they had chosen to serve. He was able, through war, to deliver them from oppression. He gave them someone in whom they could trust and follow for the next 40 years.

The question Israel needed to ask themselves was, "In whom would they trust once Othniel was out of the picture?"

EHUD – 3.12-30

- A. Israel again failed to find God sufficient.

What is the cause and effect found in [3.12](#)?

They ***again*** did what was done before Othniel - they allowed themselves to be lured to the idols and away from the Lord.

- B. God again challenged Israel to find their satisfaction outside of Him.

1. What was the result according to [3.14](#)?

God's anger was not mentioned here as in [3.8](#), but the swiftness of His action would indicate it was there. He raised up a different group of people to get Israel's attention, this time from the southeast side of the Jordan.

God withheld His justice, and in His mercy He desired to spread His wings over and around Israel in order to lovingly bring them back. ([Luke 13.34](#))

2. Look at the map on page xii. Find Moab. Then find where the tribe of Benjamin settled. The **City of Palms** ([3.14](#)) is near Jericho, not far from the Jordan River. Eglon crossed the Jordan and entered Benjamin. Where did his army travel, and why is it significant?

Ehud
Tribe Benjamin
Territory fought in & for Benjamin
What were the idols? While not stated, the term <i>again</i> would suggest the same as the previous verses.
Who was the enemy God used? Moabites, Ammonites, & Amalekites
How long oppressed and at rest? 18 years of oppression 80 years of rest

They had to cross the territory belonging to the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Neither of these tribes tried to stop them. They did not see fit to defeat the enemies of Israel. However, as we know from the story, God raised them up to oppress only this territorial section of Israel.

3. Read Gen.19.1-38 (especially 34-38). Who were the Ammonites and what were they to Israel? Lot was the nephew of Abraham. He had an incestuous relationship with his daughters, making Lot the forefather of both the Moabites and the Ammonites and therefore, related to Israel by blood.

4. The other tribe mentioned here, the Amalekites, had a similar history with Israel. Read Gen.36.9-12. Who were they, and why were they so anxious to go to war against Israel? Abraham – Isaac – Jacob. These are the names associated with the beginnings of Israel. But Jacob had an older twin brother – Esau, who renounced God’s covenant blessing and went off to form his own nation – the Edomites. One of his descendants was named Amalek, who was the father of the Amalekites. So, they too were related to Israel.

C. Israel cried out for deliverance

How much longer did it take Israel to learn they needed to cry out to the Lord instead of the idols for help? (3.15)
18 years instead of 8!

Why?

God, being a just God, could have demanded Israel pay for their sin by being wiped out by the enemy. Instead, God had mercy on His people, bringing the oppressor as His instrument to turn them back to Him. Ask the class how long God had to deal with certain sins in their lives before they turned to Him for help.

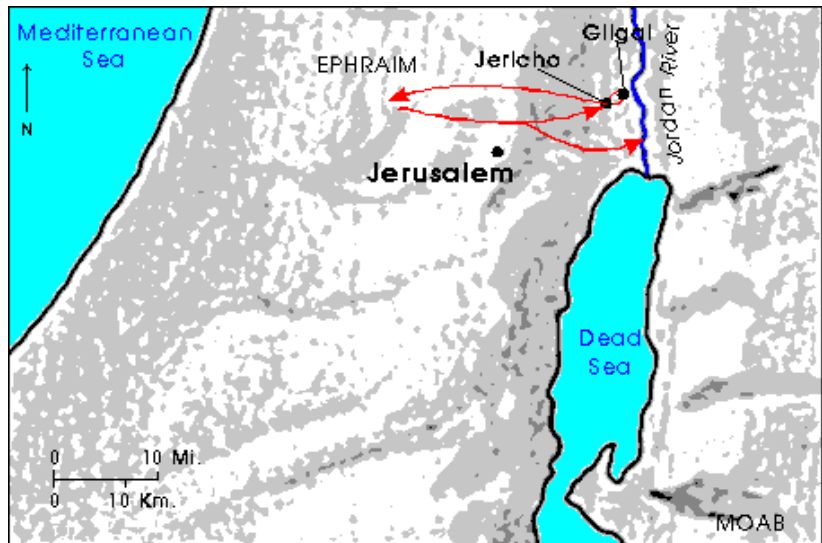
D. God raised up a deliverer

1. List everything the text says about Ehud, and how he led Israel.
 - ✓ He was the son of Gera out of the smallest tribe – Benjamin.
 - ✓ He was left-handed (soldiers were generally trained to fight right-handed).
 - ✓ He had the ability to forge his own sword to his specifications and strap it to his right leg (instead of the normal left leg from which the right hand would grab).
 - ✓ He led a group to deliver the tribute/tax to the king.
 - ✓ He sent his men out of the king’s chamber and returned to the king, telling him of a secret message.
 - ✓ The king sent his men out of the chamber.

- ✓ Ehud told the king he had a message for him from God, grabbed the sword from his right leg, and stabbed the king.
- ✓ He left the chamber, closed the door, and fled.
- ✓ He sent out the call-to-arms for the Ephraimites to join his Benjamite brothers to fight.
- ✓ He delivered Israel as ordered.

2. Ehud is mentioned as being left-handed. Why is that important?

All soldiers were trained to be right-handed. A right-handed soldier would carry, or conceal, his short sword in a scabbard on his left thigh. Ehud would be searched before he entered the presence of Eglon; checking the left thigh only. Ehud's sword was strapped to his right thigh and was not found, allowing him to enter into the presence of the enemy king fully armed.



3. What triggered deliverance here (3.15a)?

Israel cried out to the Lord for help, BUT they only did that after 18 years of praying and sacrificing to the idols! For whatever sad reason, it took Israel a very long time to realize only God could truly satisfy their needs.

4. What is the significance of “he turned back at the idols” (3.19) and “he passed beyond the idols” (3.26)?

Although there is great uncertainty about what this means, Ehud might have used this as a way of getting back into the presence of the king by pretending these gods had a message for Eglon.



5. How would Ehud compare with Othniel? (personality, methods, etc.)
 - a. Each proved to be a military leader
 - b. Othniel was a convert to Jehovah, while Ehud was born an Israelite
 - c. Othniel was said to have lived through the battles in Joshua
 - d. Only Othniel was said to have been given God's Spirit to carry out his call to deliver Israel

6. What did Israel learn about God through this experience?

Israel did not know God (2.10). Satan led them to follow worthless idols that could never satisfy. God wanted Israel to know who He is, so He forced them to see just how worthless their idols were by making their living situation much worse under the occupation of a foreign power.

We also see God having given certain natural traits to a man from birth, and then calling upon him to use them, even though Ehud is never said to have done them in the power of the Holy Spirit. God, therefore, is displaying His sovereignty throughout each of these stories and in the life of each character.

What did *you* learn from this experience?

SHAMGAR – 3.31

God used Othniel to rescue Israel from their distant enemy which came from the north. He then used Ehud to save His people from their neighbor who came from east of the Jordan. Now He will use Shamgar to deliver Israel out of the hands of the first of the nations they failed to drive out – the Philistines in the southwest. ***Now these are the nations that the Lord left, to test Israel by them...in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.*** (3.1-2)

When God raises up a deliverer, He uses whomever He wills. He does not always use the famous or those we would choose. Instead, here He used a man like Shamgar but tells us very little about him. After all, the story is about God, not Shamgar!

1. Although the spiral is not noted, 3.31 shows it occurred.

No details are given here about Israel sinning against the Lord, but the implication is clear from the context. The Philistines were among the people God instructed Israel to eliminate from the land because of their sin. The fact God used Shamgar gave the indication He was again rescuing His people from their failure to live according to His instructions.

Shamgar
He did what God sent him to do
Tribe Unknown
Territory fought in & for Southwest Israel/Judah
What were the idols? None mentioned
Who was the enemy God used? Philistines
How long oppressed and at rest? Not told Not told

The name, Shamgar, raises some questions – it is not an Israelite name. A second question comes up here: Is his father's name Anath, or is this a reference to Shamgar's being a follower of the pagan god, Anath, a female consort of Baal? To answer this, we must start with what we understand about the Bible. It is God's Word, put together by the Holy Spirit, and it contains only what He wants us to know. That may be too simplistic for some, but this is the belief of the Church throughout the ages! Therefore, we may conclude this: Shamgar is not a follower of a pagan god, and may, in all likelihood, be one of the few converts to Israel's faith mentioned in the Bible. If this is true, then we have what many Israelites would have considered an outsider fighting their battle. Whatever the case, God uses whomever He chooses. For this, we should be thankful! If Shamgar was a foreigner, then it shows all the more how far Israel has moved away from God.

2. Later in Judges we read about the Philistines. They were well-trained fighters. How then could one man defeat 600 soldiers?

There is good reason to assume this defeat of the Philistines did not take place in just one battle. Shamgar might have fought smaller companies of soldiers over a period of time. This takes nothing away from the text, as little detail is given to us.

3. What does 5.6-7 show about the continued deterioration of Israel?

This event took place during the time of Ehud. Notice 4.1 refers to the events following Ehud's death and not Shamgar's, indicating the southern part of Israel was having problems while Ehud's area of the country was at peace.

Final thought about the first three judges: Othniel was a strong believer in God. Not as much is mentioned about Ehud's faith, except for the one reference in 3.28. Shamgar may not even have been an Israelite or a believer. What are your final evaluations about them?



III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

All spiritual warfare involves our heart battling for satisfaction/contentment. We are either going to find it in God or in something else (which is idolatry). Israel moving into the land, already inhabited by the enemies of God, is a picture of what we experience when we enter our new lives in Christ; but we take with us our old nature. God used the nations He left there as a way of teaching every believer the battle for satisfaction is both a daily and a lifetime battle.

1. What part does “*knowing*” God intimately play in our everyday battles for satisfaction?

As we battle for satisfaction, we come to understand we cannot fight it in our own strength - we clearly see our need for a Deliverer. As we learn to know God deeper, we realize there are two Deliverers we depend on – Jesus, who on the Cross delivered us from the penalty and power (allure) of sin, and the Holy Spirit Who daily enables us to live a life satisfied in Him.

2. What is God showing us today in raising up the judges?

In the past, God used Moses and Joshua to lead the people into the land flowing with milk and honey. Once they settled in the land, which was not theirs, they took over cities and houses they did not build, and reaped harvest from fields they did not plow. But still their hearts were not satisfied either in God or in all He gave them. They sought their satisfaction in the idols of the land, because they could see and touch them, and the people of the land (led by Satan) told them all the things their gods had done for them. God would not stand for this, so He sent an oppressor, and said to Israel, “Now see how well these gods can satisfy you.” Finally, they cried to God for help and He raised up a deliverer (a judge).

3. The battle for our hearts is VERY real today. God’s Spirit is constantly at war against the world, our flesh, and the devil; all claiming to satisfy the desires of our heart. Who is winning in *your* heart?

Lesson 4

HOW MUCH FAITH DOES IT TAKE?

Judges 4-5

When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.... Deut. 20.1

I. Preparation for Battle

1. Think about a time when you knew God was calling you to accomplish a task, yet fear stood between you and obedience. How much faith did you have for the job?

2. How much did you think you needed?

Contend, Lord, with those who contend with me;
Fight against those who fight against me.
Take up shield and armor;
Arise and come to my aid.
Brandish spear and javelin
Against those who pursue me.
Say to me,
“I am your salvation...”
Psalm 35:1-3

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

Chapters 4 and 5 can best be described as a riddle wrapped in an enigma. Why? There are so many questions that arise, yet we cannot always be sure we have the right answers. Therefore, let us begin this lesson where we should begin all lessons by asking the question: What is God teaching us about Himself in this story?

But, before we dive in, we want to see as much of the whole picture as we can. The best way to see these two chapters is by viewing them as a picture-within-a-picture. The larger picture would show us what is taking place in the physical realm and help us to experience it. The smaller picture would show us what God is doing in the spiritual realm where we don't see unless we have "spiritual eyes". These serve as a lesson to us, revealing how we should see every day of our lives. But sometimes the things of the world get in our line of vision as they did with Israel.

"When pleasure rules the life, mind, sensibility, and health shrivel and waste, till at last, and not tardily, no joy in earth or heaven can move the worn-out heart to response." T.T. Munger.

God tells us these battles belong to Him and He will give us the victory - provided we follow His battle plan. He says in Judges 5.3: ***So may all your enemies perish, O Lord! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.***

There is never a time when God is not at work both around us and in our lives. He tells us, in effect, "I am jealous for My children, and I won't have you seeking your satisfaction in those worthless, powerless, ignorant pieces of wood." ***You shall have no other gods before Me.*** (Deut. 6.5) Yet, as we have seen before and we will see again, Israel's heart was being pulled to the idols. They repeatedly went back after the lifeless gods of the people around them. And because God is jealous for His people, He had to lovingly discipline them.

A. Israel's Failure to Find God Sufficient

According to Judges 3.7ff, Israel's enemies came from the north, east, and southwest, all outside Israel's borders, but now they came from within.

During Joshua's time and under his leadership, there was a united effort. Initially, God gave Israel victory over each of His enemies in Canaan. He then promised them continued victories over these same enemies – which proved harder. Why?

In times of peace and ease there is the tendency to rely more on ourselves than God. This not only violates the First Commandment, but also causes us to fail in keeping our relationship with God fresh and meaningful.

What happened to Israel physically and spiritually also happens to us, at least spiritually. Israel should have defeated God's enemy, but since they failed, God used these nations to test them (3.1). Satan uses the same types of enemies to lure us back to our sin when we do not resist his constant temptations.

As the story opens in Chapter 4, Israel had enjoyed two generations (40 years) of rest from oppression. But sadly, the grass seemed greener to them in the gods of the land in which they lived. Without the knowledge of who God is and what He had done for their forefathers, they really didn't have the spiritual eyes to see God for who He is and what He can do.

As a result of this blindness, they *again did what was evil the in the sight of the Lord*; and, because He loved them with a jealous love, He disciplined them by selling them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan. Now they were ruled, not by the God who loved them, but by a heathen who oppressed them *cruelly* for 20 years.

Can you imagine what their lives were like?

B. God's Teaching Instrument: War

This was the first generation born in this land, and they had not been taught about God, His might, nor His commandments. After they settled in the land, they became farmers and tradesmen - not warriors. As a result, the instrument He used to teach them who He is was war. In each battle, God demonstrated His trustworthiness and faithfulness. They refused to believe He could be or wanted to be their total sufficiency. The lure of the enemies' gods, what they could physically see, was stronger than their faith – their spiritual eyes were, at best, dim.

Refer to the map on page 45 to see where all of this took place. You will see Jabin's army controlled the coastal plains from Harosheth-Haggoyim in the Kishon river valley. This gave him total domination over a large area, namely, the entire northern part of Israel.

Jabin chose Sisera as leader for his army. He also commanded 900 chariots of iron. 5.8 tells us how once Israel had chosen to follow the “new gods”, the war was on. But there were no shields or spears to be found among 40,000 people. Their society was in such a state of decline, 5.6 says, travelers abandoned the highways and took the roads less traveled so as to avoid being mugged and/or robbed. 5.7 even says the villagers of Israel refused to fight. Not only were they oppressed physically, but mentally as well. They had given up the desire to fight.

What about you? Are you so battle-fatigued you have succumb to your idol?

C. Israel Realized Their Powerlessness and Cried Out... - 4.1-5.31

In 4.3, the Lord heard Israel's cries and responded, but in a way they had not expected.

God had already prepared someone who would speak for Him. How does Scripture describe this person?

4.4 – Name – Deborah

4.4 – Wife of – Lappidoth

4.4 – Occupation – judge, and also a prophetess

4.5 – Location of judging – under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim

4.5 – Purpose of judging - the people brought their complaints for judgment

She was well-respected by the people.



We are not told God “raised up” Deborah in the same way He did every other judge. She was the prophetic voice God chose to speak through. Yes, she was called a judge, though judges traditionally sat at the gate of the city to hear the problem of the people.

In this male-dominated society, and during 20 years of cruel oppression, she was peculiar to this position.

Deborah was not the only one God called a prophetess in the OT. There was also Miriam ([Ex.15.20](#)); Noadiah ([Neh.6.14](#)); Isaiah’s wife ([Is.8.3](#)); Huldah ([2 Kings 22.14](#)); and Anna ([Luke 2.36](#)) (remember, the OT doesn’t end until Jesus’ death and resurrection).

Deborah is often used by liberal interpreters of the Bible to justify having women pastors/elders. This is a terrible Biblical interpretation. This was the most miserable time in Israel’s history as God was trying to develop them into a nation instead of a loose federation. God did not use Deborah to lead Israel into battle, as we shall see. It was the failure of the male leadership (just look at Barak) which demonstrated the true state of Israel. Deborah was the voice God used to respond to the people’s cry, but she was never called a savior or deliverer! Deborah was not trying to usurp the male leadership, but was obeying God’s call of being His voice to move the male leadership into doing what He had earlier told them.

One day, Deborah sent for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-Naphtali (a careful observation of the map will reveal Deborah was near the southern end of the Jordan River and Barak was near the northern part), so he had quite a way to travel to get there. [A distance of approximately 55 miles.]

1. Read through the conversation in [4.4-10](#). What was happening?



Deborah gave Barak God's battle plan. She told him how many men to gather, and where to get them. Even the details of what would happen and what the outcome would be. Did Barak believe her? Did he believe and trust God?

Let's examine Barak for a moment. He must have been a commander or, at the very least, the head of his tribe, because Deborah called for him personally. 4.10 says he sounded the battle cry and the men came. 5.8 tells us ***no shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.*** (Jud.5.8b) How would he fight a cruel oppressor with no weapons?

They might have kept them hidden.

What was Barak's response?

If you will go with me, I will surely go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.

Was that the response of a fearless commander? Support your reasoning from Scripture.

Barak's response was riddled with a lack of faith, or was it? Put yourself in Barak's sandals. How would you have responded?

Could he have been acknowledging he knew he was only the instrument of Yahweh's plan? Whatever he was thinking was in direct contrast to Deborah's faith. He reflected not only what was in his own heart, but in the heart of Israel. She saw the political and economic climate with spiritual eyes. She knew what God was capable of doing, and she knew *He* would do it for them.

Deborah tells Barak, this victory will *not* be for his glory. Because he asked Deborah to go with him, Sisera would fall at the hands of a woman! At the hands of a woman? How would that happen? Imagine what Barak must have been thinking! Think about how that would have affected his status in the community? Yet he obeyed.

Deborah

Respected by the people as judge and used by God as His prophet

Tribe

Ephraim

Territory fought in & for

Northern Israel

What were the idols?

Baals and Asheroth (note the word "again" in 4.1)

Who was the enemy God used?

Canaanites – Jabin and Sisera

How long oppressed and at rest?

20 years oppression

40 years of rest

God would share His glory with *no one*. Not Sisera, not Jabin, not even Barak. He used a woman! And again in a male-dominated society no one could mistake that the glory would go to Yahweh, the ONLY God, our ONLY Warrior.

2. God, through Deborah, gave Barak two commands - “go” and “gather” (meaning to recruit the men and deploy the troops for war). Why did this not happen the first time?

Israel had been seeking their deliverance from the oppression of the idols, who neither heard them nor could help them. Little was known by them about God. Satan, through spiritual warfare, weakened the people of God by distorting the truth about God’s ability to overcome every evil. Therefore, they probably refused to follow Barak, having grown comfortable in their cruel situation.

3. Why then did Barak ask Deborah to go with him?

Deborah was a well-respected prophetess in Israel. Her words to Barak were the confirmation he needed to go ahead with God’s plan. By her accompanying him, he could confirm for the others that God did indeed speak, and they were to be obedient.



Mt. Tabor rises 1600 feet, providing a wide view of an approaching army

THE BATTLE

Just as this whole chapter on Deborah and Barak is a riddle wrapped in an enigma, the battle that took place is just as much of a puzzle.

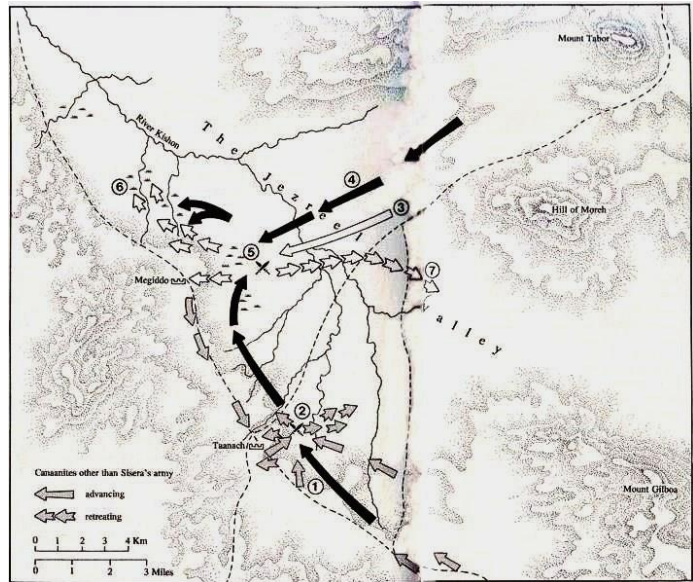
4. Read the description of the battle in [4.13-16](#) and [5.19-22](#).



Sisera received word Barak had gathered his forces at Mt. Tabor. He responded by gathering all his army and 900 chariots of iron from Harosheth-Haggoyim in the Kishon River Valley

Imagine how the battle scene looked: Barak and the Israelites were on foot— 10,000 untrained soldiers. On the other side was Sisera with 900 iron chariots and his professional army.

Now think what must have been running through Barak’s mind: “Look at all of these iron chariots.” These are what we have been oppressed by for the last 20 years. (4.3) What emotion(s) do you think Barak felt?



Why was Barak so willing to go into battle against the very person who had been so cruel to Israel for 20 years, and whose gods Israel had worshipped? What was different?

This time, Barak **knew** the Lord was with him. He took God at His word and believed He was with him. The Lord strengthened the small amount of faith that had been lurking in the back of his heart.

5. Seeing spiritual warfare is like viewing a picture-within-a-picture. Can you find this in [5.19-22](#)?

In [4.15](#), God, Israel’s Warrior, went ahead of them and **routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword**. Write out [5.19](#). Here we discover another detail about what happened on that day - in the physical realm:

*Yes the kings came and they fought
Then fought the kings of Canaan
At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
They got no spoils of silver.*

Now write out [5.20-22](#) and you will see what was also going on in the other picture - in the spiritual realm:

*From heaven the stars fought
From their course they fought against Sisera.
The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!
Then loud beat the horses’ hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.*

This event was not only a battle fought in the spiritual world between God and Satan, but also a time when God taught Barak and Israel about Himself.

Satan disguised himself as the idol Baal, the god of storms. God, however, shows us He is the real God of storms, able to defeat any puny idol, and Satan himself. Barak's name means "lightening." The God of storms works not only behind the scenes, but in and through even His reluctant children.



Satan used the chariots to cause Israel to fear their enemy. By having Barak and Israel confront their fear head-on, God, the Warrior, showed them there was nothing to fear as long as He was with them in the battle, as He is in every battle.

6. Sisera, who had put his trust in his chariots and his gods, now was forced to flee on foot (4.17). He arrived at the tent of Heber the Kenite, and his wife, Jael (a distance of 27 miles from the last battle scene).

Who were the Kenites? The Kenites were not Israelites. They lived on the border and had made peace with Israel's enemies, at least outwardly. They were originally an Arab tribe, very wild, and living by themselves.

Jael's hospitality of inviting Sisera into her tent (4.18-21) would be typical of desert tribesmen. Note the poetic praise sung about her in 5.24-27. What does it show you about how Sisera actually died? He was so tired from fighting and then running 27 miles, he lost sight that his life might be in peril. Because of their truce (4.17) he trusted Jael not only to provide for him, but also to guard and lie for him.

Deborah and Barak's song - Chapter 5

1. To whom did they give the credit for the victory in 5.1-5? Full credit belongs only to the Lord! This is important for the class to understand. God is involved in every battle we face in our lives, working to enable us to be victorious. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rom.8.31b)

What change do you see in Barak's faith in God in these five verses compared to his response to Deborah in 4.6-9?

2. How would you put 5.6-8 in your own words, as it describes the political, economic, and social conditions in Israel?

Life was unsafe for Israel. They feared to travel, and they feared to live. They could not go far from their homes for fear of being killed. They were restricted to their own lands. And, as we will see in the story of Gideon, even their lands were not a safe place.

3. What was the effect on Israel's society as a result of following and worshipping idols? (5.6-8, 14-18)
When the idols Israel worshipped did not deliver them, they sought new ones instead of God (5.8a: *When new gods were chosen*). The different tribes in Israel were following the local gods. In doing this they started separating from each other. So, when Barak asked other tribes for their help, they refused because they were divided over their different religions (gods). They were the same people, but they could not come along side and help those who needed help. Israel was divided in the same way many churches are divided today.

- a. What does this show you about the spiritual condition of the people of Israel even though they had been told God was about to deliver them?

Lawson Younger adds: "The issue of participation is raised in the song with evaluative, theological implications. Those who do not participate in the battle against Sisera are guilty of apathy and of indirect support of the enemies of God (and by implication their gods). The Lord expects his people to participate in the advancement of his kingdom. Noninvolvement because of self-centeredness is unacceptable today as in Deborah/Barak/Jael's time."⁷

- b. What tribes of Israel were asked to help (4.6)?
Naphtali and Zebulun.

- c. To what extent did they help in this battle (5.9, 18)?
They offered themselves willingly and fought with all they had.

- d. How did the other tribes react (5.14-17)? Can you find varying reactions to the conflict among these tribes?

⁷ Lawson Younger, *Judges*, p.162.

4. Compare [4.9](#) with [5.24-27](#). What is the point of this passage – who got the credit for the defeat of Sisera?

It was one thing to defeat the enemy army, but it was most important to chop off its head. Here, the head was defeated by God through Jael. Because of Barak's lack of knowing God well, he did not follow Him at the beginning; therefore, credit for the death of the leader of the opposition army went to Jael even though Barak defeated the rest of the army. Fair or not, this is how God, in His mercy, chose to teach yet another lesson on obedience. From this point forward, Barak displayed more and more faith.

5. What was God telling us by including this poetic lament ([5.28-30](#))?

This passage shows the utter degradation of the people, and why they were God's enemy. Sisera's mother admitted to knowing the type of man her son was. He would plunder anyone and take what was not his. After defeating husbands and fathers, he would rape their women, which shows what Israel was up against with this *cruel* oppression.

6. After reading Chapters 4 & 5, why do you think Barak received a place in God's hall of faith in [Heb.11.32](#)? What faith did he display? [***And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah...***] [See also [1 Sam.12.11](#).]

Barak had only a very rudimentary knowledge of God, but through war he comes to a much fuller knowledge of God personally. His faith might have been small, and it appears to have been challenged by those he tried to lead into battle the first time. But in God's timing and God's planning, God's purpose was accomplished.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

The battle against Sisera did not end the war. Note [4.23-24](#). First, what was God said to have done in this on-going battle?

The battle going on in the Spiritual world was clearly fought and won by God's angelic army, giving God the credit.

[4.24](#) is a picture of our fighting and winning a spiritual war in our lives. God defeated sin. Now it is our responsibility to choose to fight continually in the power of the Spirit against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Israel had to keep fighting against King Jabin, and what men he had left, until this battle was totally over. We must fight the same way against specific sins in our lives. There *can* be a time when we finally and totally defeat a particular sin in our life.

What would have happened if Israel had not finished this battle?

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

What sin is there in your life keeping you from finding your ultimate satisfaction in Him? You probably don't want to write it here, but you know what it is (or, what they are). Unless you make a plan, and begin it right away, it will remain in your life to defeat you. Therefore, what can you plan to do *this week* to begin pressing harder and harder against this sin, remembering you are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to empower you to accomplish this victory, and that you would have a persistent purpose-driven heart?

Suggestions to help you carry out your plan:

1. Write out a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to enable you to reach the goal(s) you set above.
2. Find verses to use and memorize those which speak specifically to the defeat of your individual idols.
3. Keep a journal to help you crystalize your goal, and enable you to track your progress.
4. Ask for prayer support from someone you trust.
5. Ask this trusted friend to hold you accountable.

Use this space to write your battle plan.

Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 105

Q. What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, Atheism, in denying or not having a God; Idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of any thing due to him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of him; bold and curious searching into his secrets; all profaneness, hatred of God; self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of the mind, will, or affections unto other things, and taking them off from him in whole or in part; vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgments, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, carnal security, tempting of God, using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means; carnal delights and joys; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal; lukewarmness, and deadness in the things of God; estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God; praying or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures; all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions; making men the lords of our faith and conscience; slighting and despising God and his commands; resisting and grieving of his Spirit, discontent and impatience at his dispensations, charging him foolishly for the evils he inflicts on us; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idles, ourselves, or any other creature.

One true God,

My disappointments reveal the shrine of idols I carry in my heart.

*When trophy spouses, promising careers, or picture-perfect families fail or are taken away,
my heart's true trust and affection are laid bare.*

Forgive me for all the things I've chased after in place of you.

May the love of Jesus keep my mind, will, and heart fully set on You.

*Amen.*⁸

⁸Philip F. Reinders. *Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible through the Year*. Baker, p.581.

Lesson 5

“Gideon, You Can Trust Me”

Judges 6-7

The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. Ps 145:13b

I. Preparation for Battle

1. Describe what you know about the character of Gideon in one or two words.

2. What strengths and weaknesses did he have?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

As we learned in Lesson 4, God used war to teach His children about Himself and His ways.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
Whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.
Hosea 14.9 (ESV)

If you want to live well,
make sure you understand all of this.
If you know what's good for you,
you'll learn this inside and out.
God's paths get you where you want to go.
Right-living people walk them easily;
Wrong-living people are always tripping and
stumbling.
Hosea 14.9 (The Message)

We learn in [6.1](#), Israel did not obey the Lord, and He gave them into the hand of Midian for seven years. What were their lives like during those seven years? And, who were these people God was using to teach His children? What did the Lord want Israel to learn about Him and His ways?

God, as Israel's Father, wanted to teach them He was their all-sufficient One. When our children are young we teach them there are boundaries where danger lurks. We tell them, No! But, they do it anyway - again and again. They try to stretch the boundaries until we intercede and show them why their choice was not the best. We do this because of our love for them and not to punish. We don't set them up to fail. We put situations in front of them so they learn we can be trusted. James tells us we grow by God's testing us ([James 1.2-4](#)). [Heb. 12.5b-6](#): ***"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines [trains and tests] the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he received."*** We would want for nothing if we just depended on Him alone. ***For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*** ([Psm.107.9](#))

Read [Judges 6.1-10](#).

Life was not pleasant for the tribe of Manasseh. [6.3](#) tells us: ***For whenever the Israelites planted crops [twice a year], the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the East would come up against them.***

These people weren't afraid of Israel or their God. They took their crops and livestock, yet, they didn't take their cities.

Read [6.3-6](#), and describe how their lives looked.

They would bring their tents, livestock and families and plunder Israel. They took all their crops and livestock. And, instead of standing up against the desert marauders, Israel retreated into the mountains and lived in caves.

This plundering took place every year when the crops had been planted, and every time they would invade the land from the east, cross the Jordan, hit the crops in the plain of Jezreel, and sweep southwest as far as Gaza in the Philistine territory.

List some of what you would have felt after your food was stolen on the first raid, then the second, and then the seventh year! What would have been the difference from the first to the seventh year?

After a long time, you lose heart and give up. You lose the will to fight back. You also become afraid to say anything, lest a "friend" turn you in to the enemy.

Would you have been one of those so fearful you would have given up your home, livelihood, and everything you have as a “normal” life, and retreated to the dens and caves in the mountains?

In the previous events in Judges, we were shown how Israel sought their satisfaction from the gods of the land. In this account, we are not told this up front. However, after hearing God speak through His prophet, and then speaking Himself, it became evident Israel had not learned its lesson.

In 6.2, Scripture tells us the Midianites overpowered the Israelites. In Ex.2.21, we see Israel had a history with them. What famous Israelite was married to a Midianite?

Moses, who spent 40 years living among the Midianites. See Ex.18 to see how helpful Moses’ father-in-law was to the way Moses would lead Israel for 40 years.

Read Num.31. What took place in this chapter that would be of significance to Israel in Judges 6?

God had already defeated the Midianites just one generation ago, right before Joshua took over from Moses. Yet they did not know what God had done for them, and here we find them in bondage to a defeated enemy. The Midianites did a better job passing down to the next generation their history with Israel than the Israelites did.

The Amalekites were also distant relatives of Israel. They descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother. They lived south of Israel in what is known as the Negev. Throughout their history, they were a thorn in Israel’s side. They blocked them from passing during the Exodus (Ex.17.6-16), and they defeated Israel when they tried to defy God by entering the Promised Land after Israel rejected Joshua and Caleb’s report on the land (Num.14.39-45). They have appeared twice already in this book: first when they formed part of the coalition with Eglon (3.12-14); and second, when they fought against Deborah and Barak (5.14). It was during his fight against the Amalekites Saul lost his right to be king (1 Sam.15). They were a persistent pain throughout David’s reign. Hezekiah finally destroyed them several hundred years later (1 Chron.4.40-43).

6.1 tells us they were given into the hand of Midian for seven years. 6.6 tells us Israel was brought very low because of Midian. But does Israel understand why?

They are about to find out...

After being at this low point, 6.7 says they finally turned back to the Lord and cried out for deliverance. *But*, instead of a deliverer, God, in His mercy, first sent them a prophet so they would know why God had given them over to oppression seven years earlier. It took Israel all this time to realize these gods could never satisfy or deliver them from anything. They feared these gods were angry at them, and they spent seven years trying to appease them.

Notice how the prophet refers to God when he delivers His message (6.8). He refers to God as **the LORD** (Yahweh), **the God** (Elohim) - their God and Creator. This is significant because God didn’t offer Israel deliverance or relief; instead, in His wisdom, He offers them understanding.

What did God teach them about Himself by doing this?

His kindness and personal guidance in their lives. It shows the magnificent role His Word plays in our lives. (Heb.4.12-13) **God means what he says and what he says goes. His powerful Word is as sharp as a surgeon’s scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one is impervious to God’s Word. We can’t get away from it – no matter what.** (The Message)

Gideon's Call – Chapter 6

God doesn't call those who are qualified, He equips those He calls.

1. In 6.6, Israel was in such bad straights they finally called out to God for help. So far, we have seen similarities and differences in how God responded to the cries of help from His people. Read through each of the sections quickly, listing how God responded.

3.7-11 – After they cried out, God raised up a deliverer to save them. He also gave Othniel His Spirit.

3.12-30 – Here in 6.15, He does the same thing.

4-5 – Because of the crying out to God in 6.3, He used a prophetess, Deborah, to aid the real deliverer, Barak.

In 6.6-10, what did God do? And why?

He again raised up a prophet, but this time it was to make clear to Israel it was their sin that brought this devastation on them. It was their fault, not God's!

2. Do you think every individual in Israel was guilty of this sin? Why would this be important?

Not every Israelite was a believer. There were the true believers (later referred to as the “remnant”), and then there was the rest of Israel. However, when God gave them into the hand of their enemy, the believers suffered along with the rest of the people.

What part does the individual believer play in either restoring a nation, or keeping it from falling?

In later Scripture, we learn God spared Israel for the sake of the “remnant.” Read 2 Chron. 7.14 to see what God expects His people to do.

What effect does the church today have on the condition of the nation it is in?

During the Reformation, when the church was faithful, Europe was strong. In the 19th century, the church in England was faithful, and the nation was strong. During the 20th century, the church in America was faithful, and the nation was strong. Today in Europe the church is weak and so is the continent; the church in England is in terrible shape, and so is the condition of the nation. If there is time, today in America...

Can you think of an example today, in America, which shows how the church is falling into the same trap as Europe and England in not leading the direction of the nation?

What is the position of many in the church on gay marriage and the rights of homosexuals?

Gideon
Tribe Manasseh
Territory fought for & in From Manasseh to east of the Jordan
What were the idols? Baal & Asherah
Who was the enemy God used? Midianites & Amalekites
How long oppressed? 7 years
The Land had rest for: 40 years

3. Once the prophet gave Israel a report on the “state of the nation,” they could understand why they were being disciplined by the oppression of the Midianites. Then the Lord reached out to His appointed deliverer - personally. Why? Before Gideon, all the deliverers were military men already gifted by God for the job. We aren’t told *how* God called the previous judges, but God knew Gideon needed a face-to-face meeting. What He was calling Gideon to do would not be easy.
4. Before the Angel “appears” to Gideon, He sits under a tree watching him. What would He have observed?

Gideon was working in a place that should not have been used to thrash wheat, making it a much harder job than it should have been. If the situation were different, he would have been at the mill instead! The Angel might have even heard Gideon feeling sorry for himself.

5. Read [6.12](#). The Angel now appeared to Gideon and addresses him personally. How would you have reacted to an angel addressing YOU this way?
6. The Angel said: ***The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.*** What was the Angel challenging in Gideon’s mind?

The prophet told Israel they were plagued by national sin. Now the Lord faces Gideon. From the beginning, God was working in Gideon to strengthen this timid man. He wanted Gideon to learn to trust Him in everything He wanted him to do.

7. What does Gideon’s answer to the Angel reveal about his heart attitude in [6.13](#)? God reminded Gideon what He had done for Israel in the past. Yet Gideon still protested: ***Please sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us, and given us into the hand of Midian.***

Gideon was only looking at the earthly circumstances, but now the Angel of the Lord was asking him to see with his “spiritual eyes.” Gideon was given the promise of His presence with him – an equipping promise.

8. What was the promise made to Israel throughout their history, and who was affected by it?

Genesis 28.15 – [Jacob](#)

The promise – ***Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.***

Genesis 46.4 – [Jacob](#)

The promise - ***“...I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again...”***

Exodus 3.12 – [Moses](#)

The promise - ***He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”***

Deuteronomy 20.1 – Moses

The promise - *“When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt...”*

Joshua 1.5 – Joshua

The promise - *No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.*

Psalms 23.4 – David

The promise - *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Isaiah 41.10 – Israel

The promise - *“...fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

Isaiah 43.2,5 – Israel

The promise - *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you...Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you.*

Matthew 28.20 – Believers

The promise - *“...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Acts 18.9-10 – Paul

The promise - *“...Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”*



The purpose of beating the wheat was to have the chaff blow away. This was best done where the wind can get to it, not in a winepress.

To this point, Gideon has not exhibited any leadership or charismatic traits. He described himself, saying, “I am from *the weakest clan in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.*” (6.15) The Angel, however, addressed him as, *O mighty man of valor.* (6.12) Because God designed each of the purposes of our lives, He sees us as who we *will* be, while also being mindful of who we are.

9. In Judges 2.10, we are told the generation following Joshua ignored God, and the works He had done for Israel. But what does 6.13 tell us about Gideon’s upbringing.

Gideon knew what the prophet said in 6.8-10. The fact that Gideon was questioning God at all, shows God was at work in his heart to deepen his relationship with Him.

10. From 6.1, what can you learn about the leadership ability of this man who God called to be Israel's fifth judge?

a. Did he understand why he and his people suffered (6.13)?

No, he was emotionally struggling with the situation he lived in. He saw his people suffering, and instead of blaming or owning their sin, they blamed God. God had promised to be with His people, but as they looked at their circumstances, they could not see His presence.

b. Was he confident of his leadership ability (6.15)?

No. Here again was a problem of perception rooted in the heart, which also made it a spiritual problem. Gideon had not learned to trust God; therefore, he only looked at himself in a negative way. The Angel saw him for what He would make him into. The Angel was basically telling Gideon, "Gideon, I want you to learn to trust Me, and I will make you into that mighty man of valor."

c. Was Gideon a man of courage against public opinion (6.27)?

11. Let's examine who this Angel of the LORD was who appeared to Gideon.

a. What was He called in 6.14a?

The word **LORD** here is YHWH – the name God used to identify Himself to Moses and the people of Israel in Egypt. By this name, He is known as the God of the Covenant.

b. Who was this "I" who sent Gideon out (6.14b)? And, by what authority did He do this?

This Angel was now saying *He* was the one who was sending Gideon. Although **angel** means messenger, this Angel was not working under someone else's authority. He was commanding Gideon to go by His own authority.

c. How does Gideon address the Angel in 6.15?

Gideon referred to this Angel by the term **Lord** – Adoni, whereas the rest of the text refers to the Angel as **LORD** – YHWH – Jehovah. This was a common term used as a term of respect, and for one's master. It was also used of a deity.

d. Did 6.17 indicate Gideon knew to Whom he spoke?

Gideon was genuinely perplexed and needed clarity. God was not supposed to be visible to anyone. How could this Angel be God and yet Gideon is able to see Him?

e. What did Gideon hope to learn by asking for a sign (6.17)?

The Angel told Gideon He would be with him, but Gideon needed to know He had the power and authority to ensure victory. He wanted confirmation the Angel he talked to was indeed the Angel of the Lord he had heard about throughout Israel's history, and that He had not forsaken them.

f. What was the Angel of the Lord doing in [6.19-21](#)?

Gideon offered a present (the same word used for offering) to this Angel. If He was not God, Gideon was practicing idolatry. However, by His action, the Angel had His own way of giving Gideon the sign he asked for by accepting the offering, indicating He was indeed God. [See a similar story in [Judges 13](#).]

g. From [6.22](#) forward, did Gideon know for sure who this Angel of the Lord was?

In this verse he refers to the Angel by both terms – Adoni, and YHWH – my master and my Covenant-keeping God.

Why was he frightened? ([6.23](#)) (See [Ex.33.20](#).)

Israel knew no one could see God's face and live. ([Ex.33.20](#): *You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*) The Angel consoles him by telling him he will not die. ([6.23](#))

What was the result of this face-to-face meeting?

God (with whom Gideon was in a covenant relationship) was deepening this relationship from one he knew about to one he was in a face-to-face, intimate relationship. ([Job 42.5](#)) It is clear his fear subsided as he referred to God as Peace. ([Rom.5.1](#))

12. In Gideon's first assignment, what did God have Gideon do to help him get over his low self-image and his fear of men?

He no longer feared God in the same way he did before, but he still had his same fear of men. God built Gideon's trust in Him by having him confront this fear head-on by giving him a task which would involve direct confrontation between him, his father, and the men of the town.

13. Gideon's work as Judge of Israel began with his own house ([6.25-27](#)). Here he proved he trusted God enough to complete this first assignment; and though he was found out ([6.29](#)), his father successfully mediated for him ([6.30-31](#)).

How do you reconcile what happened in [6.13](#) with the fact Gideon's father was the priest of these idols and then defended his son?

This shows you how low Israel had sunk. They wanted the "best" of both worlds, but God would have none of it. It went back to what Joshua told them in [Josh.24.15](#): *...choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* God wanted Gideon to know that He would not accept a divided heart. They were to have no other gods before Him.

14. What does the attitude of [6.30](#) show you about how Israel connected their misery ([6.7](#)) with their sins?

They built their own gods with their own hands out of material God created. They then sought to find their satisfaction in these pieces of wood, and even expected them to help make their lives better. But, when their gods were threatened, the people knew their gods needed them to defend them. What a horrible disconnect with the reality of knowing a God Who desires His people to find their ultimate satisfaction and joy in Him, and Who doesn't need us to defend Him.

15. Jesus appeared to Gideon in the form of the Angel; God spoke directly to him as He had the prophets - and now God the Spirit enters the picture to empower this weak man to do what he could only do under the control of the Spirit. As God's Spirit came on (or *clothed*) Gideon (6.34), what was the first result? (6.35)

His own family, who we just saw was about to put Gideon to death, were now willing to follow Gideon since their gods were incapable of getting revenge on Gideon. Several of the tribes responded to his call to gather together and fight this plague.

16. Before his first battle, Gideon's trust in God was still in doubt, so he double-tested God with a wool fleece (6.36-40). What was this test about? (6.36)

Gideon had heard about what God had done for His people in the past; but because of his immature faith, he did not feel confident enough to trust God immediately. God had more to teach Gideon, and Gideon had more to learn about God.

What does this show us about Gideon and his relationship with God?

He had met God, but his trust in God was still developing. Gideon was human. The first time he tested God, he concluded that perhaps his request was answered by natural causes, so he asked again.

Why did God go along with this?

God was teaching His son to trust Him and His ways. God, in all His grace, did for Gideon what He knew he needed. Gideon was never disciplined for doing this, nor did God say even one word against what he did.

17. What are some of the lessons we can learn from the situation described in 25-40?

Give the class time to look over this section and find the applications. Be careful not to let them go too far afield and come up with things never intended from the passage.

Gideon's Victory – Chapter 7

1. The separating of the volunteers in 1-8 is fascinating, and there are so many lessons to learn from this process.

What do *you* learn about Israel?

What do you learn about God?

What did the method of drinking water have to do with who should or should not fight?

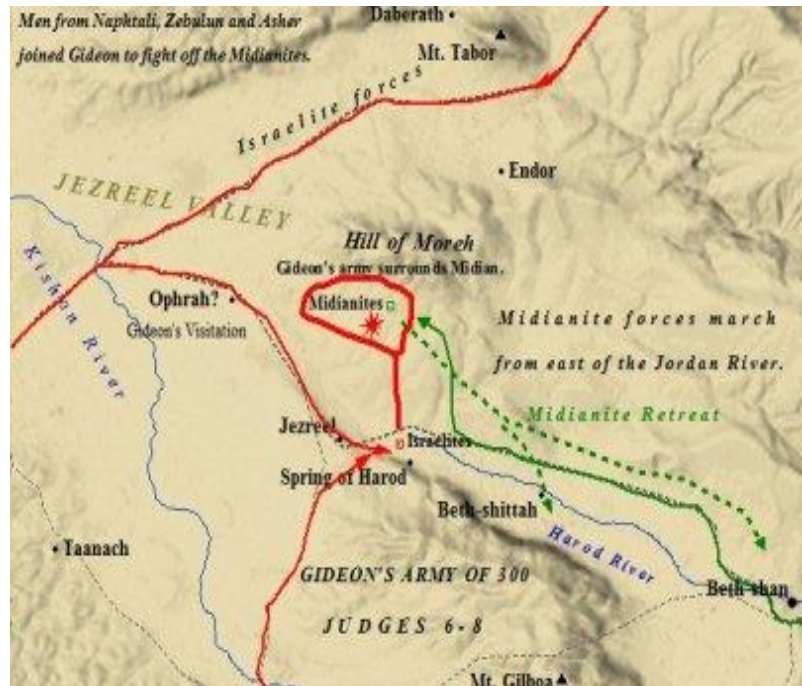
Of the 10,000 remaining soldiers, fewer would have lapped like a dog. God said He did not want a large army, so He does this to ensure they would not get the credit for the victory. God alone was to receive the glory. And it was God who wanted Israel to know who He is and what He would do compared to the idols they were trusting.

2. In two steps, God trimmed the fighting force from some 32,000 to 300 men. (7.2-7) Why? 300 men were *more* than enough for God. But 32,000 would learn more about who God is and what He was capable of doing.

3. What did God promise to do in 7.7? He promised to save Israel from their situation. Remind the class what God said back in 3.1-2. He wanted to teach each generation who He is because the parents continually failed to teach their children as God required in Deut.6.4.

What was different in the relationship between God and Gideon compared to what we saw in 6.36-40? Before, Gideon tested God to make sure he knew he could trust Him. In this chapter, Gideon needed no fleece when God told him to do something difficult. God was bringing Gideon along in deepening His relationship with Himself.

4. In 7.9, did God give the enemy into Gideon's hands? In God's eyes, this was a done deal. There was no question He would deliver them because He was determined each generation should know Him intimately and personally.

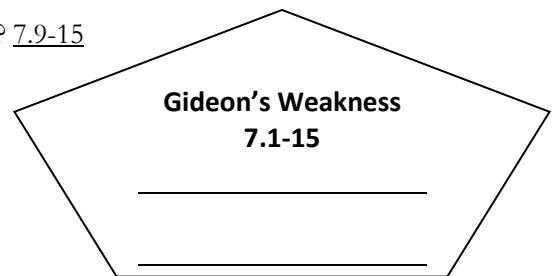


5. Let's recap what has taken place so far:
- Gideon raised an army of 32,000 untrained men.
 - God didn't want Israel to take the credit for the victory, so He sent 22,000 fearful men home.
 - There remained 10,000 brave men, but God said again there were too many.
 - God chose only 300 to fight an overwhelming army.

- e. As Gideon watched his army dwindle, fear returned.
- f. God did not want Gideon or Israel to put their trust in their numbers.

How would *you* feel - especially if your weaknesses included struggling with the fear of man and low self-esteem? Would you do it as commanded even though you were afraid? Or, would you allow your fear to paralyze you?

6. How does God show His compassion for Gideon's fear? 7.9-15
 Notice how God was way ahead of Gideon in giving a dream to this soldier. Now He encouraged Gideon to take along his servant and approach the enemy camp – so close he could overhear them talking. God took them to the exact place where these two men were talking about the dream God had given one of them.



What did Gideon learn about God through this event?
 God displayed His sovereignty over every event that has happened to Gideon to this point. He was showing Gideon He is in complete control over every movement. God graciously told him his hand would be strengthened by what he heard. (9.11)

7. 7.9-15 reveals some interesting information about God, and also something about Gideon. What does it teach us about God?
 The beauty of what we see here is how God already knew Gideon's heart. He told Gideon to go to the enemies' camp. There Gideon saw the vastness of the enemy army, which would not have strengthened his faith. But God gave the dream to the enemy soldier in order for Gideon to hear and believe this was going to happen just as God said. This loving God was continuing to teach His son.

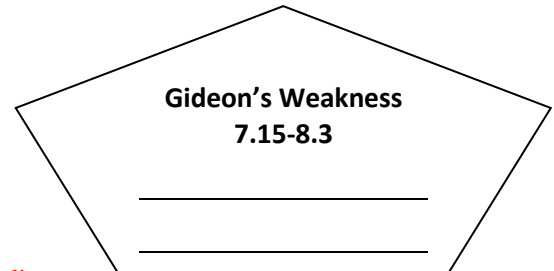
God set out to make Gideon into a mighty man of valor. He has taken him through several levels of trust-building. What did this final lesson before the battle produce in Gideon's relationship with God? 7.15
 Imagine standing there listening to the dream and interpretation. In some way, not clearly stated, Gideon burst out in worship to God.



This overwhelming response of worship reinforced Gideon's trust in God and gave him the confidence he needed to return to his tiny army and lead them, believing they were about to defeat the enemy.

8. Perhaps the most amazing battle in all of Judges took place in 7.16-25. How, actually, did the enemy perish?

The enemy (probably the three different nations) began to fight and kill each other.



What did Israel's efforts actually amount to?

They did little more than frighten the enemy while they were sleeping. They might not have been great in number, but surrounding the enemy with this much noise caused them to panic and turn their swords against each other.

What was God teaching Gideon and Israel in the way He chose to defeat His enemies?

There would be no question after this the victory was His. God wanted there to be no doubt in the minds of His people who had really accomplished this victory.

How did Gideon know how to 'fight' this battle?

The Angel told Gideon he was a *mighty man of valor* in 6.12. In 6.34, we are told *the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon*. Looking at his battle strategy from a human viewpoint, this strategy would seem ridiculous. Gideon was led to do everything by the Spirit of God.

9. In 7.23, what did Gideon do?

As the enemy began to flee, Gideon called out the other tribes to join in the pursuit.

Was this right? Considering the success of the 300 in 7.19-22, couldn't this have been completed without the aid of the other tribes?

The enemy (all three nations) began to scatter. This would have been too much for Gideon's 300 to pursue alone, so he made a command decision to strategically get the other tribes to help. God told Gideon he would succeed; He never told him how to handle the battle after the initial work of the 300.

10. What did one of the summoned tribes, Ephraim, accomplish in 7.24-25?

They captured and killed two of the Midianite princes.

11. What was the underlying feeling in the complaint of Ephraim in 8.1?

They had been left out when the fighting first started. They were prideful. They basically challenged Gideon by saying: "How dare you leave us out of this war?"

12. What was Gideon's answer (8.2-3), and what does it show about him?

He now had to become the great diplomat. His answer is gentle and does not try to put them in their real place. Nor does he tell them to quit complaining as this was the Lord's choice and not his.

Should his answer have been any different? Explain.

Perhaps he should have explained this as the Lord's direction to him, but then they might have been more indignant to think the Lord only spoke to him.

What was the REAL reason for Gideon's not summoning the Ephraimites to come (7.7)?

It was Gideon's responsibility to win by God's leading and empowering. God wanted the victory to go to this unknown man from an obscure family, in order to show His greatness. If Ephraim really wanted the credit, they should have gotten involved during the seven years this mess was going on. Where were they then?

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

For the nation of Israel, idols were pieces of wood. For Gideon, and us today, our idols are not necessarily made out of wood, but are things such as how we see ourselves. How would you describe Gideon's idol in 6.15?

How did God begin to show Gideon the idol's power over him in 6.14 and 16?

Gideon probably feared retribution from the idol as well as the people.

Was Gideon's fear of the consequences of his action an idol in 6.25-27?

What was the difference between the two accounts?

God had made it clear He would be the One Who would bring about His desired outcome, and He would do it through Gideon. In the second account, we see Gideon trusting God for the first time, even though he still feared both what his father, as well as the town's people, would do.

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

When you are so overcome with fear, you worship yourself, as Gideon did when he tried to do everything he could to protect himself.

Lou Priolo defines sinful fear this way: “Fear is sinful when it is rooted in the loss of some cherished idolatrous desire. (John 12.42-43)”⁹

Those who seek their satisfaction in money	typically fear poverty
Those who seek their satisfaction in approval	typically fear rejection and conflict
Those who seek their satisfaction in control	typically fear losing control
Those who seek their satisfaction in intimacy	typically fear loneliness
Those who seek their satisfaction in pleasure	typically fear boredom
Those who seek their satisfaction in themselves	typically fear losing their identity ¹⁰

Which of these idols do you see evidence of in your own heart?

Identify what you are most afraid of?

Why are you so afraid of losing it?

Are you using that fear to keep you from accomplishing what God has called you to do?

Sinful fear is not trusting God for anything and everything. It is that battle for our heart that takes us either to God or away from Him. It is our being satisfied with or dissatisfied with Him.

There is no quick fix to dealing with the idols you have battling for your heart. However, **...you are from God and have overcome them** [your idols], **for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world....There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.** (1 John 4.4,18) God has given you the Holy Spirit, and it is He Who will fight for you. Seeking to find your satisfaction in God alone means fighting a constant battle against many different idols. Each one must be defeated, sometimes over and over. Therefore, you overcome fear by trusting in God despite your fear, which results in finding the satisfaction

⁹ Lou Priolo, *Fear: Breaking its Grip*. P&R Publishing, 2009, p.12.

¹⁰ This list is a paraphrase of Priolo, p.12.

you crave in God. You face that fear knowing you have a God Who loves you, and He is the One Who will help you fight.

Over this next week, keep track (preferably in a diary) of what idols you discover in your life. Commit yourself to pray for forgiveness for seeking to put that idol in God's place. Then develop a habit of prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to make you aware each time that idol rears its ugly head.

Second, begin a study of Bible passages containing words like "fear" and "peace" (especially the peace that comes from God). Meditate on these passages, memorize them, and then use them each time you are confronted by that idol that wants to take control of your heart again. The Holy Spirit is always there, empowering you to resist the devil, who will then flee from you.

Lesson 6

THE BATTLE FOR SATISFACTION CONTINUES TO THE END

Weakness Becomes Strength Becomes Weakness It's Tough to End Well

Judges 8

I. Preparing for Battle

Try to recall a time in your life when you felt weak and insignificant. Then something happened, causing you to feel important and needed. What happened after that? Did you remain strong, or did the change take you back to how you felt about yourself before?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

Insights from Gideon's Judgeship – Chapter 8

The Gideon we read about in Chapters 6-7 seemed to change during the latter part of Chapter 7 and especially in Chapter 8. As we continue to examine the relationship between God and Gideon, we will learn what turned him back to idol worship. There is a lesson here for us today.

1. What was the condition of Gideon's army in 8.4, and why is this significant to the story?

His men were exhausted and needed rest. Instead, Gideon pushed them to keep on tracking down the enemy. The enemy's army was resting (8.10-11). Gideon was driven at this point and nothing was going to stop him from getting *his* victory.

2. The response of the men of Succoth was very different from that of Ephraim (4-6). Why did the men of Succoth and Penuel refuse to help Gideon (5-8)?

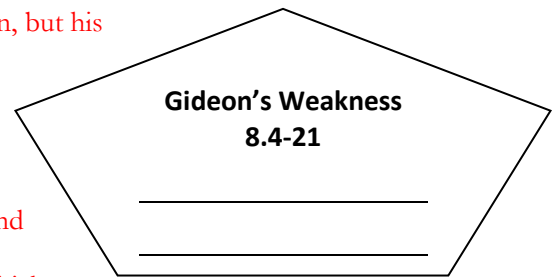
While we don't know the whole story, we can assume these men, who lived on the east side of the Jordan, may have been victims of Midianite invasions as well. In either case, they appeared to have feared the return of the Midianite kings, who still had an army of 15,000 compared to Gideon's 300, and who might take vengeance on them if they gave aid to Gideon.

What does this show about Gideon's leadership?

Gideon has made a name for himself on the west side of the Jordan, but his influence did not extend very far beyond his home area.

3. What would Gideon's angry threats show you about the man Gideon was becoming? (8.7-9)

In Ch.6 we saw a man afraid for his life. But the Lord stepped in and began to transform him into the man of valor we saw in Ch.7. However, in this chapter, we don't see that same man. After the initial battle he was no longer the fearful Gideon, but a vengeful Gideon. He did not tolerate anyone standing between him and his victory. God's victory had already taken place when He drove the Midianites out. Gideon's army was exhausted and very hungry. Thinking rationally was not done well under these conditions.



4. How did the majority of the 120,000 die in v10? Read 7.21-22.

Make sure they see the words: ***the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.*** This battle was the Lord's - not Gideon's! God was teaching Israel, again, how He was to be their total satisfaction in life and not the gods of the peoples around them.

5. Read 8.3,7,19,23. These are the only references to God, or the Lord, in this chapter. Read them carefully. What do you think was Gideon's spiritual state at this time?

Here do we not see Gideon showing any dependence on God. It seems quite the opposite! Gideon had lost sight of his calling and was now venturing out on his own using God's name glibly, much like most Christians do when they say "The Lord bless you," or, "The Lord led me..." when we really are not sure He did.

6. What did the actions of 8.14-17 actually accomplish?

In Chs.6-7, God was clearly in charge. Here Gideon is exacting vengeance on his own people who had the same fear of the Midianites he showed in Ch.6. Nowhere are we told the Lord sent him on this expedition, nor do we have any word he sought the Lord on how to handle these brothers who didn't help him. Could this be the actions of an exhausted general not making the best decisions?

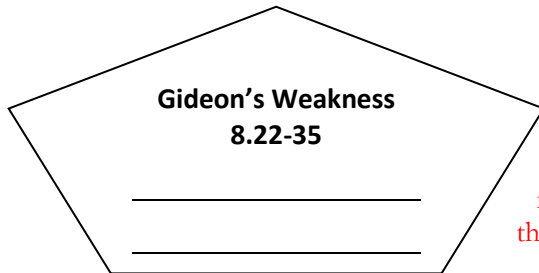
7. The killing of these kings (8.18-21) was based upon what (8.19)?

This gives us the real key to Gideon's motives – revenge. Now that Gideon had seen his abilities in leading men, he took full advantage of it beyond what God called upon him to do.

What does this say about Gideon?

From here on, we see no sign of Gideon truly following the Lord or seeking His guidance. The God Who made him into a mighty man of valor and won His victory through Gideon has now been ignored. We will look at his statement in 8.23 below.

8. Gideon's oldest son, Jether, was old enough to be among the 300. He may have still been young, but he had now experienced the horror of war. Now he was called on to perform what he knew was not an act of war, but revenge in 8.20. Jether displayed the same level of timidity as did his father in the beginning of the story. Gideon had forgotten from whence he came!



1. The testing that came to Gideon in 8.22 seems to have been resisted in 8.23. With what you now know about Gideon, do you think he resisted the call of the people to lead them?

He may have resisted their plea for him to be king, but from what follows, he doesn't seem to be totally resisting the idea of still being their leader in some capacity.

Do you see a lack of vision in the people's request of 8.22?

They just defeated another nation led by a king. Every nation they knew had a king. They wanted one too! They just could not see how God's desire for them was to make them a great nation under His leadership. They could see only what was around them. They failed to think through what God had just accomplished for them and through them!

If so, would YOU have made the same request as Gideon?

If we lived in that day and age, we might have made the exact same request. It is easy to point fingers at them for being blind, but is it so different for us today? Who do we truly believe runs this country? Do we worry about what Washington is doing, or do we rather pray *Thy will be done*?

2. After reading 8.24, why do you think Gideon turned down the offer to be a king? Or did he? Davis states: "The context, after all, does contain some evidence of royal status: He collected the portion of the spoils from his men (enough to make him rich), Gideon's role as a religious innovator (8.24-27), his keeping a sizable harem (8.30), naming his concubine's son "My father is king" (Abimelech, 8.31), and Abimelech's propaganda that rule would surely pass to or continue in Gideon's family (9:1-5)."¹¹

Gideon might have turned down the offer to be king, but it doesn't appear he turned down the opportunity to rule in the same type of capacity kings ruled. The following paragraph shows some of this evidence.

3. What did Gideon do with the spoils of battle given to him? (8.26-27)

He collected about 75 pounds of gold his army voluntarily gave to him, including the heavy objects which hung around the necks of the enemy camels, crescent ornaments, pendants, and the royal robes of the kings. He returned home a very rich man. He then took the gold and fashioned it into an ephod.

¹¹Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*, p.112.

What was an ephod? (Read [Ex.28.6-30.](#))

This was part of the garments worn by Israel's high priest (located at this time in Shiloh). It was made up of precious stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel, and worn over the heart of the high priest. Inside the ephod was kept the urim and thummim used by the priest to discern the will of God for Israel.



Why did Gideon make this ephod?

While we will never know for sure, we do see the continued downward spiral of this man of faith. In Ch.6, God had Gideon tear down his father's idols, and then he made one of his own, which took Israel down with him. He may have been thinking something good at first, but the text is clear: this ephod took them away from finding their true satisfaction in God alone.

What was the result of having this ephod? See also [Jud.2.3.](#)

It became a snare. [2.3](#) says, ***So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.***

This ephod/idol dragged Gideon down as well as his family and the rest of Israel. He once tore down his father's idol, as God commanded, but now he sets one up. Gideon once heard God speak to him, and now he thinks God will continue to work through him. But He didn't. Gideon once saw himself as being from the smallest and least important tribe, but now he had a taste of fame and notoriety. He learned to enjoy it, and lusted to keep it going. He was ensnared by his lust for power and fame, neither of which he had when he started. He stopped seeking his satisfaction in God, Who had made him what he'd become, and now sought to fulfill his own desires. Read [James 1.12-15](#) to see the first enemy we all battle against.

Spiritual warfare is a battle every one of us faces daily. Read [1 Cor. 10.18-22](#) and [Eph.6.12](#). What other enemy(s) was Israel battling with this idol of the ephod?

We battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. In these passages, demons are constantly enticing us to find our satisfaction in anything but God. We cannot escape this on-going battle. Therefore, we need always to be wearing the full armor of God.

At this point, ask the class what snares there are in their lives causing them to find the satisfaction in something other than God, and what they think they are battling – the world, the flesh, or the devil.

4. What else do we learn about Gideon in [8.29-31](#)?

This section continues to show Gideon's inner desire to be a ruler (perhaps without all the work involved). He is now rich enough to have his own harem. We know his firstborn was still a young man in [7.20](#), so these many wives and children would have come along only after he moved away from following the Lord. Also, consider this: if he had 70 sons (plus one by a concubine, who lived in a different city), how many children did he have in all if you could count his daughters?

5. After the relationship we saw develop between Gideon and God in Chapter 6, does the conclusion of this story surprise you, and why? (See 8.33-35.)

Gideon did a major turn away from the Lord with what became an idol. This turned his family away also. We saw this same pattern in Gideon's early life. There we were told his father taught him the things of the Lord, and yet his father had idols.

Then, we are also told Gideon's idol turned Israel away. They may have tried to justify this by saying it represented the priest who would seek answers from God. (After all, Gideon did talk to God directly in Ch.6.) But 8.27 & 33 clearly shows the unconverted heart of the majority of Israel returning back to where it started in this story.

If not a surprise, this idolatry should at least be noticed as Gideon, and all Israel, continued its gradual slide away from God. They just could not believe He could satisfy their every need!

6. How easy it is to forget important events over a 40 year period. All of us forget over time. Remember how we all felt about world events after 9/11? It drove many people to attend church for the first time. But how do we feel now? Just as deeply convicted? Probably not! Forty years after 9/11, we will probably feel as numb to the event as we do about Pearl Harbor. Forty years is an entire generation. If people are not taught about God in their early years, it is unlikely they will remember anything more than a faint name for God in later years.¹²
7. **The land had rest.** It is important to note, this is the last time Israel would enjoy rest in this book. After this failure, and their constant return to idol worship, God no longer gave them this kind of peace from strife. Either He would be their satisfaction in all of life, or He would allow them to go on searching in vain for it. The downward spiral continued, with no hope of peace.
8. Would you say Gideon shares the blame for what happened in 8.35? Why?
Gideon had been discredited, his image tarnished. What he once found satisfying about God ceased to be true. Let the class play around with this for a short time.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

Gideon's Weakness Became His Strength Which Became His Weakness.

The story opened with Gideon being a fearful man - as the least important in the weakest of the tribes. But God knew who He would make him into. God built Gideon's faith into a personal relationship. God accomplished His purpose in and through Gideon - finding his satisfaction in God alone. But, after conversing face to face with God and being enabled to deliver Israel, Gideon found himself no longer hearing the voice of His Lord. Instead, he began to depend more and more on himself, causing his downward slide. He erected an ephod for the purpose of being in contact with God in the same way as the High Priest of Israel. His father was the priest of their local idol; now Gideon repeats history, by making and using the

¹²For more on this, we would encourage your Christian education folk to read George Barna's *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. Regal, 2003. There is also a DVD study available from Regal.

ephod, which became an idol and a snare for all Israel. By making and using the ephod, he was snubbing God's Aaronic priesthood and making himself a priest outside the Levitical family.

Snare: A snare is a device used to capture animals. The word is used here as a metaphor relating the capture of a person's heart, mind, and will. It represents spiritual warfare, as Satan's demons lure us away from finding our ultimate satisfaction in God and drawing us into finding satisfaction in anything else. The world, the flesh, and the devil all ensnare us. Every one of us has our own personal snare.

What snares are there in your life, which keep you from enjoying and being content in your life with God, and what He has *currently* given you? (See [Psm.139.23](#).)

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

The end of Gideon's story finds the people of Israel being ensnared by the ephod (idol) erected by their respected leader. [8.27](#) says they were so ensnared by it, they "whored after it."

When we select people to "rule" over us, even good ones filled with the Holy Spirit, what are our expectations of them? Are they expectations that will simply make us more comfortable in life, or are they expectations of what God wants to accomplish in and through them? And, more importantly, do we pray for them? If you do pray for them, what do you ask for?

Here is your call to commitment: Will you agree to begin to pray *regularly* for those in positions of authority over you on all levels? This would start at home first, then with the elders of your church, and finally move to local, state, and national levels. What can you specifically pray for?

1. Faithfulness/obedience to God's will in their lives, decisions, and votes
2. Faithfulness/obedience in seeking God in all their decisions
3. Faithfulness/obedience in leading their families, so that their next generation will follow in the ways of the Lord as they saw it lived out in their parents' lives

The only passage that tells us how to pray for the government is [1 Tim.2.1-2](#). What does it tell us specifically to pray for here? [Hint: this is not praying for a comfortable life, but rather, one that is not interfered with by government.]

Lesson 7

THE LEGACY OF COMPROMISE

Judges 9

I. Preparing for Battle

1. Define the word “legacy.”
2. How important is leaving a legacy in our society today?
3. Re-read Judges 8.22-35. How would you describe the legacy of Gideon?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

ABIMELECH, 8.33—10.5

Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life. Deut. 32:46-47

*O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come. Psalm 71:17-18*

Read [8.29-9:57](#) at least once to get the whole picture of this story.

If someone outside your family were to write a short paragraph describing the life and legacy of your family, what would they say? Would it involve the part your family played in the history of America? Or would they simply limit it to the family itself?

In [Judges 8:29-35](#), we see the legacy of Gideon's family. And it is not pretty.

God tells us how many sons Gideon had. Why? What is He trying to tell us here? Was it God's will for him to have so many wives? Was it God's will for him to have a concubine?

Could this be revealing how Gideon was trying to take the office of king in a passive-aggressive way?

Whichever it was, God thought it was important for us to know as it played an important part in the story. Not only did Gideon take all of these wives, but he took a concubine, too. And in [8.31](#), the writer tells us Gideon named his son, Abimelech. But this was not just any name; it meant "my father is king." What a chilling commentary on the heart of Gideon! He told the people of Israel he wouldn't rule over them, yet he named his son (of a concubine no less) "my father is king." If our actions don't match up with our words, we come across as being unbelievable and therefore untrustworthy.

Yet Yahweh is a God of mercy. He desired for Gideon's family to be shown respect for what he had done as the deliverer of Israel. The true ephod represented the way God answered and led His people. Now Gideon usurped the position of priest and, by leaving his false ephod in place, allowed for his children to carry on after his death. This gave Gideon, at least in his own mind, the power he felt God originally gave him in Chapter 6. He longed for the satisfaction he found when he knew he was in the center of God's will. He wanted that feeling of contentment, which is why he tried to manipulate God by setting up the ephod.

Israel was interested only in what they could get for themselves. Not only did they whore after the ephod Gideon had set up, but they whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. Baal-berith means "lord of the covenant." What a slap in the face of Yahweh! Yahweh is the only true God of the covenant, yet Israel called a piece of wood by God's personal name and pretended it could do for them what Yahweh had done.

Character of Abimelech

No faith or integrity;
never called a judge

Tribe

Manasseh

Territory fought for & in

His own people and territory

What were the idols?

Baal of the Covenant

Who was the enemy God used?

He brought in an evil spirit to serve Him

How long oppressed?

3 years

Judged how long?

Never, at least not in any good way



Although Gideon did not officially accept the people's plea to become their ruler, he did, in fact, rule over them, and possibly intended for his children to do the same.

Note: Any child born of a man's concubine was rarely accepted as part of the man's family. The ties of this child would only be to the mother's family.

1. All parents have dreams for their children. Dreams of success, honesty, integrity, as well as hopes they will grow into adults who are responsible, viable, members of society. We all want them to reflect well on us as parents. But sometimes, no matter how hard we try, some children will go their own way. And this way takes them away from the Lord.

Abimelech was probably raised in his mother's house away from Gideon's influence. And while he didn't understand the things of the Lord, he did understand how to manipulate people, as we will soon see.

2. Read [9.1-5](#). How would you describe Abimelech's heart attitude, which would lead him to approach his mother's relatives with his suggestion?

Since Gideon "ruled" over these areas for 40 years, it was assumed his children would continue to do so. Abimelech's ambition to live up to his name led him to convince first his family and then the leaders of Shechem to choose him, their blood relative, to reign. Otherwise, Gideon's dynasty might have ruled over them for decades.

3. What did Abimelech do with the 70 pieces of silver he was given by the leaders of Shechem? He went out and hired a bunch of thugs to help him assassinate his own flesh and blood.

Where did they take the silver from, and why was this significant?

As stated in the intro to this section, it was taken from the pagan temple they set up to the god they named to replace the true God of the Covenant.

Did the leaders of Shechem share accountability in Abimelech's scheme, or were they simply his pawns? (See [9.22-24](#) and [56-57](#).)

The people were totally complicit in this whole sordid affair. They rejected God's rule over them and sought their allegiance in a mere man. We see in these later verses how God was meting out punishment on not only Abimelech, but the people of Shechem as well.

Who escaped, and why is this significant ([9.5](#))?

We were told about Gideon's oldest son, Jether, back in [8.20](#), who must have been at least a teenager as he was involved in the war, which took place over 40 years ago. It was Jotham, Gideon's youngest son who escaped. It seems that God spared Jotham in order to use him to pronounce judgment on Abimelech.

4. Abimelech was made **king** ([9.6](#)), and [Jotham](#) (whose name means "YHWH is perfect, blameless, honest, and has integrity") predicted the downfall of both Abimelech and the people of the city of Shechem ([9.7-21](#)).

Note the significant uses of each of the following in the parable:

- Olive/Oil** Used to anoint kings & priests. It was also used for lighting lamps, cooking, medicine, laxatives, and lubricants.
- Fig** Represented the basic foods of the land. The fig is telling them what it does is far too important to leave to go into “politics.”
- Vine** In the same way as the fig, the vine represented the rest of the necessities of life – what the people needed for drink.
- Bramble**¹³ This was the thorny waste product hated especially by farmers as it choked the vegetation and would easily ignite.

Although we are not told this parable was given to Jotham by God, we have seen God working in and through people throughout this book, regardless of their being conscious of what He was doing. We don't find out God's involvement with this until the very last verse of the chapter.

What would you conclude this parable is about?

You have chosen a disastrous king in selecting a 'bramble' like Abimelech; therefore, you will suffer the consequences.

5. Is there more to 9.5b than a “lucky” escape? Is there more to 9.7-20 than the warning of a brokenhearted man? Note 9.7b.

God was at work behind these scenes as He *always* is! Jotham never really mentioned God in his speech, except in passing. However, it was God who delivered this prophecy through Jotham to Abimelech and the people of Shechem.

The escape was God's way of honoring what Gideon had done in obedience, which is why he was recorded in the Hall of Faith in Heb.11.32-34.

6. These two mountains (9.7) have a background worth noting. In Deut.27-28, God commanded Moses to proclaim His laws – the promises were proclaimed from Mt. Gerizim and the curses from Mt. Ebal, which was next to Mt. Gerizim, both overlooking Shechem. Joshua did exactly this in Josh.8.30-35. Now God spoke through Jotham, but He did it on the mount of promises, knowing it would ultimately be their curse.

[Shechem was a sacred place for the Israelites as it was the final resting place for the bones of Joseph (Josh.24.32).]

Note: The Oak of Shechem: This place had historical significance in Israel's past. This was where God appeared to Abram and promised him the land (Gen.12.6-7); it was where Jacob put away his false gods of satisfaction for the true God of satisfaction (Gen.35.1-4); and it was here Joshua challenged Israel to put away their foreign gods (Josh.24, especially 24.25-26). Take special note of the words Joshua used to challenge Israel in 24.14 – *sincerity and faithfulness = good faith and integrity!* Sadly, it was also here Abimelech chose to reject God's call for Israel to show its *good faith and integrity*.

¹³ There is another possibility of what this shrub was. It has been identified as a tree that grows to a height of about 30 feet. It also produces a food source suitable if one lived in the wilderness where less desirable foods grew. It would not be the choice of those with access to more desirable foods like olives, figs, and vines. (Boda, pg.1174)

Throughout this book, we hear the cry, “There was no king in Israel.” Gideon was right when he said ***the Lord will rule over you*** (8.23). Israel was having a hard time learning to be content (satisfied) with God being their King. God intended for them to have a king after His own heart, but in rebellion they wanted to rule with their own hearts. The very fact that God gave them judges (not to speak of Moses, Joshua before them, and Saul, David, et al.) after them shows God does govern through His governors in civil affairs, and through His priests (pastors and elders) in ecclesiastical affairs.

God in His sovereign mercy gave Shechem the king they desired and deserved. Abimelech, likewise, got the constituents he deserved. Because the people refused to repent and honor God as the Ruler of their hearts and lives, He executed His judgment. (9.56-57)

How God fulfilled His prophecy

Until now, we have not been told the length of any judge’s “reign.” We have only been told how long the land had rest. Here we are told Abimelech (who was never called a judge), lasted only three years. God did not put up with his or Israel’s sin, for long.

1. 9.23 says God used an **evil spirit** to begin His judgment by dividing the people. Here “bad” evil is pitted against “worse” evil. Israel’s sin had become so bad, God removed His Holy Spirit as the restrainer of evil and replaced Him with one of Satan’s minions. With the Restrainer removed, we clearly see the results of sinful men exercising their free will, the effect it had on the lives of all around them, and their resulting deaths.



This is the second time in Chapters 6-9 God used evil to destroy evil. First, the Midianites fought and killed each other, and here the Shechemites were destroyed by evil Abimelech, who himself was destroyed shamefully by a woman.

2. A newcomer, Gaal (9.26), challenged Abimelech’s leadership successfully (9.26-29), insulting which key figure? (9.28)

The insult went deep as he took the discussion back as far as Gideon and the disrespect he continued to be shown. This party really got going as they all got so drunk comments and bragging began to fly. This newest resident began to taunt the ability of the sitting ruler, thereby elevating himself.

3. Abimelech’s governor, **Zebul**, informed Abimelech of the conspiracy and covertly invited him to ambush the city that had formerly supported him. (9.30-33) Abimelech destroyed the city (9.34-45) and killed the inhabitants, and its leaders escaped. (9.46-49) Where did the escaped leaders and their families seek refuge?

The hearts of these people were so far from God, they never even considered Him someone to Whom they could run. Instead, they sought their refuge in the house of worship of the idol in whom they had been seeking their satisfaction and protection.

4. While attempting to take another city, how did Abimelech die? (9.50-55)

He assumed his previous method of taking a tower would automatically work again. It didn't, and he lost his life. But he not only forfeited his life, it happened in a demeaning way for a warrior – at the hands of a woman! But he thought he would lose that stigma by having his sword bearer kill him instead. He failed again, as the woman, who would forever remain nameless, would forever get credit for his demise.

5. Read 9.55. Why did the people simply go home after Abimelech died?

Their lives had no purpose. There was no satisfaction to be found in following this man, whose end was purposed for destruction.

It was Abimelech's seared conscience and ultimate satisfaction in himself instead of God, as well as his confidence from his last victory, that led to his death.

Thus

God avenged the evil Abimelech had done to his father, murdering his 70 brothers. And God brought down on the heads of the men of Shechem all the evil that they had done, the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerub-Baal. 9.56-57 (The Message)

TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

1. So often, history seems to be the endless repeating of trial and error. All too often, we think history is our teacher. But God is our real teacher! History is the vehicle through which we learn about Him and how He works. The spiral of repetition is what happens when we don't learn His lessons.

This story reads that way, but...

Note in 8.33a the timing of Israel's return to sin. The downward spiral (explained in Lesson 1) began again! But did they really turn at this point, or before? See 8.27.

Two lessons ago, Gideon led the people away from idolatry. But in the last lesson, we saw Gideon in his later life leading his family and Israel back into it. It was not exactly the same idolatry as with the gods of the land; however, he became the stepping stone to the full-fledged idolatry they returned to upon his death.

2. Israel forgot what God had done for them (8.34). List below what they had forgotten:

6.7 – They forgot they had cried out to Him for His help.

6.8-10 – They forgot the *many* times He delivered them from their state of misery.

6.14 – Because of His covenant promise and His relationship with His people, God answered by delivering them through Gideon.

6.32 – They forgot the many times they tried to get their idols to do something for them, but to no avail.

7.7 – They forgot what He did with only 300 men against an army of 35,000.

7.13-14 – They forgot how He revealed their victory to them before it happened.

8.28 – They forgot the *complete* victory He gave them over the enemy who oppressed them for seven years.

If Israel had shown true godly love toward the God of the Covenant, they would have been delivered from all their enemies, as they were from the Midianites.

As a result of their forgetting (ignoring) God, Gideon, and Gideon’s house, perhaps together they could have held each other accountable to follow the God who had just done so much for them. BUT, they forgot Him again, and so quickly.

3. Read 9.16-21. How would you explain the “curse of Jotham” in 9.57? What is it? Can people actually curse other people? Why was God a party to this type of thing? Or was He?

Before you answer, read this:

“Cursing is intended either as a judgment for misdeeds or as a deterrent to disobedience (Mal 2:2; 3:9). Though the term can be synonymous with *qālal*, it has a more restricted range of meaning (note that nearly two-thirds of the uses of this word are in the Pentateuch).

ārar is the term used throughout the highly charged curses of the creation narrative. The Lord curses Satan for deceiving Eve (Gen 3:14–15). He curses creation itself because of Adam’s disobedience, and he curses Cain for his fratricide (3:16–17; 4:11). Noah is designated as the one who will reverse the effects of the curse, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD *has cursed*” (5:29). Yet, even though the earth has been destroyed, sin remains a problem (cf. 11:1–9); the curse continues. The Lord then offers the ultimate solution through the seed of Abraham (12:3). As Paul recognizes in Gal 3:10–14, only in Christ is the curse finally removed.

The highest concentration of *ārar* usages in the OT occurs in Deut., where the theme of blessing and cursing is an important part of the Mosaic covenant (Deut. 27:15–26; 28:16–19; cf. Ps 30:19). The list of curses in Deut. corresponds to ancient treaties where the less powerful are bound in allegiance to the great kings with the threat of curses for their disobedience (cf. Jer. 11:3; Mal. 1:14). Curses could be invoked by God or others (Gen. 9:25; Exod. 22:28; 1 Sam. 14:24). The effectiveness of the curse is generally based on the standing of the individual who makes it. A curse becomes more serious when it is undertaken “before the Lord” (Jos. 6:26). The idea here is like the contemporary idea that an oath is more significant if it is made while placing one’s hand on the Bible.”¹⁴

Now answer #3.

¹⁴William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, pg.151-52.

4. In 9.22-25, we are ushered into God’s council chambers, where the actions of Abimelech were reviewed and judged, and where we can expect to see the decisions of God worked out in history.

Ask the class what they think about God using an evil spirit to do His will. If they don’t remember, He will later do the same with King Saul. This should spark some lively discussion, but always keep the focus on how God is incapable of doing anything wrong. He is *always* in charge of all world events.

5. Look at 9.26. How would the world see this move? How would the believer see it?

Here politics takes its normal twist. Allegiances are fickle at best. One day, Abimelech was on top, the next day he was being replaced. We should never put our hope in a government, which has no heart for God. Governments were not established with an ability to satisfy (see God’s purpose for government in Rom.13.1-7) - only God can truly bring satisfaction and contentment!

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

At the beginning of this lesson, we asked you to define what is meant by “legacy.” The legacy left by anyone will be either good or not so good. In the case of Gideon, we find both. *History* records Gideon as Israel’s deliverer from the Midianites, giving him a lasting legacy in the Hall of Faith in Heb.11. However, the rest of Gideon’s legacy is the sordid story of Abimelech. If Gideon’s story had ended after Chapter 6, the rest of his legacy might have been different. But sadly, we have Chapters 7 and 8, which revealed Gideon’s heart wandering from God.

Below is a comparison of the Gideon of Chapter 6 with his legacy in Abimelech in Chapter 9.

<u>GIDEON</u>	<u>ABIMELECH</u>
The people asked God for a deliverer	Abimelech asked the people to let him lead
God called Gideon to lead His people	He called himself to lead his relatives
Many men came voluntarily to fight with Gideon	He had to hire mercenaries to fight his battle
The people were willing to invest themselves in the battle by fighting alongside Gideon	The men of Shechem didn’t invest themselves in the battle
Gideon was filled with the Spirit and fought in the will of God	The Holy Spirit did not work in or fill him
	Abimelech was destroyed
The Lord was with Gideon and there was victory	After Abimelech died, everyone simply went home
	Abimelech was outside of the will of God
	The end was judgment, family division, and death

1. Look back at your answer to Part I, Question 3 (p.73), where you were asked to describe the legacy of Gideon. How would you describe his legacy now?

2. Comparing the Gideon of Chapter 6 with the Abimelech of Chapter 9, how would you describe the level of satisfaction each enjoyed in their relationship with God?

In Chapter 6, Gideon enjoyed a growing relationship and satisfaction in knowing and serving His God. At no point do we see Abimelech ever experiencing any joy, satisfaction, or relationship with God.

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

Compare yourself to the Gideon of Chapter 6, the Gideon of Chapters 7-8, and the Abimelech of Chapter 9. Which one of these comes closest to resembling your life and the legacy you are presently preparing to leave behind?

Examine your life. Are you leaving the legacy of one who searches for satisfaction in the Lord, or in yourself? What changes do you need to begin implementing so you can look back at your life with no regrets?

Lesson 8

TO VOW OR NOT TO VOW? COUNTING THE COST

Judges 10-12

I. Preparing for Battle

1. What is your definition of a vow?
2. Would you consider the vow to be a pledge honoring God, or bargaining with God to get what you want?
3. Can we vow the wrong thing for the right reason? Can we vow the right thing for the wrong reason?
4. Would God honor your vow, even if it might appear to violate His Word?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

In this lesson, we will look at five judges who received very little mention and the account of Jephthah.

If you read through these five judges quickly, you would think they didn't accomplish anything worth recording, but God had a reason for recording them. So, let's look at each one briefly and see what we can learn about God and them.

Tola

¹After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. ²And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir.

Jair

³After him arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. ⁴And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. ⁵And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

Ibzan

⁸After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. ⁹He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters he gave in marriage outside his clan, and thirty daughters he brought in from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. ¹⁰Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Elon

¹¹After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel, and he judged Israel ten years. ¹²Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

Abdon

¹³After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. ¹⁴He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys, and he judged Israel eight years. ¹⁵Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites

Tola & Jair**Tribe**

Tola – Issachar
Jair – Gilead

Territory fought for & in
Not told**What were the idols?**
Not told**Who was the enemy God used?**
Not told**How long oppressed?**
Not told**Judged how long?**
Tola – 23 years
Jair – 22 years**Jephthah****Tribe**

East Manasseh/Gilead

Territory fought for & in
East Manasseh/Gilead**What were the idols?**
Balls, Ashtaroth, gods of Syria, Ammon & Philistia**Who was the enemy God used?**
Ammonites**How long oppressed?**
18 years**Judged how long?**
6 years**Ibzan, Elon, Abdon****Tribe**

Ibzan – Bethlehem
Elon – Zebulun
Abdon - Ephraim

Territory fought for & in
Not told**What were the idols?**
Not told**Who was the enemy God used?**
Not told**How long oppressed?**
Not Told**Judged how long?**
Ibzan – 7 years
Elon – 10 years
Abdon– 8 years

GOD'S TRANSITIONS, 10.1-5 and 12.8-15

1. Tola and Jair combined, judged Israel for almost half a century after the death of Abimelech. As we have seen, little is mentioned about their rule, — but look at what happened again in 10.6. Israel, just like us, forgot all too easily. When God does something great for us, after a period of time, we forget all about it and start complaining again.
2. What would you observe about the “downward spiral,” as it runs in 10.6, 10.7, 10.10, and 11.6?
Without question, the situation continues to deteriorate. Israel kept sliding downhill at a faster and faster rate. In every other story, God raised up the deliverer and sent him/her to the people. Here the people have to find someone to lead them.

The problem with sin is this. Once you have given in to it the first time, it is much easier from then on to keep giving in. We get much more comfortable each time we give in. Sin **must** be resisted at all costs, and every time it rears its head!

What events are conspicuously absent from the information given about these five judges?
Idols were not mentioned. There was mention of judgment. We are not even given a reason for these judges being raised up. There was also no mention of there being any period of rest! They had a judge in place for a certain period, but there was no statement they enjoyed any rest during that time.

TOLA AND JAIR - 10.1-5

1. What does the lack of details on Tola and Jair indicate about their combined 45 years of ruling?
For one thing, we see God was still in charge. He placed these two men in positions of authority to govern Israel through this very dark period. God is giving us His “flow” of history, which indicates there is continuity from story to story and not total chaos going on during these very troubled times.

2. What do you think 10.4 shows about Jair?
This gives us the pattern which has been evolving since Gideon – generational leadership. Jair not only judged, but he also set his sons to rule over different areas within his sphere of judgeship. To have that many children meant you were wealthy, with many wives, animals, and much land. The donkeys also indicated wealth. In Jud.8.22, the people wanted Gideon and his sons to rule over them generation after generation. Jair was doing what Gideon said he would not do.

IBZAN, ELON & ABDON, 12.8-15

1. What distinguished Ibzan (12.9)? Was this good or bad? Right or wrong? Why?

He imported 30 daughters for his 30 sons from outside, which probably meant from outside Israel. These would have been God's enemies. Wealth was abundant for Ibzan! He married his daughters off in political alliances. Arranged marriages were not at all unusual in this age, and for governing authorities it was quite common. With this type of alliance one assures oneself of a peaceful time with those who might otherwise be enemies. The bad side of such an alliance comes from Ibzan's lack of trust in God to keep the peace between these Israelite tribes.

2. Elon judged for ten years and nothing more was said about him. However, we need to keep in mind God saw him as significant enough to include him in this record. Many times, the Bible uses a connecting story to bridge one event to another. This might be why Elon is mentioned.

3. Abdon's details provide political places of importance (12.14), as Jair's details had done (10.3-4). But can you see the one additional fact added here?

This time we have not only two generations mentioned but three. His sons and grandsons might also have judged Israel. But, we are never told they were set up by God to be judges.

Chapter 10 has the construction of a sandwich. The top piece of bread, vs. 1-5, give us few details about Tola and Jair other than who they were, where they lived and died, and how long they judged. The bottom piece of bread consists of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, and comes at the end of 12.8-15, again with just a few details.

However, there are some interesting details we can learn to help us understand.

Upon examination of a map, you will see these two "pieces of bread" all surround geographically the "meat of the sandwich," which is the account of Jephthah.

Some scholars tend to treat these judges as "transitions," as we do. Transitions are put in as a way of linking events and places.

Why did the writer of Judges put them in the book at this particular time? What is God trying to tell us? Let's see...

ANOTHER STEP DOWN

1. Compare 10.6 with 3.7, 3.12, 4.1, 6.1, and 8.33 - the other periods of turning away from God. What is the difference?

This time Israel pushed God even further. They added not only the "big" gods of the area but many other small local idols. In order to be politically correct with all the nations around them, they accepted their gods so as not to offend anyone – except the true God!

2. We are told in 10.7 God was angry. What does this tell us about Israel's relationship with God? This is the first time God has displayed this kind of reaction since 3.8! This says a great deal about how long Israel had presumed upon God, and He would not be long-suffering any longer.

3. What does this teach us about compromising with the world's *many* idols? Why did Israel keep giving in?

Spiritual warfare is the real topic. The 1st Commandment is very clear - God will not put up with anyone, especially His children, putting anything before Him. Israel insisted on trying to find their satisfaction in the gods of this world, while God was trying to give them all they really needed in Himself. The world, the flesh, and the devil are all luring God's children away from Him. Why do *we* keep giving in? [This should provide some lively discussion as to why we keep allowing ourselves to be lured into sinning.]

4. Israel, under the weight of their latest oppressor, was said to have been "**crushed**" and "**oppressed**." The last time we saw the word **crushed** used was in 9.53, when the unnamed woman dropped the millstone and crushed Abimelech's head. Using this word again should give you a picture of how badly Israel was suffering. God used this oppressor to humble them by proving these idols could not satisfy.

5. Israel finally concluded these gods could not satisfy or release them from their oppression. This realization led them to "repent." Their repentance, however (10.10), was NOT accepted at face value by the Lord (10.11-14)! Why did God not accept this?

God knew their hearts, how far they had strayed, and what it would take to bring them back. Israel had arrived at the point where, like so many Christians, they took God for granted. They thought, in effect, "He came through for us many times before, He will do it again." But this time He said, NO!

6. Two things happened in 10.16. What was it that moved God from His decision in 10.13b? Commentators differ on what makes God "change His mind." Was it because Israel actually put away all these gods, or because God had compassion on His children as He saw the intense pain they were suffering?

The truth may lie somewhere between the two. For the first time, Israel's request for help was turned down and their suffering intensified.

7. Do you think Israel meant business with God in 10.15-16?

Israel decided they needed to get serious with God and came to the realization they needed to do more than cry for His help. They needed to actively stop sinning against Him. The combination of Israel's action and God's compassion led God to act on behalf of His hurting, wayward children.

8. Think back on all the times Israel called on God for help so far in the book of Judges. What was it that seemed to move Israel to cry out? Could their protracted suffering have been avoided?

Israel continually laid God aside until they completely forgot about Him. He is God and will never allow this to happen, especially by those He has chosen to put His favor upon. Of course this could have been avoided, in the same way any child could avoid the discipline of a loving parent when he does what he knows is wrong. Each time Israel sought to find their satisfaction in life outside of God, He let them go until they found there was no satisfaction to be found anywhere else.

What is our lesson? When we come to Christ for salvation, we lay down *everything* before Him. We say, in effect, “Lord, take my life and do with it as You see best.” The Holy Spirit comes to live in us, and He has a specific job to do – to make us like Jesus. He **WILL** do His job. And this, many times, is what we don’t like, but it must be done if we are to find true satisfaction. “Our hope does not rest in the sincerity of our repentance, but in the intensity of Yahweh’s compassion. . . .Repentance may be a condition but not a cause of God’s favor.”¹⁵ God made His covenant promise for Israel to be His people, and He cannot and will not break His promise.

Nowhere else in Judges does it say Israel “repented” of their idolatry – they simply cried out to God, but this time they had to get rid of their idols. God, in His severe mercy, offered deliverance for them as a nation. Keep in mind, there are two Israels – unbelieving Israel and “the remnant” who truly believed and kept God’s covenant. God had mercy on national Israel for the sake of those who believed!

Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” Judges 10.17-18

JEPHTHAH: THE MAN, 11.1-3

1. Read 11.1. List everything stated here about Jephthah and his family background.

2. Who was Jephthah’s father? (11.1-2) Read this very carefully.

The writer is using literary license in using the name of the town as the name of Jephthah’s father. His mother was a prostitute, therefore, there may have been many in that town who had slept with her. In 11.2, the writer goes back to talking about Gilead as one person, but he still represents the town as a whole.

3. Why was Jephthah driven out by his brothers (11.2)?

Sibling rivalry has been around since Cain and Abel. Greed is part of the picture as his brothers don’t want any possibility of him sharing in the family inheritance. This was merely an excuse. In his culture, Jephthah would never have had any chance to get anything of an inheritance from his father’s family. Jealousy was also an excuse to get rid of him. Jephthah proved to be the warrior they were not, as the elders went after Jephthah to lead them in war.

If there is time, you might want to venture into the discussion of family rivalry as it relates to where our true satisfaction is found or lost.

¹⁵Davis. *Such a Great Salvation*. p.136.

4. **Worthless fellows** joined themselves to Jephthah. Where did they come from?

They appear to have lived in the area of Gilead, and for whatever reason, they found themselves rejected by the town. Jephthah, being a leader (**a mighty warrior, 11.1**) could easily attract followers. So they all left Gilead for Tob together.

5. Why would Jephthah take up with such **worthless fellows**?

This takes us back to Lesson 2, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Jephthah might have been getting his most basic needs met, but the one for intimacy was hurting. He was rejected by the ones who should have been closest to him. Not having that level of need satisfied, he searched for and found a sense of closeness, but with the wrong people.

You can't help but wonder if the writer of Judges was saying this somewhat tongue-in-cheek when he talked about these fellows as being worthless when he just described the whole town of Gilead as being worthless!

JEPHTHAH: HIS CALL, 11.4-11

1. Jephthah's call was the most subtle of any so far in the book. He did not get a visit from the Angel of the Lord, nor did he hear God speak directly to him. His call was more like ours. God gives us the gifts He wants us to have (11.1a), and then uses others to confirm that gift (or ability), as He did here through the Gileadites.

2. What was the motive behind the actions of the elders of Gilead?

They had been oppressed for 18 years (10.8). Their safety was being threatened. (This is level two on Maslow's chart in Lesson 2.) They rationalized their only hope for deliverance would come from a person, and not God. They, in desperation and possibly humility, turned to Jephthah.

3. What do you think Jephthah's reason was for helping his own people?

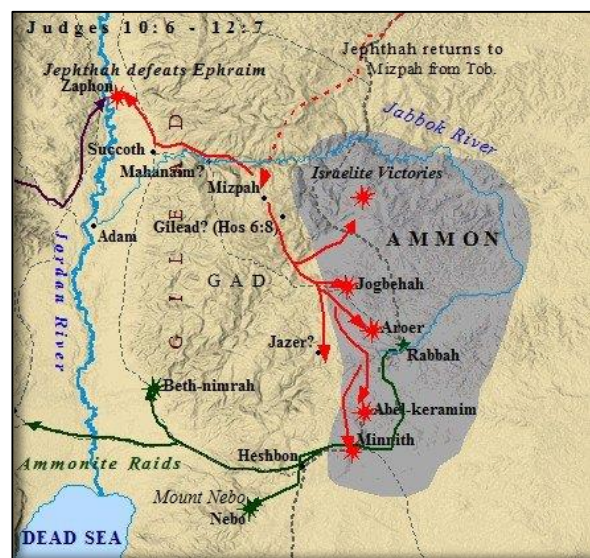
In 11.8, he was told he would not only lead the people through this war, but he would also be made the **head and leader** over them.

4. What relationship, then, actually existed between the Gileadites and Jephthah?

The town fathers allowed their legitimate sons to drive him out. But they never forgot him, nor his ability. Jephthah went off and started a new life, one in which he seemed to have been quite content. When responding to the request of the Gileadites, he referenced the town, not as Gilead, but as **my father's** house. He didn't seek retribution; rather, he agreed to return and help.

5. There appeared to be a tender side to Jephthah as well. Do you see it in his response to the elders in 11.9?

If you bring me home again.... If he was only concerned about leading them, he might have said, "If you will make me leader to fight against the Ammonites..." His reference to "home" gave the impression he missed being there.



6. Jephthah bargained (11.9-11) and became both their military *head* and political *leader* (ruler). Here we see yet another trait in Jephthah. He was going to prove he was a man of his word. He would indeed lead them in battle and then be their leader and judge for the next six years. What an ego booster! He left Gilead consorting with low-lives, but he returned leading the people.

JEPHTHAH: THE DIPLOMAT, 11.12-28

1. The entire discussion exposed a grudge long-held by the Ammonites. Here they used it as an excuse to war against Israel (11.13). Jephthah's argument was Israel had not "taken" anyone's land; it was given by God to Israel after the people of the land had stubbornly refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory *centuries* before.
As you read both sides of the argument you can see the "revisionist" history the Ammonites put forth. They had a selective memory of the events. Jephthah's response came even before he had the Holy Spirit come upon him (11.29).

Can you see the spiritual warfare going on here? Only this time, it is Jephthah using the sword of the Word of God to fight against the enemy.

2. Jephthah's reasoning with the Ammonite king was based on 11.23, which was, of course, disregarded (11.28). Note the sarcasm of 11.24-25.

11.12-28 reveals what about Jephthah's knowledge of Bible history?

He clearly and accurately articulated extensive details of Israel's history, far beyond the normal teaching given every year at the Passover celebration (where Israel's basic history was recounted, describing what God did for them). For someone who was the offspring of a prostitute, rejected by his family, and a consort with outcasts, he had a really impressive understanding of his Bible! There was more to this man than what you find at first read.

After Jephthah gave his history lesson, he gave his theology lesson: "We will be satisfied with what Yahweh gives us, and you will be satisfied with what your god, Chemosh, gives you. OK?"

3. OPTIONAL QUESTION AND THOUGHT - Israel had been in the land for 300 years at this point. Should they have just given it back? Think of it this way: How would you respond if Mexico came and demanded we give back Texas and the SW US? How about Israel? They had the land of Israel from 1400BC until it was taken over by the Muslims in AD 638. The Muslims possessed the land until 1948. Did Israel have a right to take it back by force?¹⁶

¹⁶ Paul Gilchrist added some interesting thoughts along this line: Did Israel have a right to take the land by force? This question is far more complicated than it may seem. The British *Balfour Declaration* had promised it to the Jews after they conquered it from the Ottoman Empire. They gave most of the old Ottoman territory to the Arabs, but reserved some for the Jews, and the French further north deeded Lebanon to Christians. When the Jews started back to "Palestine"

THE VICTORY, 11.29-33

1. God's Spirit "came upon" Jephthah as preparation for the battle got under way. (11.29) This phrase in the OT refers not to salvation but to the Spirit's empowering. We are told He came upon certain prophets, priests, kings, and judges, enabling them to do their jobs or complete a task. This indicated Jephthah might have been saved before this point. When might this have happened?

Although there is no absolute answer to this, it would seem he might have come to a point, while cavorting with the other social outcasts; he looked up and sought God. He obviously had a good Bible background, so he **might** have grown up as a Covenant child, turned away, and then was brought low enough to come back to his Covenant roots.

Look at Jephthah's faith as he expressed it to the Ammonites when he said in 11.27: *I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.*

2. Look at 11.11, and then 11.21,23,24,27. Was Jephthah's relationship to the Lord new?

Apparently not! For anyone to be able to give a history lesson like this shows he had been well taught. He was mature enough in the Lord to know how to use the Word to fight the spiritual battle for satisfaction.

3. What did Jephthah do in 11.30-31?

He made a solemn promise to the Lord. He did this in good faith, but perhaps without thinking through the ramifications of what might happen.

What do you think of the making of this vow?

Was it made sincerely?

before 1948, they were allowed to buy land – most of which was the swamp land in the lowlands. When the Jews started transforming the swamps into productive orange groves, the Arabs became jealous and wanted the lands back. In 1948, when the *Balfour Declaration* was enacted by the UN and the land partitioned between the Arabs and Jews, the Arabs attacked the Jews – which continues to this day. (A book by 2 British journalists, *Ob Jerusalem*, was a most helpful book re. this early period.)

Who or what do you suppose Jephthah thought would have come out of the door of his house?

We can only guess, but if his house is like mine, the dog would have been the first one through the door.



4. God had forbidden human sacrifice (Lev.18.21,27), and burnt offerings were to be male animals (Lev.1.3). What do you learn about the heathen customs in Jer.19.5; 2 Kings 3.27; Micah 6.7?

Jer.19.5 – ...and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, no did it come into my mind.

2 Kings 3.27 – Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel.

Micah 6.7b – Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression...?

5. Note what took place following the victory (11.34-39). 11.39 suggests, to some, Jephthah changed his vow to sacrifice his daughter by having her remain single the rest of her life. According to Ex.38.8 and 1 Sam.2.22, women were allowed to serve at Israel's worship center. If this was the case here, Jephthah's daughter would remain a virgin all her life, so Jephthah would be deprived of any progeny. What do you think Jephthah actually did?

The sad part is he probably followed through on his original pledge. If he was only going to commit his daughter to a "nunnery" she would have had no need to take two months to lament as she would have had the rest of his life for that.

6. Look at the attitude of his daughter in 11.36-37. Did she ask for death? Was she afraid? What, actually, was she asking in 11.37?

She appeared to handle her situation surprisingly well. Perhaps it was the faith she witnessed in her father which led her to trust God would take care of her through this terrible ordeal.

7. Note Jephthah's heartbreak in 11.35, as well as his keeping his word in 11.39, "...according to the vow which he had made." But should he have kept his promise?

This also reflects on the terrible times in which Israel was living. Jephthah proved he was a man of his word in spite of how it violated God's law regarding human sacrifice. But, keeping one's word must never be placed above obeying God's clearly revealed Word.

Num.30.1-2: ... This is what the Lord has commanded. If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Deut.23.21-23: if you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Prov.20.25: It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows.

If Israel had rid the land of its sinful occupants in the beginning of the book of Judges, the people of Israel would never have allowed human sacrifice to exist among them!

8. Commentator Daniel Block interprets verse 40 this way:

“The narrator reminds the readers that despite her mourning over her virginity, Jephthah’s daughter’s condition did not change. Accordingly the fate of the man who tried so desperately to find security in life is sealed—he dies with his victim. Second, the narrator notes the enduring luster of the young girl’s reputation. No memorials were erected for Jephthah, but the memory of his daughter was immortalized in a festival celebrated in her honor. Nothing specific is known of this festival, except that it was observed four days each year by the women of this section of Israel. It is doubtful this observance ever became a national event.”¹⁷

JEPHTHAH: ONE LAST BATTLE, 12.1-7

1. Ephraim was one of the tribes of Israel, as was Manasseh (from which Jephthah came). Do you see a reason why no judge could ever succeed in his work beyond the immediate deliverance from the enemy which God provided for His people?

Ephraim had a major ego problem (which we also saw in their dealing with Gideon). They wanted to be involved when they wanted and the way they wanted, and when they were asked to join in the fight, they refused.

2. Note the complaint in 12.1. See 8.1. This time, the men of Ephraim were savagely punished (12.4). The attitude of Ephraim stemmed from their hatred of the tribe of Manasseh, from which both Jephthah and Gideon came.
3. If there was a possible shortcoming to Jephthah, besides his unfortunate situation with his daughter, it can be found in Chapter 12 in his dealings with Ephraim. Gideon handled them very diplomatically. Jephthah had little patience for them. This might have come from his birth and rejection. How would you describe how he dealt with them in 12.1-6?

First, he was right in their faces and they were in his. They threatened him and he lost his patience with them. He stated he did it by risking his own life since they refused to help. Whatever other words that might have been uttered, both sides went to war.

It was bad enough when Israel had to fight a common enemy. It was without excuse they came to such a state as to war and kill each other.

On the other hand, God may have been using Jephthah to discipline Ephraim for its ongoing arrogance against the other tribes of Israel.

4. Note the “trial by accent” in 12.5-6. (Shibboleth means “stream.”) Why was this significant?

Two tribes within Israel, living across the river from each other, had so little to do with each other they developed their own accents. Now, due to their uncooperative and unforgiving spirits, they were willing to kill each other. What a terrible state of affairs!

¹⁷ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p.375.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

If God is anything, He is consistent. If He wasn't, we would never know when we could trust Him or when He might change. If He is consistent, His Word is also consistent, and both of them can always be trusted. Much like a child who learns how not to trust from a parent who never keeps his/her word, there is no satisfaction or security to be found in inconsistency.

“Who’s your daddy?” This had to be one of Jephthah’s life-long heart questions. Think of him growing up in his home town, knowing one of the men there was his father, yet never being told the truth (if known). Later, he gets run out of town by the town fathers (one of which was his), only to be sought later, not because he was a son, but because of what he could do for them.

God cannot violate His Word. For this we can be thankful. When God tells us we are to do something, or not do something, He will never alter His Word. Jephthah made a vow which, as it turned out, violated God’s clear statement on human sacrifice. Because of his background, he was determined to keep his word to God; he placed keeping the vow above obeying God’s clear command. By keeping his vow, he did the wrong thing for what he thought was the right reason.

God clearly said *you shall not murder* (Ex.20.13). For Jephthah to have kept his vow, he would have had to sacrifice (murder) his daughter. For this violation of Ex.20.13, God would have required Jephthah be put to death. For Jephthah to break his vow rather than commit murder would have been forgivable. His vow was made hastily and in ignorance of its consequences. He could have asked for forgiveness, and God would have forgiven him.

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

Definition of a vow

noun

1. a solemn promise, pledge, or personal commitment: *marriage vows; a vow of secrecy*
2. a solemn promise made to God committing oneself to an act, service, or condition
3. a solemn or earnest declaration

verb (used with object)

1. to make a vow of; promise by a vow, as to God: *to vow a crusade or a pilgrimage*
2. to pledge or resolve solemnly to do, make, give, observe, etc.: *They vowed revenge*
3. to declare solemnly or earnestly; assert emphatically (often followed by a clause as object): *She vowed that she would take the matter to court.*
4. to dedicate or devote by a vow: *to vow oneself to the service of God*

Between now and the next time your group gets together, write down each time you make a promise – a direct promise or an implied one.

Were you able to keep them all?

How did you handle any you could not, or did not, keep?

Did you repent and ask forgiveness from the One to whom you broke your promise?

What did it “cost” you to keep your vow/word/promise?

What did it cost in terms of your relationship with the person with whom you broke your word?

What did it cost in terms of your relationship with God?

What did it cost you when you failed to keep your promise?

What did it cost in terms of your relationship with the person with whom you broke your word?

What did it cost in terms of your relationship with God?

Record what each cost you and report back next week on what you learned.

Remember to start next week’s class by asking the group what they learned regarding how many promises they made this week, and how well they did at keeping their word.

Lesson 9

SAMSON, IF ONLY YOU HAD DONE IT MY WAY

Judges 13-16

I. Preparing for Battle

Does God work through even our bad choices and lousy attitudes?

If you think He does, why would He?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

Background: The Philistines – They were known as a seafaring, warlike people originating from the Aegean area (between Greece and Turkey). They tried taking on the Egyptians. They lost, but were encouraged by the Egyptians to settle in the area between them and western Judah, between Joppa to just south of Gaza. They appeared in minor roles back in Abraham’s day, but their greatest period of strength and influence in Israel was between 1200-1000 BC. They had no central government, but were ruled by five lords in five well-known cities: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron. These lords would unite, giving them greater military strength than the disunited Israelites.

SAMSON, 13.1—16.31

The story begins like all the others in Judges – sinful idol worship and oppression. But unlike the other stories, we hear no cry to God for help. Israel seemed to have grown content living under the rule of another nation. (See [15.11](#).)

The introduction to this section, seen so many times already, tells us *the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...* But this will be the last time we are told this. The evil did not stop again, or cease while there was any period of rest – for there would be no more rest. And, for the first time in Judges, there was no complete deliverance during the lifetime of this judge. The irony in the passage comes from Samson’s father’s name, Manoah, which means “rest” The very thing neither he nor Israel got.

Not only does Israel not repent and refrain from serving these gods, they also are *content* to live under the servitude of the Philistines. *In spite of Israel's not crying out for another deliverance, the faithful God of the Covenant was going to save them anyway.* He will be faithful even when His people are not.

Samson has four chapters dedicated to the story of his life, and how the incomplete deliverance he brought to Israel never lasted. The other judges had failures, but none like those of Samson. He had a clear calling from God, and his relationship with God was played out on the stage of history. He is listed in [Heb. 11.32](#) as one of the men of faith in the Old Testament. Yet this man's life raises many questions.

SAMSON'S MIRACLE BIRTH, Chapter 13

1. In [13.2-3](#), was there anything unusual about Samson's birth?
Yes. God brought this special child into the world in this way for a very specific purpose. He seemed to do this so all would know He was the one who brought this child into being, and He had a special plan for that child.

Samson
Tribe Dan
Territory fought for & in Dan & Judah (western part held by Philistines)
What were the idols? Not specified
Who was the enemy God used? Philistines
How long oppressed, judged and at rest? 40 years of oppression 20 years judged (during on-going oppression) No years of rest

What other Bible characters can you recall who were born by God supernaturally opening the womb?

Isaac, Rachael's children, John the Baptist...

Why would only THIS judge have a miracle background?

This story is about God and not this judge. This judge failed over and over, but God accomplished His plan through this man in spite of how he lived. This is nothing new in this book. We have seen again and again how the "heroes" failed, but God still accomplished what He had planned.

2. The Angel of the Lord announced to Manoah's wife this amazing news (13.3) and God's plans for the new baby (13.5). What did He tell her about this child?
- He will be a male child who must not be affected by alcohol even in the womb.
 - He will be committed by a sacred vow to the Lord as a Nazirite from conception.
 - He will **begin** to save Israel from the Philistines.

3. The Angel told her to ***eat noting unclean***. What does this tell you about the situation in Israel? Could the writer have added it for emphasis?

Many in Israel had ignored God and were violating God's food laws, which were given for their good.

4. God set Samson apart as a Nazirite (Jud.13.5), a man dedicated to the Lord. Read Num.6.1-8. What are the three parts of this vow?
- He/she was not to touch a dead body (man or animal).
 - He/she was not to drink anything related to something that was or could be misconstrued as being alcoholic.
 - His/her hair was not to be cut.
5. What details are given about the Angel in 13.21-23? [Note the list in optional Lesson 11]
- He is bringing the message about their no longer being barren (3).
 - He just appears, and His appearance is that of a man (6).
 - He tells Manoah's wife what to do and not do to safeguard the sacredness of the vow (4-5).
 - He predicts the future, as to the coming birth, the plan this child will fulfill, and how long it will last (7).
 - He commanded (14), showing His authority.
 - His identity was slowly revealed (15-20).
 - His name was withheld, but not... (18).
 - He accepted the sacrifice (20), left in the flame of the altar, and by doing so, Manoah and his wife came to realize Who He was.
 - He is called God (22).

6. Manoah asked the Angel His name. When he was told *it is wonderful*, what was He really telling Manoah?

The word *wonderful* is used in the Bible only here and in Psm.139.6 (*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*) The Angel's name, which is a description of Himself, should be understood as *incomprehensible*.

When you look at Psm.139, you see David expressing his knowledge of God as incomprehensible. You can feel the awe David feels in being trusted with this knowledge as well as the character of God. In Manoah's case, the Angel has delivered this message to him and his wife foretelling not only about their future son, but also what his purpose would be. This information was truly incomprehensible. Manoah and his wife were not only going to be blessed with a much longed-for son, but he had also been set apart from conception and chosen to begin to deliver Israel.

7. The key to understanding Samson's life comes in two forms:
 - a. **THE DIVINE PLAN**: Samson was raised up and commissioned before birth by God. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin Israel's deliverance from their enemies' god and might.
 - b. **THE HUMAN**: Despite God's commands for Samson as a Nazirite, Samson had his own ideas about how he would live his life. Samson was told about and raised under the parameters of the vow by his parents.

SAMSON'S MARRIAGE, Chapter 14

1. God had been at work in Samson's life from before his conception. Now He is ready to put Samson to work to accomplish what he was set apart to do.

We don't want to leave out the role Samson's parents played in his life. They raised him to live by this vow; but more importantly, they raised him to know the Lord. So, at this point in his life, Samson might have been aware it was the Lord Who was doing this stirring.

2. In 13.25, how do you see God beginning His work of defeating the Philistines through Samson? *The Holy Spirit did not work in this way with many in the OT. Samson was empowered by the Spirit to do great things. He could have done so much more in delivering Israel if he had followed the leading of the Spirit step-by-step.*

3. The stirrings of 13.25 became action in 14.1-4 - but whose? 14.4 is the key to the whole story. *His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord, for he [God] was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.* God was in charge here, not Samson or his parents. God had a plan, and He was going to carry it out. How much more effective might Samson have been, had he simply followed the leading of God's Spirit from the beginning?

4. Why did Samson want to marry this woman (14.1)? Was Samson wrong in his desires in 14.1-2, and his insistence in 14.3b?

Samson knew nothing about her, except she was a Philistine. He simply saw her, and decided he had to have her.

We can only speculate what Samson was like growing up. If what we see in his attitude in his adult life was the same attitude he had growing up, then he must have been a very strong-willed child. His attitude toward authority was “I want what I want.” His desire to have a wife was not wrong, but where he went to find one was.

Were Samson’s parents right in 14.3a?

They were right, and he was wrong. God had told Israel over and over not to intermarry with the people of the land, so as not to turn their hearts away from following Him. And, it didn’t take much for them to turn away! Make sure to have the class read Ex.34.16 and Deut.7.1-4. Help the class see how Samson lived up to the theme of Judges: He did what was right in his own eyes.

5. How do you explain this proposed marriage was *of the Lord*? (14.4)

Samson’s story sounds eerily like Esther’s. She found herself living in “such a time as this,” where to save her people she had to marry an unbelieving King. God told Israel not to marry any non-Israelite. Now, for His purpose, He works through this marriage to defeat His enemy.

6. The first evidence of Samson’s tremendous strength is in 14.5-6. Where did the source of his strength come from?

This verse clearly indicates his strength came only from the empowering of God’s Spirit. No other source is mentioned.

7. Note the sequence of consequences of the bad (sinful) decision in 14.2.

- He allowed himself to fall in love with a non-Israelite (14.2),
- taking him on a trip which brought on the lion incident (14.5-6),
- bringing on the event that caused the riddle (14.8,9,10-14),
- bringing on the pressure and deceit of Samson’s wife (14.15-18),
- bringing on the destruction (14.19) and laying the groundwork for the next situation (14.20)....

Yet we read in 14.4 how this was in the Lord’s plan, *for he* [God] *was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines*. How do you justify God’s using the sinful acts of Samson without justifying the sin?

Dr. Davis comments, “There would have been real comfort for Samson’s parents had they known; they didn’t realize this situation was “from Yahweh”; this does not mean they were wrong to object to Samson’s desires and action. Nor does it mean that Samson’s desires were virtuous or that his bull-headedness was right. It means that neither Samson’s foolishness nor his stubbornness is going to prevent Yahweh from accomplishing *his* design. Yahweh can and will use the sinfulness or stupidity of his servants as the camouflage for bringing his secret will to pass.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Davis, *Such a Great Salvation*, p.171.

8. Samson didn't tell his parents about the events of 14.5-6 & 7-8. Samson would not have the problems he had if he had allowed the call of God on his life to direct and shape his attitude. According to these verses, what was Samson's real attitude toward God and His vow?

All of his life, Samson knew the vow he was under. This act was a clear violation of that vow – the first we have recorded. God seems to have passed over it, too, as it was His plan to do through Samson what He knew needed most to be done. Samson knew if he had told his parents what he had done, they would have told him he needed to report to the Tabernacle and do all that was required to renew the vow he had broken. Moses gave instructions concerning how things were to be handled in order to renew a broken vow, but Samson ignored both God and the vow.



For Samson to reinstate the vow, he would have had to report to the priest at the Tabernacle, shave his head, and offer the required sacrifice. He was not willing to do these things.

Note: Bees do not build hives in carcasses. This incident was God's preparing His own way of destroying the Philistines (14.4).

9. Samson finds his way of provoking trouble with the Philistines by daring them to guess a riddle (14.14). What were the terms of this riddle?
- If you answer my riddle, I will...
 - If you don't answer the riddle, you must...

10. How would you describe what caused Samson to change his mind about not telling the answer to the riddle to his new wife? (14.16-17)

This is only the first time we will see Samson manipulated by his blindness from his love of a woman. She nagged him until he gave in to what she wanted. How stupid he must have felt when he heard the guests give the answer to the riddle. He knew exactly where the answer came from.

11. What was the source of his tremendous strength on this occasion? (14.19. Compare this to 14.5) For what reason was it given to him? (See 13.5 & 14.4.)

The first time this happened, Samson killed the lion. This violated the first part of the vow. Num.6.11 says this caused him to sin (accidentally). He refused to reinstate the vow and kept going anyway. At the wedding feast, there would have been alcohol, which would have broken the second part of the vow; and again, Samson showed no willingness to repent and reinstate the vow. The Lord's Spirit empowered Samson anyway in order to accomplish His plan to begin to destroy His enemy.

12. What would cause Samson to be SO angry after the Spirit empowered him to defeat thirty Philistines (14.19b)?

The words, *hot anger*, would be more literally translated: He was breathing fire through his nostrils. The picture here is of a fire-breathing dragon. This is perhaps the strongest reference to being fiercely angry found in the OT.

Having given these garments to those who coerced his wife into getting the answer to the riddle went against his pride and caused him to lose control to the level of this extreme anger.

This whole event gives us great insight into the character of Samson, and the mercy of God. Samson displayed almost nothing but a prideful attitude, one which caused him to continue to sin against God by indifferently breaking his vow and seeking to find his satisfaction in anything other than his God. Even King Nebuchadnezzar, after being humbled for his pride by God, said: ***Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.***

13. God did protect this man He chose to use (14.6), and God did use him to accomplish His plan to defeat the Philistines (13.5b). But how much was actually accomplished (14.19)...?

We must, at all times, keep in mind how this was God's plan against *His* enemies. These people hated God. In spite of what we might think of Samson's antics, God used them to bring about the destruction of His enemies. However, if Samson had sought the will of God, he might have accomplished so much more with his Spirit-given strength.

SAMSON'S IRRESPONSIBLE VENGEANCE Chapter 15

1. Samson's *hot anger* (14.19b) resulted in 14.20. This laid the groundwork for 15.1-3....
2. Samson's vengeance was now the occasion of a great slaughter (15.8 & 15.15). Can you find a pattern emerging that would produce little for God, and even that from wrong motives?

This turned out to be a hit and miss "deliverance" (or *salvation*, 15.18) of Israel from their oppressors. If Samson had been committed to seeking and doing God's will, there is no telling how much he would have accomplished. This would have saved Israel another century of oppression by these Philistines.

3. Do you see a problem with the instrument of destruction Samson uses?

The jawbone comes from a dead carcass, thereby causing him to violate his vow once again. However, God is still the one in charge, and He uses Samson to inflict His justice.

4. Desertion and anger (14.19) caused 14.20; Samson cooled off but had the problem of 15.1-2. Vengeance again blinded him to his own responsibility in all this (15.3). The fox incident solved nothing (15.4-8. Note 15.6). Vengeance belongs *only* to God (Ex.32.35). God was enacting His vengeance upon the Philistines through His agent – Samson.

5. God’s plan was for Samson to begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Because of Samson’s anger, his reaction appeared to go against God’s plan. Note 15.10-13. Then note Samson’s reasoning in 15.11b. What was it that was going wrong, and what was he thinking?

This was NOT his calling. His calling was to save Israel from the Philistines, not bring them to Israel’s door in anger. But Samson’s anger over a situation he himself had caused might have made the situation even more difficult for his own people!

Here we see Israel also failed to take advantage of the situation. With 3000 men, they could have backed Samson up; but instead they capitulated to the Philistine’s demand to turn Samson over to them. We were told back in 3.1-3, these nations were left by God in the land to test Israel. They failed the test, yet once again.

6. In 15.14-20, God, in His mercy, overruled Judah’s plans and partially delivered the people through Samson. Note that God did work here, in 15.14. Would God have worked in such a way if Samson had obeyed his call?

We were told back in 13.5, Samson would only *begin* to save Israel. It is always interesting to speculate upon the “what if” question, but we cannot come up with a satisfactory answer, except to say “God knew what He was doing.” However, from our vantage point, we can look into Israel’s future and see more. David, when he was fleeing from Saul, fled to the Philistines. They took him in and protected David from his own people. God’s ultimate plan was for David to deliver Israel from the Philistines, and He would use this to raise David up in the eyes of the people of Israel as their new king who would defeat all their enemies and solidify them as a great nation.

7. What difference do you see in Judah’s faith in 15.11 compared to 1.1-7?

When Israel first took over the land, Judah led the way against God’s sworn enemies. They were the example for the other tribes to follow. Here they sat, satisfied to be enslaved. We are told God was *seeking an opportunity against the Philistines* (14.4), and Israel was letting it pass. But, He would keep His covenant promise to give Israel the land.

How this conflict between the Philistines and Samson went... in reverse

The Philistines...	but Samson...
The Philistines wanted Samson for slaughtering their people	but Samson did this because they killed his wife
The Philistines killed Samson’s wife because he burned their fields	but Samson did this because his father-in-law gave away his wife to another man
... but her father did this because Samson went away angry	but Samson did this because his wife betrayed his confidence by revealing the riddle
... but his wife did to avoid being burned by her people	

8. Note God's care for Samson's plight (15.18-19), even though Samson got himself into this spot. This is grace. Grace as only God could give it. When He has a plan to use someone, He does everything necessary to carry out that plan. Whatever we might say about Samson and the way he lived his life, God still cared greatly for this man, and He satisfied all of his real needs (but not the ones Samson *thought* were his needs).

9. Compare Samson's statements in 15.3 and 15.18a. In 15.3, he admitted his motives were not the purest. In 5.18, he recognized God had given a great victory (*salvation*) through him. It is too bad he had to keep talking (15.18b). He saw what a great victory God had given him, but he could not see how God could supply a drink of water. Yet God, in His love, provided what Samson needed, and in a miraculous way.

10. Now we are told Samson somehow "judged" Israel for twenty years. What did he accomplish? Ultimately, the story was *not* about Samson - he was just the character carrying through the action in the story. The storyline *was* about God's teaching Israel, through war, through Samson, so they would know Who He is, and what He is capable of accomplishing. Remember from Judges 2, God wanted Israel to learn who He is and what He can do to satisfy their every need on every level (see Lesson 2). Therefore, the goal of the story was not to see what Samson accomplished, but what we could learn about God, and the strength He provided. Israel received no relief as with past judges. They never cried out to God for help, so what He brought was the judgment He knew was necessary at that time. What did Samson accomplish? He accomplished exactly what he was set apart by God to do – begin to save Israel.

SAMSON'S DOWNFALL AND DEFEAT, Chapter 16

Read 15.7b. From what Samson said here, we are left to understand there was as much as a twenty-year gap between these two chapters, with no details about Samson's "judging" during that time.

1. God gave Samson his extraordinary power to be used to accomplish what God called him to do.



In 16.1-3, for what purpose did Samson use his unusual gift?

Using his extraordinary ability for something which in no way honored God was the same as what the Apostle Paul talked about with the misuse of spiritual gifts in the Church (1 Cor.12-14). Samson, through a great demonstration of his strength, used his gift to show off, thus revealing to the Philistines he had returned. This would lead into the next story, where the Philistines wanted to find out where his great strength came from.

for this work?

2. Does 16.1-4 speak of the Holy Spirit coming upon him

No! And neither does this whole event accomplish anything towards God's plan to defeat His enemies.

Where, then, did his strength come from to perform this massive feat?

When we exercise our spiritual gift, which is given to us by the Spirit, we are empowered to do what He enables us to do. However, Paul, in 1 Cor.12, points out that these gifts could be misused. So, the gift was still there, but not always empowered by the Holy Spirit. This misuse is generally associated with pride, as demonstrated by Samson. Pride comes from not being satisfied with what God has given to us, and not using it in the way and with the timing He directs. When it is done in our own strength, it is sin.

3. Note how the enemy of Israel exploited the weakness of Samson (16.4-5):

The first attempt by Delilah is in 16.6-9. What should Samson's answer have been to the question of 16.6? Why did he answer as he did in 16.7?

His answer should have been a definitive, "No." Then he should have walked away from her, knowing where she wanted to take him. It was not as if he had never been through this before. (14.15-18)

The second attempt is in 16.10-12. What was Samson doing in his replies to this woman?

He toyed with Delilah as if this were a game. Samson never takes God's plan for him seriously. For him it is always something to be used to satisfy only his own desires.

The third attempt is in 16.13-14. What do you think of her complaint in 16.13? Is it any different than 16.6,10?

This time Samson fell into his own trap and got far too close to the truth she was seeking. The thought of even mentioning his hair was wrong.

Samson's interest in women is woven throughout his story. Note how, although God did not approve of his conduct, He did use this for the eventual punishment of the Philistines.

The fourth attempt is in 16.13-17. How did she gain what she wanted (16.16)?

And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. Samson was worn down and finally betrayed his calling, and especially his Lord. He allowed his weakness for finding his satisfaction in life through his poor relationships with women and sex to cause him to experience the cataclysmic consequences of his actions.

How do you suppose **she made him sleep on her knees** (16.19)?

Sometimes the Lord brings consequences immediately. But in this case, He waits. There is a short gap of time between Samson's confession and the night he loses his hair. It is really hard to believe he was gullible enough to have told his secret and still been self-satisfied enough to sleep so soundly. Here he again fell for the lure of this seductress and slept. After all, she had a LOT of money invested in his cooperating!

Do you think Samson REALLY believed 16.17? How do you know?

And he told her all his heart. Meaning, he left nothing out. There must have been a marked difference in the way he answered her. This time she knew he was finally telling her the truth. But, when he woke up this time, even though his strength was gone, he thought he would be able to do what he could do before.

16.20 doesn't say the cutting of his hair caused his weakness. What did?

Samson may have believed his strength was in his hair. But, this is the clearest verse telling us it was God leaving him (taking away His empowering) that caused him to become like all other mortals.

Up until now Samson had broken only two of the three-part requirement to his vow. This was the final breaking of the entire vow, and there was no coming back from it - at least temporarily.

4. Note that, up until now, the Philistines had not put in an appearance, though they were close by. 16.18 indicates they had grown tired of this game, but were persuaded to try once more. They were desperate to get rid of this man!

5. This story was recorded by God for all of Israel to hear. Why was it important for Israel to hear that God had departed from Samson?

Samson was Israel in microcosm. God does not tolerate sin. He put up with a great deal from Samson, as He did with Israel. But there was a limit, as Samson finally found out.

SAMSON'S LAST DAYS

1. How would you describe Samson's terrible treatment by the Philistines (16.21)?

It was what Samson allowed his eyes to see that got him in trouble throughout this story. He never seems to believe there would be consequences for his past actions. He did lose his sight, but he lost far more – the joy of having an intimate relationship with the Lord.

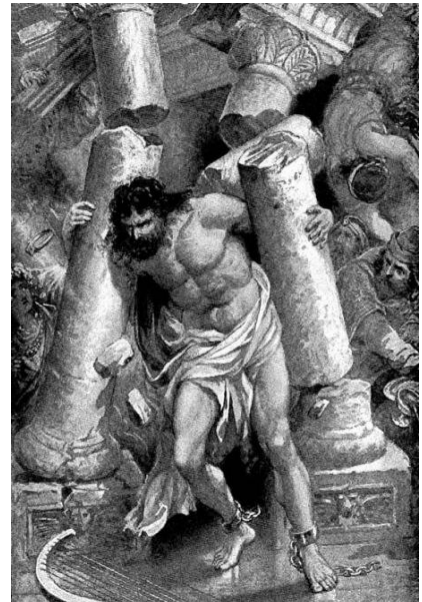
Have the class reread [14.1-3,7; 16.1](#).

What difference might it have made in Samson's life and work, as well as his relationship with the Lord, if he had lived by Job's philosophy? [Job.31.1a](#)

[Job.31.1a](#) – *I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then can I gaze at a virgin?*

Samson's eyes were gone, so he could no longer misuse them. Think through what difference this might have made with his intimacy with the Lord as he grinded the grain and had plenty of time to think about his life.

The grinding of grain was a woman's job. The Philistines had Samson do such demeaning work as revenge for his burning their grain earlier. They meant it for harm, but God used it to bring Samson to his knees in recognition of his need for God to be the Lord in his life – not his strength.



2. A time to make sport of him came on a day when what was happening (16.23-27)?

This was the Philistine's day of celebrating the victory of Dagon, their god, over the true God. This was exactly what Samson should have never allowed to happen. Here was God's deliverer, having been conquered by God's enemies, being shown how the Philistine's god had instead delivered them.

However, God's story was not yet finished.

3. What had begun to happen in 16.22?

The Philistines may have blinded Samson, but God blinded them from seeing Samson's hair had begun to grow again. Remember, Samson's strength was not really in his hair but in God's empowering! God had predetermined He would remain faithful to Samson, as he would remain a Nazirite until death.

What does this show you about God?

God was about to show the Philistines and all of Israel, He and He alone was God. No idol can ever do what only God can do. God would deliver Israel one more time, so they would know who He is and what He was capable of doing for them!

4. Note the humiliation in 16.23-24, as the people give credit to their god for the capture of Samson. *Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to rejoice, and they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." And when the people saw him, they praised their god. For they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the revenger of our country, who has killed many of us."* God would never be satisfied to allow a false god to receive the glory He alone deserved!

5. Samson seemed to realize he was finished, as far as being of any use to God. In 16.28, he offered himself. What does this show you had happened during his time in prison?
He had a lot of time to think about his life and actions. There might even have been a lot of repenting.

6. What two things do you learn from Samson's prayer in 16.28?
- He had learned of late who he really was – a servant of the Lord with a special purpose for his life. Even though his hair had begun to grow back, it was only at this point Samson called upon the Lord to give him his strength back. He recognized his strength was from the Lord and not his hair.
 - The human side of Samson was still evident. His prayer was not for God to be glorified in his death, but for him to be avenged for the loss of his eyes.

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

In Lesson One, it was pointed out how the stories in the Bible are not primarily about people, places, dates and events. They are about God working through each of these to accomplish His will through whomever He chooses.

- If you were writing Samson's biography, how would you portray him? What characterized his lifestyle? How seriously did he take his vow? Did he truly understand the mission God had for him in delivering Israel?
- Now, if you were God writing *History*, how would you have portrayed Samson?

3. What did God accomplish through Samson in

14.6 – then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.

14.19 – And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon and struck down thirty men of the town and took their spoil and gave the garments to those who had told the riddle.

15.14b – Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms become as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

16.20 – 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.

16.30 – And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.

4. Samson was promised to be a Nazirite until death (13.7). What might help us to understand the story can be found in 2 Tim.2.13: *...if we are faithless, he remains faithful.*
5. How do we allow the knowledge of being set apart to God shape and direct our attitude to His call on our lives?

6. In studying Samson’s life, we transparently see man’s idolatrous heart becoming a lifestyle. Samson, despite the knowledge of his being set apart and called before conception, chose to ignore his relationship with his Lord. He lived his life his way. Yet, in writing *History*, God places Samson in the Hall of Faith in Heb.11. Our immediate reaction is to wonder why he is even there. We even say to ourselves, why would God do such a thing? Why do you think God placed him there?
He is there because he displayed faith in what God could do through him. Obviously it wasn’t much faith, but even that can give us hope. God has a plan for our lives, and He will accomplish what needs to be done. In spite of his idolatrous heart, and his searching for satisfaction in everything but God, God still loved him because of His covenant promise to be his God, and do for His people what they needed most from Him.

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

This lesson should make us think how easily an idolatrous heart can derail our behavior. ([Matt.15.17-19](#))

What has God called you to do that you have yet to do? You are facing spiritual warfare, which is a battle for your heart. Kyle Idelman, in his book, says it this way:

There are gods at war within each of us, and they battle for the place of glory and control in our lives. What keeps us from truly following Jesus is that our hearts are pursuing something or someone else. Behind the sin you're struggling with, the discouragement you're dealing with, the lack of purpose you're living with is a false god that is winning the war for your heart.¹⁹

Can you imagine what might have been accomplished in Samson's heart if he had learned to be satisfied to live his life in response to God's purpose? With that in mind, what areas of your heart do you need to begin to turn over to the Lord to change, so you can live more satisfied in Him and more useful to Him? Are you willing to begin to pray this week for the Holy Spirit to empower you to live this way? If so, write the prayer here.

Now make a plan to keep track of how you do each day or week, depending on what needs to change.

¹⁹ Kyle Idleman. *God's at War: Defeating the idols that battle for your heart*. Zondervan, back cover.

LIST OF LEVITICAL CITIES

IN JUDAH AND SIMEON

1. *Hebron/Kiriath-arba*
2. *Libnah* ?
3. *Jattir* ?
4. *Eshtemoa*
5. *Holon* (1 Chron. = *Hilen*)
6. *Debir*
7. *Ashan* ? (Joshua = *Ain*) ?
8. *Juttah* (omitted in 1 Chron.)
9. *Beth-shemesh*

IN BENJAMIN

10. *Gibeon* (omitted in 1 Chron.)
11. *Geba*
12. *Anathoth*
13. *Alemeth* (Joshua = *Almon*)

IN EPHRAIM

14. *Shechem*
15. *Gezer*
16. *Kibzaim* or *Jokmean* ?
17. *Beth-horon*

IN DAN

18. *Elteke* (omitted in 1 Chron.) ?
19. *Gibbethon* (omitted in 1 Chron.)
20. *Aijalon*
21. *Gath-rimmon* ?

IN MANASSEH

22. *Taanach* (1 Chron. = *Aner*)
23. *Ibleam* (Joshua=*Gath-rimmon*; 1 Chron=*Bileam*)
24. *Golan*
25. *Beeshterah* or *Ashtaroth*

IN ISSACHAR

26. *Kishon* (Joshua = *Kishion*; 1 Chron. = *Kedesh*) ?
27. *Daberath*
28. *Ramoth* (Joshua = *Jarmuth*) ?
29. *En-gannim* (1 Chron. = *Anem*)

IN ASHER

30. *Mashal* (Joshua = *Mishal*) ?
31. *Abdon*
32. *Helkath* (1 Chron. = *Hukok*) ?
33. *Rohob*

IN NAPHTALI

34. *Kedesb*
35. *Hammoth-dor* (1 Chron. = *Hammon*) ?
36. *Kartan* or *Kiriathaim*

IN ZEBULON

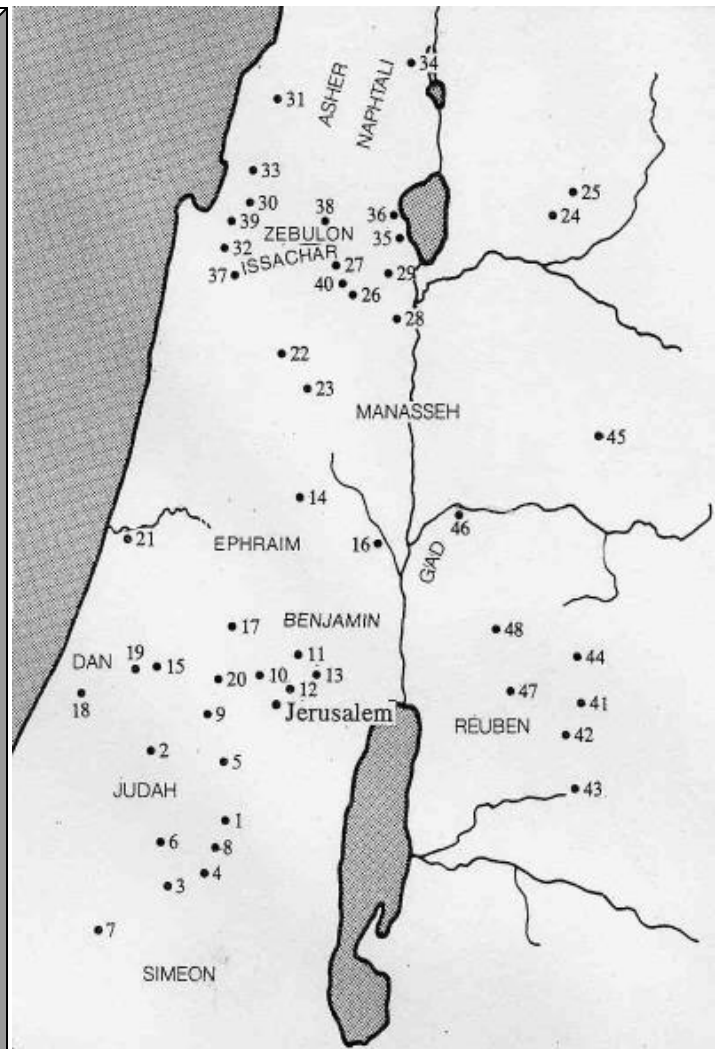
37. *Jokneam* (Joshua = *Kartah*; 1 Chron. omits)
38. *Rimmon* (Joshua=*Dimnah*; 1 Chron.=*Rimmono*)
39. *Nahalal* (omitted by 1 Chron.) ?
40. *Tabor* (omitted by Joshua) ?

IN RUBEN

41. *Bezer* ?
42. *Jahaz* ?
43. *Kedemoth* ?
44. *Mephaath* ?

IN GAD

45. *Ramoth in Gilead*
46. *Mahanaim* ?
47. *Heshbon* ?
48. *Jazer* ?



Map is from *ISBE*, vol. 3, 1986 edition.

List of Levitical Cities is modified from *ISBE*, vol. 3, 1986 edition.

“?” after the city indicates that the location is not certain.

NOTE: Cities 1-13 are designated for both the Aaronic Priests as well as the other Levites. The locations of these cities are more strategically set to be in close proximity of the central sanctuary.

Lesson 10

BUT THERE WAS A KING IN ISRAEL!

There are but two religions --- Christianity and paganism, the worship of God and idolatry. A third between them is not possible. Where idolatry ends, there Christianity begins; and where idolatry begins, there Christianity ends.

Friedrich Jacobi

I. Preparing for Battle

Society today preaches everyone needs to live by the codes of tolerance and diversity. What keeps a society from living according to what is right in their own eyes?

What are some of the areas society and government are forcing Christians to tolerate according to their agendas?

II. The Battle for Satisfaction

This section begins like no other in the book. There was no mention of Israel seeking their satisfaction in idols or needing God to raise up oppressors to bring them back. There was no judge and there was no rest. There was also no word God was angry. But, idolatry was very present and there was the repeated emphasis on how *everyone did what was right in his own eyes* and *in those days there was no king in Israel*. (17.6, 18.1, 19.1, 21.15)

ILLUSTRATIONS OF APOSTASY DEMONSTRATED AMONG THE LEVITES

The Levites were the one tribe in Israel whose sole responsibility was to care for the things of the Lord, helping the priests do their work for the Lord (Ex.28.1), and as helpers at the Tabernacle (Num.1.51,53). It was from among this group of people, the author of Judges drew his illustrations of the depth of apostasy to which the nation had gone as they *did what was right in their own eyes*, without God.

SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY OF THE LEVITE – Chapter 17

Who were the Levites? Levi was the third son of Jacob, and Levi's descendants were God's choice to teach His Word throughout Israel. Only those descended from Moses' brother, Aaron, would serve as priests at the Tabernacle (and later the Temple). All Levites were to be supported by the other tribes by their tithes. As one of the original tribes of Israel, they inherited no territories of their own. Instead, they were given choice land in and around 48 cities strategically located throughout Israel. (See map above.) The responsibility of the Levites who did not minister around the Tabernacle was to teach Israel the Word of God. As long as the people tithed, the Levites would be able to instruct them in the ways of the Lord. The problem was, the people failed to give their tithes, forcing the Levites to fend for themselves to feed their own families. Consequently, Israel starved spiritually and neither knew God, nor what He desired to do for His people.

By the time of these stories, the Levites were not well-schooled, either. The Levites mentioned in these two stories were not living in their assigned cities, nor were they doing what they were assigned to do. In fact, as you read their stories, you will quickly see either how little they knew of the Law of Moses or how little they cared about it.

Summary of Chapters 17-18: Chapter 17 begins with a Levite who is **not** of the priestly line of Aaron. He left home to *stay wherever he might find a place* and happened upon Micah's house. Micah was an idolatrous Ephraimite, and he invited the Levite to stay with him and be "a father and a priest" to him, in return for pay, clothes, and expenses. Some Danites, looking for room to expand, made the acquaintance of the Levite as they came upon Micah's house. A short time later, they returned to Micah's house and took both the Levite and all the idols, moved on to capture and re-settle a northern city, and then began a new religion for themselves in their new location with the help of their Levite.

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THIS STORY

1. Throughout five chapter (17-21), the Lord is mentioned only in 17.2,3,13, and 18.5,6,10. How is the Lord viewed by the people in these times?

He was given lip service – at best. Because God created us with the need in our hearts to worship, Micah was determined to worship. Yet, left to our own devices and wondering hearts, we will worship what is easiest instead of doing it God's way.

2. **Micah** – his name means, "Who is like Yahweh?"

3. The story begins with a *very* dysfunctional family. What are we told about this family?
 - a. The father was absent, for whatever reason;
 - b. the mother was wealthy;
 - c. she gave her son a godly name,
 - d. but she sanctioned the creation of images of God.
 - e. The son stole from his mother and only offered back what he stole after she uttered a curse on the one who stole from her.
 - f. Mom then dedicated the returned money to God,
 - g. but then she gave Him only a fraction of the amount for the making of forbidden images.
 - h. Her grandson was ordained as a priest, though he was not from the God-ordained line of priests.

4. In 17.2, Mom uttered a curse on the thief. A curse was an act of witchcraft intended for harm. The real curse that should have been heeded came from God in Deut.27.15: ***Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the Lord, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.***

5. Read Lev.6.1-6. What did God's Law require Micah to do when he gave back the money?
He was to restore the amount he stole *plus* 20% as his penalty.

How might this policy change the way we do things in our country today?

Instead of sending people to prison for things like theft, they should be required to pay it back to the offended party along with the 20% penalty. As things are now, the fine they pay benefits only the court, and because the offender goes to prison, the victim gets nothing back.

6. ***Ephod***– We saw one of these back when Gideon made one. What was the result of Gideon's "good idea?" See Jud.8.27.
And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family.

- Bethlehem was not the Levite's home, he was only spending time there trying to find something to do. Bethlehem was not one of the 9 Levitical cities set aside for the priests in Judah. (See map on page 111.) Finding nothing there, the Levite moved north through Benjamin to Ephraim. He didn't even look for work in towns designated for Levites.

This Levite should have been seeking opportunities to teach the people of Israel the Law of God. Because the Levites were not paid as they should have been, they not only had to make their own living, but they also needed someone to teach them the Law.

- If the rest of Israel had followed the teachings of God, what would they have done to Micah, his family, and this Levite?

The tribal elders of Ephraim would have had the responsibility to stone the Levite to death. This may seem harsh, but these were supposed to be the people of God, with whom He had made a covenant to love them and take care of them. This was a deliberate slap in the face of God to make such an idol.

SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY OF THE DANITES – Chapter 18

Dan, for whom the tribe is named, was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, the elder of the two sons born to him by Rachel's maidservant Bilhah (Gen.30.1-6). The tribe was given their allotted land by Joshua (Jos.19.40-46). God told Israel He had already given the land to them; all they needed to do was to take it by His might. Instead, like all the other tribes, Dan failed to follow through (Jos.19.47-48; Jud.1.34ff). As a result, they were forced to live in the hill country and not on the fertile plains below. This was not God's fault; they failed to defeat God's enemies as they had seen others do by His strength throughout the battles in Joshua.

The Danites, because they failed to take the territory given to them by the Lord, decided to take land elsewhere. They sent five men to spy out the land. On their journey, they came to Micah's house. They recognized the accent of the Levite and asked counsel for their upcoming search. They spied out Laish (north of Israel) and returned home. Six hundred soldiers went out to take Laish. As they passed by Micah's house, they seized Micah's idols and his Levite. Micah and his neighbors pursued them, but were outnumbered. After Dan defeated Laish, Micah's idol became the official tribal god of the Danites. With their own priest, the Levite (and later on, the Levite's descendants), the tribe of Dan established an independent religion apart from the rest of Israel.



1. What do the following verses show you about the spiritual condition of Israel?

18.3-6 – All Israel knew where God’s Tabernacle was (just a few miles from Micah’s house), yet they chose not to go there to worship or find answers from God. They knew what they should do, but refused to obey God’s commands. They had a knowledge of God, but their heart had no relationship with Him.

18.10 – God had defeated mightier armies before their eyes, yet they went against a defenseless people the Lord never told them to defeat. (Laish was the responsibility of Naphtali to defeat.)

18.18-20 – Their unbelieving hearts led them to become little more than common thieves, with no regard for anyone else.

2. What does 18.6 show you about the Levite, spiritually?

He did not know the Lord personally, and wound up misrepresenting God. He knew only the right formula he needed to give the Danites. Neither the Levite nor these Danites had a relationship with the Lord, but knew how to use His name for what they thought would be their benefit.

3. 18.10 records the report given by the five men to their countrymen concerning the land they wanted to capture. How does their use of the phrase, ***God has given it into your hand***, define them?

Their using this phrase is like what so many today do, even in the church, who know how to speak like Christians, but their hearts are far from Him. This statement is, in fact, a lie. God told them to take the land they were currently living in, *never* this extra land. This was a crime of convenience.

4. In 18.18-20, what was the real motive that made the Levite’s heart glad?

If he thought he had struck it rich when Micah hired him, he must have thought he was now in heaven with this new offer to be the priest for an entire tribe. The Danites appealed to the prideful part of the Levite’s heart, leading him to become the one who actually stole from Micah.

5. Micah finds out what happened and set out to reclaim his gods, **which he made**. How “powerful” were Micah’s gods shown to be in 18.24? Do you suppose this occurred to Micah?

Micah built these gods, and then gave them “power.” Now he felt his gods were helpless enough to need his help. The same is true for Islam today; they feel their god, Allah, needs to be defended by them. How weak a god is that? On top of that, Micah admitted he was the one who made these gods!

Why didn’t the heathen consider this?

Because of our sin in Adam, and the blinding by Satan (2 Cor.4.4), the non-Christian does not have the capacity to think through the logical consequences of his beliefs. He stops short of coming to the truth.

From 18.26, doesn’t it appear the care and protection was somewhat backward? Who should protect whom? Who, however, was concerned here?

God had proven repeatedly, He would be the one who would win their victories. They could depend on Him for their satisfaction at every level of need. (Remember the *Hierarchy of Need* in Lesson 2?) How foolish of Micah to believe the gods *he made* could protect him.

6. From one point of view, how much can you blame the sons of this Levite for going on to follow in their father’s footsteps in this self-styled “Priesthood”?

The sins of the father were passed on to the children through what they were taught. George Barna learned from his research that the spirituality of a child is in place by the time the child is nine, and this comes more from the influence of the parents than anyone else.²⁰

7. So far in the Book of Judges, have you noticed anyone willing to die for what he believed about the God of Israel, such as we find in 18.22-25 for idols?

Micah wasn’t even willing to fight for his gods. He was more willing to run away in humiliation and defeat.

²⁰ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. Ventura, CA: Regal. 2003.

THREE CAUSES AND THEIR EFFECTS OF *DOING WHAT WAS RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES*

1. Note the prevailing *spiritual* attitude in 17.6b, and how well this fit in with the prevailing *political* attitude noted in 18.1. What difference did the writer think there would be if there was a king? If the writer felt there would have been a difference in Israel if there was a godly king, then he didn't understand there was no human king who could change the habits and hearts of the people. Or, did the writer really intend to say, *There was a King in Israel, but the people refused to follow Him*, then we can see where he was going.²¹

2. From 18.30b, how long did Dan's false religion last?

The writer established for us the Danite's *false religion* continued until the Captivity of the Northern Kingdom in 722BC. In 18.31b, he tells us the Danite's *carved image* remained until the Tabernacle was moved from Shiloh, which was accomplished by David after he became king. This would have been at least 100 years after this false worship began at Dan's new home.

To what could you attribute this longevity?

It seems that, in all this time, there was no one mentioned who came to the truth, nor anyone who cared enough to reach the Danites with the gospel from any other tribe. This tragedy was worse than that of the Canaanites. These were Israelites, the people of God, but they had no regard for their God and the blessings they had experienced from Him.

3. Why do you suppose the author of Judges points out the house of God was in Shiloh (18.31)?

All Israel knew where the Tabernacle was. This was to be the central place of worship and sacrifice for ALL Israel. This was not optional. God established this, not man. God designed only one place for them to come, and that was through Him (Jesus). This story is a microcosm of how the world insists on trying to find a way to satisfy on its own the need He has built into us for Him.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR SIN

Dan's migration north encouraged Israel to continue practicing their idolatry, being far from the Tabernacle of God. After the division of Israel into north and south following Solomon's death, the northern king, Jeroboam, set up two national shrines; one at Shiloh in the south, and the other at Laish in the north in Dan. So Dan was "promoted" from being a local idol center to one of two national centers. Ultimately, all this came crashing down on them when God punished the northern kingdom by cruelly taking them captive into Assyria in 722BC. Listen to what God said about this:

²¹ Dr. Ralph Davis said this about what we wrote: The "godly king" view claims only that such a king would so rule and control matters that such religious and moral chaos would not have free course – not that he could change people's hearts.

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria...And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God...and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out...And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right...provoking the Lord to anger...But they would not listen...They despised his statutes and his covenant...They went after false idols...they abandoned all the commandments of the Lord their God...And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. 2 Kings 17:6-17

Those who remained in Dan's original territory eventually disappeared as they were absorbed into Judah.

Micah – tried to find satisfaction

In having more money - seeking security

In a father figure - seeking security

In having more gods than One - seeking false gods instead of the One true God

In worshipping his own way - seeking to worship the creation rather than the Creator

In having his own priest - seeking to worship, but not God's way

Micah's mother – tried to find satisfaction

In her wealth - seeking safety and security

In having more gods than One - seeking false gods instead of the One true God

Levite – tried to find satisfaction

In finding a city to live in not set aside by God - not being content with where God had placed him

In playing a part not given to him by God - trying to be someone other than who God intended for him to be

In having more gods than One - seeking false gods instead of the One true God

In desiring greater status when offered by deception – not being satisfied in what God called him to do

The Danites – tried to find satisfaction

In finding a place to live not approved by God – not being content with what God had given them

In finding more than what they had – not being content with what God had given them

In wanting more gods than One – seeking false gods instead of the One true God

In being willing to steal someone else's gods and priest –coveting idols

In being content in their sin for generations – being content to pass on the sins of the fathers

Laish – a city self-content with what it had, and life, but not in God - they already had their "reward"



*For now they will say:
“We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord;
And a king – what could he do for us?” (Hosea 10.3)*

ANOTHER LEVITE - Chapter 19

The spiritual apostasy of the nation of Israel during the times of the judges was illustrated in the story of the wandering Levite priest in Chapters 17 & 18. The author now presents the moral side of Israel's apostasy, using once again a Levite.

BACKGROUND IMPRESSIONS OF THIS STORY – Read Chapter 19

1. This woman (19.1) was not the “primary” wife²² of this Levite, although her relationship is loosely called “wife” in 20.4. What were the feelings of this Levite for this woman in the following verses, and what was her relationship to him?

19.2-3 – And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him.

19.25 – But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning...

19.26-28 – And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door ... where her master was, until it was light. And her master rose up... and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door....He said to her, “Get up, let us be going.” But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey... and went away to his home.

19.29 – And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb...and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.



²² Concubine: This woman would have been a secondary wife; a slave, but with more freedom. Their ethical treatment was covered by the Mosaic Law (Deut.21.10-14). This means the Levite probably had a wife somewhere, but was not moving with her. Had he simply abandoned her? We don't know, but we do see him trying to hold on to one who was not his only wife.

2. Where have we seen these types of characters before in Judges? 19.22-24

It sounds like the same type of people Abimelech associated with when he first left home. But, there is also the eerie reminder of the story of when Lot went down to Sodom.

3. From other parts of the book of Judges, there are evidences life was cheap and living was apathetic and callous as far as any spiritual or moral values were concerned. In spite of this, however, write out what is said in 19.30:

And all who saw it said, "Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt; consider it, take counsel, and speak." Even amongst the most immoral people, there were those who would cry out against injustices.

4. What was the purpose behind the action of the Levite in 19.29, as illustrated in 1 Sam.11.7?

He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!"

This was a common practice in this time. It was a way of rallying the different tribes. However, they cut up animals – NOT people!

5. Why do you suppose the author chose *this* story for his narrative?

God had moved Israel into this land to punish the sin existing there since before the time of Abraham. (Gen.15.16) But the sin committed by His own people had become as intolerable as the Canaanites' had to be dealt with. It showed just how far the depravity of man can sink.

6. They came to the city of Gibeah. What were the conditions there? (19.15b,22,25)

These men showed no respect for the custom of hospitality, they were given to riotous living, and their sexual exploits showed no moral limits. They had sunk at least as low as the people of Canaan.

7. From what you have read of the story so far, evaluate the Levite's decision made in 19.12.

The Levite believed there was more good to be found in Israel than in the pagans living in Jerusalem. But he was to learn just how depraved Israel had become.

8. What type of emotion does this Levite express for his "wife" in 19.28? What must their relationship have been like?

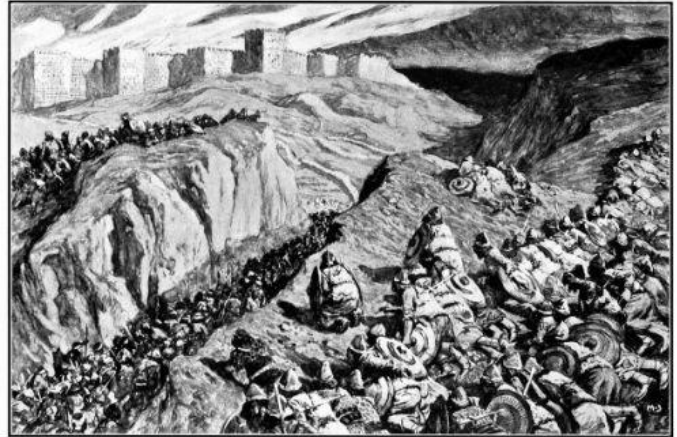
She had left him one time before (19.2), and it seems he has never really forgiven her for her unfaithfulness.

9. What level of depravity is described in 19.30?

As low as the people of Israel sank in this book, there still was the realization that some things were just not right or tolerable. This sin they felt needed to be punished.

CIVIL WAR – Chapter 20

1. The nation rallied to the call. (20.1-2) How many sins, apart from the murder of this woman, can you list in Chapter 19 thus far?



Why was it that *murder* stirred the people, when the other sins did not?

It was the way she was murdered. This was a gang rape and murder by people who were part of God's covenant family. Now the rest of the family was upset, and wanted to punish the evil.

2. Compare the actual story (19.22-25) and the Levite's testimony to his questioners (20.4-7)? What did he tell them, and what did he leave out?

What he told them

1. I spent the night there instead of with pagans in Jerusalem
2. The town "leaders" came after me
3. They meant to kill me
4. They grabbed my concubine only and violated her

What he left out

1. These were the worthless men of the town who came after him to have sex with me
2. My host offered both his virgin daughter and his concubine to them instead of me
3. They took only my concubine. [Whom *he* threw out!]

3. Was the sentence passed on Gibeah in 20.10 reasonable?

The Israelites were rightfully outraged. But remember, they were led to believe it was the leaders of Gibeah who did this. However, keep in mind the depth of the sin of the rest of Israel recorded in Judges.

4. Read 20.18,23,26-28. Why did God enter into this situation each of the three times Israel asked about the battles?

Bethel was where the Tabernacle of God was located at this time. Unlike in times past, they did not just cry out to the Lord for help, they simply went and sought Him out as if they did this all the time. However, this time the Lord had lessons for more than just Gibeah.

How did they approach God?

20.18 – They approached God as if nothing were wrong between Israel and God. They offered Him no sacrifice or worship. They simply threw a question at Him. God gave them a very blunt answer – ***Judah shall go up first.*** But He did not promise them victory.

20.23 – This time, there was crying out, but again, no repentance, no sacrifice, no worship. Their weeping was more from their loss in battle than from their recognizing their sin. Again, they were given a blunt answer, ***Go up against them.*** But there was still no promise of victory.

20.26-28 – This time, things were different. Everyone went before the Lord, and they fasted and made offerings. This time, God told them they would have victory.

Why would God side with Israel (who had demonstrated they had no time for Him) against Gibeah (who also had no time for Him)?

He didn't. At least not at first. He had lessons for both Benjamin as well as the rest of Israel to learn. There was punishment for sin for both sides as well.

5. How many men did Israel lose in 20.21,25? How many men did Benjamin lose (20.35, 44-45)? Did anybody win?

Israel – In the first two battles, 40,000 were lost. They sent the entire army at first (20.2,9-10). An unknown amount was lost in the third battle (20.31b,39).

Benjamin – None are mentioned as lost in the first two battles, but 25,100 in the last.

Who won? -

Does this explain God's part in all of this? If so, how?

Clearly, God had taught Israel a hard lesson about how they "handle" Him. After their lesson was learned, the Benjaminites received theirs. What is clearer still is God's part in all this; for the writer states: ***And the LORD defeated Benjamin before Israel....*** Note here how the Covenant name of God is used. He was the one who would keep His covenant promise to His people.

6. Was the punishment in proportion to the crime? See 20.43-48.

For God to have stopped the punishment where He did gives us a clear indication He punished according to what was deserved.

CHAIN REACTIONS – Chapter 21

1. How would you describe the emotions of the Israelites at the time they made this vow to the Lord in 21.1?

This was "mob mentality." When a group gets together and the adrenalin kicks in, the group starts thinking all as one, sometimes regardless of what the suggestions might be or lead to. After all, what was the purpose of this vow? Would it have really accomplished anything? Probably not.

2. The tribe of Benjamin almost became extinct. (20.47) How many were left? 600 men. They had killed off all the women and children when they invaded the cities.

What was the oath Israel foolishly took in 21.1?

None of the tribes would give their daughters in marriage to a Benjaminite.

What does their question exemplify in 21.3?

This was the consequence of the rash vow they had taken. Now they would lose one of the 12 tribes of Israel. It would have been bad enough if the enemies of Israel had wiped out Benjamin, but they had to do it themselves.

3. What lesson did Israel learn about asking God for anything? 21.4

They learned through their three attempts that, to get an answer from God, He must be approached in reverence and repentance. This was a critical lesson, and now they were seeking another answer from God, and doing it His way.

4. After the fury of the battle was over, Israel realized what they had done. (21.6) What was the consequence of their action?

Benjamin was all but eliminated from being a tribe in Israel. Now they had to figure out if there was a legitimate way of undoing their vow without breaking it.

5. Another oath had been previously taken (21.5 – killing Israelites in order to get wives for the sinful Benjaminites) and was used to correct the problem caused by the oath of 21.1 (they would not give their daughters in marriage to any surviving Benjaminite). The taking of an oath was already discussed (righteous versus sinful) in the lesson on Jephthah. By comparing these two oaths, what can you learn?

6. Now another entire Israelite city was destroyed to simply provide wives for the Benjaminites (21.10-12). But they came up short; by how many?

The 400 potential wives they captured were not enough, as there were still 600 remaining Benjaminites. The plan for getting wives for the remaining Benjaminites (caused by their rash vow) was solved by a brief battle which involved the killing of an entire Israelite city which had not taken part in punishing Benjamin.

7. Another plan was concocted to fill the remaining gap (21.16-23). Was there anything about the securing of these women from Shiloh that would illustrate the total spiritual blindness of the people?

None of these decisions were made after seeking God's direction. They were made by their own fleshly resolution.

What does this tell us about their relationship with the Lord by taking these women during the feast (21.19)? (See also 21.15b)

They may have offered sacrifices to the Lord, but He was not being sought after for what He wanted done to preserve Benjamin. In 21.15b, He was blamed for what happened to Benjamin; and now in 21.19, they interrupted the time of worship being given to Him in order to accomplish their scheme.

8. How would you paraphrase their reasoning in 21.22?

“Since you could not willingly give your daughters, we allowed the Benjaminites to take them. This kept you from breaking any vow which would force us to go to war with you.”

9. Do you see the chain reaction that had been occurring? In Chapters 19-21, how would you illustrate this chain of reactions?

a. 17.6 - the SPIRITUAL decline, which caused the...

b. 18.1 - the POLITICAL decline, which caused the ...

c. 19.1 - the MORAL decline, which caused the ...

d. 21.25 - the SOCIAL decline – reducing them to do again whatever seemed good in their own eyes.



There are but two religions --- Christianity or paganism, the worship of God or idolatry. A third between them is not possible. Where idolatry ends, there Christianity begins; and where idolatry begins, there Christianity ends.

Friedrich Jacobi

III. The Results of the Battle for Satisfaction

There are those who voice the concern the OT has nothing to offer us today, in our modern world of fast-paced technology, instant gratification, and air travel. However, it seems to us they have not given in-depth attention and study to this book. Among the pages of this brief but powerful account in Israel's history, you can find yourself. We, the authors, found our hearts resonating with parts from each of the judges' stories. Thus, instead of approaching Part III of this lesson as we have done the others by summarizing that particular lesson, we felt a summarization of the whole book might be of more benefit to us and our walks today. So here goes...

Immediately before the period of the Judges began, Joshua called together the leaders of Israel. Form the picture in your mind. Here was the leader all of Israel had been following for the past 25 years. He now stood in the winter of his life, knowing those he had led in battle for so many years, had already turned from God to pursue the counterfeit gods of the land. Once again, he stood before them to challenge them. They had to make a choice, a choice which would affect the rest of their lives. He knew it would not be easy living in the Promised Land; after all, he had led them to “take the land.” He also knew choosing to serve Yahweh would be a battle, and he wanted them to make the right choice. But he couldn’t do it for them. He wanted to inspire them to choose God. They responded in one voice - they chose God. But Joshua knew them well and once again asked them to realize how important this decision would be for them. In effect, they would need to “purpose in their hearts” to follow God. Joshua knew they would be nothing without the presence, help, and protection of the Yahweh he knew so well. He also knew each needed to make the decision on his own. They couldn’t fight and survive on his decision to live for Him - it had to be a personal decision of every individual. They responded to Joshua in one voice again and chose God. Here we see God recording Joshua’s exact words to them:

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.... You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him. (Joshua 24.19-22)

Did Israel understand how important and personal this decision was? They did promise to serve the Lord; however, the book of Judges records a much different outcome. God gave Israel Moses to lead them. He then transitioned them from Moses to Joshua, and the people followed. Now Yahweh was taking them a step further in their walk with Him; He would be their leader, someone they couldn’t see, yet who was more alive, powerful, and loving than both of the leaders they had known before. He wanted to teach them more about Himself.

Soon the people were comfortable in their new homes, and forgot the promise they had made with Joshua. In their comfort, they didn’t guard their hearts. This allowed the lure of the idols in their new homeland to quickly gain their attention as their hearts were being stolen away. Satan was at work in one of his schemes: dangling the bait while hiding the hook. And Israel went for it - hook, line, and sinker. Idolatry became a way of life, and led to their downfall.

Idolatry is as big a problem for us today as it was for Israel. Kyle Idelman describes in his book, *God’s at War*, “Idolatry isn’t just one of many sins; rather it’s the one great sin that all others come from.... Idolatry isn’t *an* issue; it is *the* issue.”²³ We have a tendency to gloss over the role idolatry plays in our hearts and walks with Jesus today. But recognition of the problem and information about our enemy helps us to develop a battle plan. God Himself warned us about idolatry when He gave us the First Commandment. And by defining idolatry as “anything we use to find satisfaction in and apart from God Himself,” we see both where and how the problem exists. When we believe we can be better and more expediently served by such things as human approval, our reputation, our power, our money, food, alcohol, or anything else other than God Himself, we sell ourselves out to Satan. The longer we continue to give our hearts to the idols, the more of a problem it becomes. Eventually we begin to cry out to God for a deliverer... - THE Deliverer.

²³ Kyle Idelman, *God’s at War: Defeating the idols that battle for your heart*, pg.22.

Israel was confronted with idols everywhere they went. In Egypt, there were thousands of counterfeit gods. When God led Israel into the wilderness, they chose to fashion for themselves one of the gods they were comfortable with – the golden calf – because they felt God wasn't doing things in the way they thought they should be done. When they were thirsty, they weren't satisfied to wait on God to supply; their idol became their lack of having their basic needs met *in their timing*. The same happened when they decided they wanted meat. They chose not to be satisfied with the Manna God supplied daily, and in such abundance. Our flesh operates in the same way. Israel wrestled against such cravings, as so do we. The flesh demands what it wants, and if we let it have control, the craving then becomes an idol as we do all we can to satisfy the flesh instead of not crying out to our Deliverer for help.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. 1 John 2:15-16

In Canaan, Israel battled the world, their flesh, and the schemes of Satan. They feared the people of Canaan, as well as their gods, even though God had both promised and proved to them He would continue to give them victory over every one of their enemies. But He left some of the nations in the land to teach those ***who did not know about war.*** (Judg. 3:1-2) He wanted to teach them (and thereby us today) how to battle against these enemies.

We saw the desire for the idol of power – as Gideon allowed his ***mighty man of valor*** status go to his head. He depended upon his own ability rather than being satisfied to depend upon God to empower him to lead as He had at first. And we saw Israel serving their flesh time and time again.

Yet, the wooden idols were not really the problem. They were only the symptom. Israel's problem went much deeper. The problem was the battle raging for control of their hearts. We are no different today. God recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 7:14 how we should deal with this: ***“If My people, who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”***

Our God is a jealous God, and He demonstrates it not just in His taking offense at our idolatry, but in His continuing to pursue our hearts.²⁴ We should evaluate our idolatry in light of this fact. God loves us and stays in hot pursuit after our hearts. So much so, it took Jesus hanging on the cross to redeem us.

The question we must face and answer today and every day of our lives is the same question Israel faced, “Will I worship God or will I worship _____ (you fill in the blank)? You choose between _____ and Me. Do we really understand and believe this is a daily battle? Or do we think we face it only with our “besetting sins”? Or maybe we think we encounter it only ever so often. But not so. “The problem is, the instant something takes the place of God, the moment it becomes an end in itself rather than something to lay at God's throne, it becomes an idol.”²⁵ Satan, the world, and our flesh are very subtle when it comes to deceiving us. This happens little by little - the frog in the kettle syndrome. We are lured into the appearance of refreshing water only to have the heat turned up by small increments. Unfortunately, we don't notice it until the water is very hot and we are boiling. By then, we have been sucked into the black hole of sin and are in dire need of our Deliverer.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.47

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24.

So the question remains, “How do we go about tearing down the idols?” It begins with identifying the idols and moves on to changing our hearts. We must begin to tear them down by calling them what they are – counterfeit gods. Focusing only on the symptoms and not the source of the problem is what most of the world of modern psychology would have us believe is the way to get rid of something we don’t want. Yet this is not treating the source. The real center of the issue is at the core of our sinful hearts. This is what we truly must go after if we are to gain any real deliverance.

Because gods at times form dark alliances of cooperation with each other, maybe the god of control (for instance) is working with the god of comfort, because, yes, your need to cover every detail speaks of a drive to stay as snug within your comfort zone as possible. But you think the issue is anxiety, while the real issue is the gods of control and comfort are winning the war for your heart.²⁶

Individual Responsibility

As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man. (Prov.27.19) “The heart is the truth of your identity, that’s why the gods fight so fiercely for every inch of it.”²⁷

The key to changing our hearts begins by identifying our many idols. But how do we identify them? Ask yourself the following questions:

What disappoints you?

What do you complain about the most?

How concerned are you about how much money you have?

What worries you?

Where is your sanctuary? (I.e., Where do you go when you are hurting?)

What makes you angry?

What are your dreams?²⁸

After identifying them, **repent**. Then ask the Lord for help. Will-power will take you only so far. When your will-power fails, and it will, the guilt takes over. At that point, this becomes an opportunity to make conscious moment-by-moment decisions to depend on the Holy Spirit Who will you keep from returning to the allure of your idol (2 Cor.10.5). Ask Jesus to show how satisfying He is to you. This will lead to true deliverance.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pg.37-40.

If the way God chooses to deliver you "seems brutal, try seeing it through your spiritual eyes. 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."²⁹

Christianity is different from any other religion because, no other religion has a God who is constantly in hot pursuit of His people.

Corporate – the Church’s Responsibility

As we have seen, God dealt with the nation of Israel through individuals. It was the nation He adopted as His people. What was to have been Israel’s purpose? To glorify God and be a light to the nations. Those who make up today’s Church are God’s chosen people, adopted into His family in the same way He adopted Israel. When we (the Church) live faithfully before Him, we glorify Him; His light shines in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation, and our society is changed. We should take 2 Timothy 2:2 to heart and pray...***for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*** When we turn away from Him, trying to find our satisfaction in elected officials, political parties, as well as other things, He disciplines us so we know true satisfaction can be found only in Him. So many times, the church takes a back seat to those who are pushing evil’s agenda. We think one voice, one person will not make a difference. We are so unlike David when he challenged Goliath, saying to Saul: ***“Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ...and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand*** (1 Sam. 17:36-37; 47). We tend just to complain. But who are we really complaining against? God, who gave those leaders to us. And we have as an example what can happen to God’s people when they complain against Him. Israel was not satisfied with the abundance of Manna God supplied, so they complained until God gave them meat to the point where it came from their noses. And there is also the example of how they wandered around in the wilderness for 40 years. (Num. 11:18-20, 31-35) We should know better. He recorded these tragic stories for us, as an example for us of what would happen if we did not learn from past mistakes.

We (as The Church) are in a constant spiritual battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. They place all kinds of idols before the Church attempting to lure us away from God. God does not expect non-Christians to live like Christians; but when the Church doesn’t live up to His standards, the nation suffers as well as the Church. (Re-read 2 Chron.7.14.)

In light of our responsibility to live faithfully before our God, what would you say the Church today, as God’s people, should be doing to prepare for the day when we are forced to tolerate what society has now lowered themselves to accept?

²⁹ Davis, p.176.

IV. Your Personal Battle Plan for Finding Satisfaction

Rate yourself: how are you currently doing?

Not praying at all	1	2	3	4	5	praying without ceasing
Not reading Bible	1	2	3	4	5	saturated with Scripture
Clueless as to Satan's schemes	1	2	3	4	5	Able to confront Satan with Scripture
Unaware of my idols	1	2	3	4	5	Discovering and defeating more each day

Personal

Using what you have learned from the failures in the book of Judges:

What steps does your plan include to rid yourself of the idols in *your* life? If you don't have a plan, you can work from the list above. If you rate yourself as a 1 or 2 on prayer or Bible reading, here are things you can do:

- a. Keep a log for two weeks of your daily activities. (See Appendix IV for a chart.)
- b. Fill in every block that is non-negotiable, such as work, school, church, small group, etc.
- c. At the end of each week, do you see where you can block off 15 minutes each day for a time of prayer and Bible reading?
- d. If you cannot find a free block of time, you will need to make some choices. Who will win out? God, or the possible idol keeping you from spending time with Him?
- e. Commit this to the Lord in prayer, and ask Him for the time and determination to do what you have committed to Him.

As a suggestion, start your Bible reading in Psalm 51. Although it has 19 verses, this Psalm is also a prayer made to God by David. As you read this Psalm, pray it along with David. Make it your own. For example:

Read 51.3: ***For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*** Then you can pray: "Lord, I know my sin is _____." Once you have confessed your sin, you can pray 51.10: ***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.***

For more help in this area we encourage you to read: *How to Have a Quiet Time* by Warren & Ruth Myers, 32 pages. (www.cepbookstore.com, #6219) And, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible* by Max Anders.

Church/National

1. In Section I of this lesson, we posed a question. How would you answer it now after you have studied this lesson as well as the rest of the book? Society today preaches everyone needs to live by the codes of tolerance and diversity. What keeps a society from living according to what is right in their own eyes?

2. What are some of the areas society and government are forcing Christians to tolerate?

How is your church dealing with it?

How are you dealing with it?

Final Take-away

Only when you are prayerfully saturated with Scripture can you detect and defeat each idol which is battling God for control of your heart. **"You will never know what prayer is for, until you know that life is war."** (John Piper)

Lesson 11 (Optional)

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

Throughout the pages of the OT walks a Figure unknown to most Christians. Sometimes, He appears as an Angel of the Lord. Sometimes, He is seen as a Man, slipping in and out of history to accomplish the will of God. Even a brief glance at the Scriptures where He is seen shows that He is more than an angel, more than a man; — and well-known to the ancient Israelites. In the following pages, you will explore the Scriptures that speak of this Person and compile a list of details about Him that will lead to a most startling conclusion.

To the Class Leader: Divide the class into groups of two or more so each of the following passages can be studied. Copy the list of 10 questions below and put them on a separate sheet of paper along with one of the Scripture passages. Give the students enough time to work through the answers, and then come back together to complete the conclusions.

In each of the following OT stories, answer these questions to see Who this person is:

1. What is He called?
2. What Name(s) does He give Himself?
3. What attributes are evident?
4. What does He promise and/or predict?
5. What level of authority does He display?
6. Does He link Himself to God in any special way?
7. Does He do anything beyond the capability of mere men?
8. How does He handle sin?
9. How does He respond when people offer Him worship?

Genesis 16.7-14 (take note of the preceding context) -

Genesis 18.1-33 -

Genesis 21.12-21 -

Genesis 22.1-19 -

Genesis 21.10-13 -

Genesis 32.22-32 and 48.16 -

Exodus 3 & 4 (note Who is in the bush) -

Exodus 23.20-22 -

Joshua 5.13-15 -

Judges 2.1-5 -

Judges 6.11-24 -

Judges 13.3-21 -

1 Chronicles 21.9-30 -

POST-TEST ON YOUR NEW KNOWLEDGE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

MATCH

Jephthah Burnt Offering	King of Mesopotamia
Benjamin Annihilated Tribe	Gideon
Cushanrishathaim King	Sisera
Levite Concubine	River
Baal Idol	Honey
Eglon Fat Man	Annihilated Tribe
Kishon River	Idol
Mighty Man of Valor Gideon	Pillars
Olive Tree Jotham	Jael
Tent Peg Jael	Burnt Offering
Warm Milk Sisera	Concubine
Samson Pillars	Jotham
Lion Honey	Fat Man

WHO WAS...

Caleb (1.12) **Othniel's father-in-law**

Jerubaal (6.32) **Victory name of Gideon**

Jether (8.20) **Gideon's first-born son**

Jotham (9.7) **Gideon's youngest son**

Manoah (13) **Samson's father**

Micah (17) **Idolater of Ephraim**

Jonathan (18.30) **Name of the Levite**

WHO...

burned a tower (2)? **Abimelech**

destroyed a tower (8)? **Gideon**

was not really one of the family (9.11)? **Abimelech**

was left-handed (3)? **Ehud**

faced 900 iron chariots (4)? **Barak**

was a "winepress farmer" (6)? **Gideon**

had 70 donkey-riding relatives (12)? **Abdon**

collected earrings (8)? **Gideon**

was almost killed by a woman (9)? **Abimelech**

was called a "mother in Israel" (5)? **Deborah**

fought a lion (13)? **Samson**

was a Dodo's son (10)? **Tola**

was a son-in-law to Caleb (3)? **Othniel**

traded 30 daughters for 30 foreign girls
for his 30 sons (12)? **Ibzan**

has just about nothing distinctive mentioned
about him at all (12)? **Elon**

HOW MANY...

in Gideon's victorious army (7.15)? **300**

were killed by Shamgar (3.31)? **600**

were left in Benjamin when war ended (20.47)? **600**

judges were Nazirites (13.5)? **one**

brothers did Abimelech kill (8.30)? **70**

died with Samson (16.27)? **3000**

WHO...

was the judge that killed 42,000 men over
a problem in their accent (12.5-6)? **Jephthah**

was the tribe that began an independent
religion in Israel (18.30)? **Dan**

burned the fields of his enemies (15.3-4)? **Samson**

was the general who wouldn't fight without
a woman's presence (4.8)? **Barak**

WHO SAID...

"...if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us...?" (6.13) **Gideon**

"...keep quiet, put your hand on your mouth, and come with us..." (18.19) **Danites**

"...I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow..." (11.35) **Jephthah**

"...Please let me test just once more..." (6.39) **Gideon**

"...The trees once went out to anoint a king over them..." (9.8) **Jotham**

"...If you had not plowed with my heifer..." (14.18) **Samson**

APPENDIX I

GODS OF THE CANAANITES

ASHERAH – This is sometimes mistranslated in some older versions as “grove.” ASHERAH was a goddess of the Phoenicians and Syrians. The ASHERAH was symbolized by the trunk of a tree, and the worship of it had to do with sexual ability. See Judges 6.25. Asherah is mentioned 39 times in the Old Testament.

ASTARTES or ASHTAROTH – A goddess of the Canaanites. Her male friend was BAAL, and worship of both ASTARTES and Baal involved much immorality. ASTARTES is connected with some certainty with the later worship of Venus, the goddess of love. See Judges 13; 10.6.

BAAL – The name of a local god of any area. The word is sometimes found with the Hebrew plural (BAALIM) and sometimes the English plural (BAALS, Judges 10.6). The word simply means “owner or master,” and could represent almost any local god of any particular area. Incense and burnt offerings were offered to BAAL, and often such worship involved other gods. See Judges 6.28. Baal was the god of storms who controlled rain and therefore fertility. Some Northern Kingdom rulers made their sons “pass through the fire” (human sacrifice) for Baal. The worship of Asherah and Baal are said to be the cause of the downfall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

CHEMOSH – A god of Moab and of Ammon. Burnt offerings were made to him. See Judges 11.24.

DAGON – The chief god of the Philistines. Either a fish god or a god of farming. He was worshiped in a temple, and pictures show him to be half-fish. See Judges 16.23. He was also believed to have been the father of Baal. Dagon’s major acceptance of worship was through human sacrifice.

TERAPHIM – Sometimes translated into the English as *household gods*. They were used to tell what was going to happen in the future. Some were small, and some the size of a man. Often the owner of such gods was thereby designated as heir to his father’s property.

EPHOD – A piece of clothing originally worn only by the High Priest. It covered the chest and back, and on each shoulder there was an onyx stone with the names of Israel’s tribes engraved on it. Changed in form, and without the gems, it was misused as an object of worship and often associated with idols. See Judges 8.22-28 and 18.18,20.

Molech – Perhaps the worst of all the gods of the land, requiring children to be sacrificed in order to be appeased or answer prayers. (Lev.18.21; 20.3-5).

Luther’s definition of God: “Whatever your heart clings to, relies upon, serves, and loves, that is your God; trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol.” (Luther’s shorter catechism on the First Commandment.)

APPENDIX II

The Secret of Contentment

William Barclay³⁰

Contentment is one of the most difficult Christian virtues to attain. Almost four hundred years ago, Jeremiah Burroughs referred to the “rare jewel” of Christian contentment. It is safe to say that contentment is no more common in our day than it was in Burroughs’. Yet, it remains one of the most crucial virtues. A contented Christian is the one who best knows God’s sovereignty and rests in it. A contented Christian trusts God, is pure in heart, and is the one most willing to be used of God — however God sees fit.

We live in a world that breeds discontent. We are bombarded with the message that to be happy we need more things, less wrinkles, better vacations, and fewer troubles. But, ultimately, the problem is the sinful human heart. We are often discontented in our jobs, our marriages, our churches, our homes — in most areas of our lives. We can easily despair that we will never be able to attain contentment. But the Bible teaches us not only that we *must* be content (Heb. 13:5), it teaches us that we *can* be content.

This is the point that the Apostle Paul makes in Philippians 4:

For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (vv. 11–13)

Twice in this passage, Paul says that he has “learned” to be content. Contentment does not come naturally to the sinful human heart. We need God’s grace to strengthen us and to change our hearts. But we also have the responsibility to learn contentment. It requires effort.

The fact that Paul refers to the “secret,” or “mystery,” of contentment, however, indicates not only that contentment does not come naturally, but also that how we pursue contentment is contrary to human ways of thinking. For example, the world typically teaches that the way to achieve peace in your life is to get out of difficult situations that cause you hardship or are not personally fulfilling. But Paul clearly indicates that he has learned to be content both in good situations and in bad — including prison, which is where he was when he wrote this letter. There are also different worldly ways of thinking about contentment and material goods. The “more is better” mentality teaches us that to be satisfied in life, we need this product or that gadget. There is also a worldly “simple living” mentality that says satisfaction comes by getting rid of stuff and living with less. Yet Paul says he has learned to be content in both plenty and hunger, in abundance and need. While there is some biblical truth to the thinking that we should not pursue earthly goods continually, a simple lifestyle alone does not guarantee a contented heart.

Ironically, in many ways the greatest “mystery” of contentment is that to achieve it we must be full of discontent. As Burroughs says, the contented Christian “is the most contented man in the world,

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and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world.” If we look back one chapter from Paul’s classic passage on contentment in Philippians 4, we read a passage that sounds decidedly discontented:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12–14)

Far from being the opposite of the contentment that Paul describes in chapter 4, the discontent of chapter 3 is a necessary component of true Christian contentment.

Notice here that contentment does not equal complacency. Contentment, in fact, requires a holy ambition. What is this holy ambition? To understand what Paul means when he says that he has not “obtained this” (3:12), we need to look back to verse 10: “that I may know [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” The contented Christian is the one who knows Christ but who has a restless pursuit to know Him more. This knowledge of Christ comes in the Word, in prayer, and in worship. But it also comes in active ministry, which is exactly what Paul is describing in these verses. Paul wants to know the power of Christ in his ministry, to share the suffering of Christ that comes to His servants, and to become like Christ in His death — dying to self, living a life of selfless servanthood.

Burroughs states, “A soul that is capable of God can be filled with nothing else but God.” This, ultimately, is the “secret of contentment”: to know Christ but to press on to know Him more in all areas of life. When we know Him and press on to know Him better, we become like Him. When we know Him and press on to know Him better, we rest in His providence and provision, and we follow His call for us — not seeking our own agenda, but content with His.

The encouraging thing is that what is beyond our ability is attainable. Like Paul, we “can do all things through [Christ].”

APPENDIX III

SATISFACTION

The following is a list of all the times this word is found in its basic form in the Old Testament. As you will see, it is not always translated the same way, but it is the same dictionary form of the word.

Exodus 16:8 And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the **full**, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

Exodus 16:12 “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be **filled** with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

Leviticus 26:26 When I break your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven and shall dole out your bread again by weight, and you shall eat and not be **satisfied**.

Deuteronomy 6:11 and houses **full** of all good things that you did not **fill**, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are **full**,

Deuteronomy 8:10 And you shall eat and be **full**, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

Deuteronomy 8:12 lest, when you have eaten and are **full** and have built good houses and live in them,

Deuteronomy 11:15 And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you shall eat and be **full**.

Deuteronomy 14:29 And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be **filled**, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

Deuteronomy 26:12 “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be **filled**,

Deuteronomy 31:20 For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are **full** and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant.

Ruth 2:14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was **satisfied**, and she had some left over.

1 Chronicles 23:1 When David was old and **full** of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel.

2 Chronicles 24:15 But Jehoiada grew old and **full** of days, and died. He was 130 years old at his death.

2 Chronicles 31:10 Azariah the chief priest, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, “Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the LORD, we have eaten and had **enough** and have **plenty** left, for the LORD has blessed his people, so that we have this large amount left.”

Nehemiah 9:25 And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses **full** of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in **abundance**. So they ate and were **filled** and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

Job 7:4 When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am **full** of tossing till the dawn.

Job 9:18 he will not let me get my breath, but **fills** me with bitterness.

Job 19:22 Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not **satisfied** with my flesh?

Job 27:14 If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword, and his descendants have not **enough** bread.

Job 31:31 if the men of my tent have not said, ‘Who is there that has not been **filled** with his meat?’

Job 38:27 to **satisfy** the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass?

Psalm 17:14 from men by your hand, O LORD, from men of the world whose portion is in this life. You **fill** their womb with treasure; they are **satisfied** with children, and they leave their **abundance** to their infants.

Psalm 17:15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be **satisfied** with your likeness.

Psalm 22:26 The afflicted shall eat and be **satisfied**; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!

Psalm 37:19 they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they have **abundance**.

Psalm 59:15 They wander about for food and growl if they do not get their **fill**.

Psalm 63:5 My soul will be **satisfied** as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,

Psalm 65:4 Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be **satisfied** with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

Psalm 78:29 And they ate and were well **filled**, for he gave them what they craved.

Psalm 81:16 But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would **satisfy** you.”

Psalm 88:3 For my soul is **full** of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.

Psalm 90:14 **Satisfy** us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Psalm 91:16 With long life I will **satisfy** him and show him my salvation.”

Psalm 103:5 who **satisfies** you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Psalm 104:13 From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is **satisfied** with the fruit of your work.

Psalm 104:16 The trees of the LORD are watered **abundantly**, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

Psalm 104:28 When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are **filled** with good things.

Psalm 105:40 They asked, and he brought quail, and gave them bread from heaven in **abundance**.

Psalm 107:9 For he **satisfies** the longing soul, and the hungry soul he **fills** with good things.

Psalm 123:3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than **enough** of contempt.

Psalm 123:4 Our soul has had more than **enough** of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Psalm 132:15 I will **abundantly** bless her provisions; I will **satisfy** her poor with bread.

Psalm 145:16 You open your hand; you **satisfy** the desire of every living thing.

Psalm 147:14 He makes peace in your borders; he **fills** you with the finest of the wheat.

Proverbs 1:31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their **fill** of their own devices.

Proverbs 5:10 lest strangers take their **fill** of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner,

Proverbs 12:11 Whoever works his land will have **plenty** of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

Proverbs 12:14 From the fruit of his mouth a man is **satisfied** with good, and the work of a man’s hand comes back to him.

Proverbs 14:14 The backslider in heart will be **filled** with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be **filled** with the fruit of his ways.

Proverbs 18:20 From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is **satisfied**; he is **satisfied** by the yield of his lips.

Proverbs 20:13 Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have **plenty** of bread.

Proverbs 25:16 If you have found honey, eat only **enough** for you, lest you have your **fill** of it and vomit it.

Proverbs 25:17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his **fill** of you and hate you.

Proverbs 27:20 Sheol and Abaddon are never **satisfied**, and never **satisfied** are the eyes of man.

Proverbs 28:19 Whoever works his land will have **plenty** of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have **plenty** of poverty.

Proverbs 30:9 lest I be **full** and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Proverbs 30:15 The leech has two daughters: Give and Give. Three things are never **satisfied**; four never say, "**Enough**":

Proverbs 30:16 Sheol, the barren womb, the land never **satisfied** with water, and the fire that never says, "**Enough**."

Proverbs 30:22 a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is **filled** with food;

Ecclesiastes 1:8 All things are **full** of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not **satisfied** with seeing, nor the ear **filled** with hearing.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never **satisfied** with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves money will not be **satisfied** with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 6:3 If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not **satisfied** with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

Isaiah 1:11 "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" says the LORD; I have had **enough** of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

Isaiah 9:20 They slice meat on the right, but are still hungry, and they devour on the left, but are not **satisfied**; each devours the flesh of his own arm,

Isaiah 44:16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is **satisfied**. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!"

Isaiah 53:11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be **satisfied**; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 58:10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and **satisfy** the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

Isaiah 58:11 And the LORD will guide you continually and **satisfy** your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Isaiah 66:11 that you may nurse and be **satisfied** from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious **abundance**."

Jeremiah 5:7 "How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the **full**, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores.

Jeremiah 31:14 I will feast the soul of the priests with **abundance**, and my people shall be **satisfied** with my goodness, declares the LORD.”

Jeremiah 44:17 But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had **plenty** of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster.

Jeremiah 46:10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated and drink its **fill** of their blood. For the Lord GOD of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates.

Jeremiah 50:10 Chaldea shall be plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated, declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 50:19 I will restore Israel to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be **satisfied** on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead.

Lamentations 3:15 He has **filled** me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood.

Lamentations 3:30 let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be **filled** with insults.

Lamentations 5:6 We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria, to get bread **enough**.

Ezekiel 7:19 They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot **satisfy** their hunger or **fill** their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.

Ezekiel 16:28 You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not **satisfied**; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not **satisfied**.

Ezekiel 16:29 You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not **satisfied**.

Ezekiel 27:33 When your wares came from the seas, you **satisfied** many peoples; with your abundant wealth and merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth.

Ezekiel 39:20 And you shall be **filled** at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,’ declares the Lord GOD.

Hosea 4:10 They shall eat, but not be **satisfied**; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish

Hosea 13:6 but when they had grazed, they became **full**, they were **filled**, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

Joel 2:19 The LORD answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be **satisfied**; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

Joel 2:26 “You shall eat in **plenty** and be **satisfied**, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Amos 4:8 so two or three cities would wander to another city to drink water, and would not be **satisfied**; yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD.

Micah 6:14 You shall eat, but not be **satisfied**, and there shall be hunger within you; you shall put away, but not preserve, and what you preserve I will give to the sword.

Habakkuk 2:5 “Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never **enough**. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.”

Habakkuk 2:16 You will have your **fill** of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD’s right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory!

A P P E N D I X I V
W E E K L Y P L A N N E R

Fill in those times that are set, such as, church and work, etc. Segments of time will then be revealed. How are you currently filling them? Are you using them in the best possible way? These are the areas you will be able to choose from and determine when you will be able to schedule your quiet/study time.

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EXPANDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is a suggested list of helpful books for the student

- Barclay, William A. *The Secret of Contentment*. P&R, 2010.
- Cundall, Arthur E. and Leon Morris. *Judges and Ruth*, Tyndale OT Commentary Series. IVP, 1968.
- *Davis, Dale Ralph. *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Christian Focus, 2000. (If you can only get one commentary for this study, this is the one we recommend highest.)
- Currid, John and David Barrett. *ESV Atlas of the Bible*. Crossway, 2010.
- Jackman, David. *Judges, Ruth*, The Communicator's Commentary Series. Nelson, 1991.
- Scott, Jack. Adult Biblical Education Series: Vol. II, Book 4: The Period of Adjustment. Christian Education and Publications, 1979.

The following is a suggested list of helpful books for the class leader

- Boda, Mark, *Judges*, found in the Expositor's Bible Commentary Series, vol. 2. Longman & Garland, general editors, Zondervan, 2012.
- Harrison, R.K. *Old Testament Times*. Eerdmans, 1970.
- Matthews, Victor H. *Manners and Customs in the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Daily Life in Bible Times*, 3rd edition. Hendrickson, 2006.
- Schwab, George M. *Right in Their Own Eyes: The Gospel according to Judges*. P&R, 2011.
- Walton, John; Victor Matthews; Mark Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. IVP, 2000.
- Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Judges: The Bible Speaks Today Series*. IVP, 1992.
- Wood, Leon. *The Distressing Days of the Judges*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, July 1998.
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- Younger, Lawson. *Judges, Ruth*. NIV Application Commentary. Zondervan. 2011.

Helpful Books on Spiritual Warfare

- Anders, Max. *What You Need to Know About Spiritual Warfare*. Nelson, 1997.
- Idleman, Kyle. *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*. Zondervan, 2013.
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- Kruger, Melissa B. *The Enemy of Eve: Finding Contentment in a Covetous World*. Christian Focus Publications, 2012.
- MacArthur, John, Jr. *How to Meet the Enemy: Arming Yourself for Spiritual Warfare*. Chariot/Victor, 1992.