

Judges: The Pity of God for a Canaanized Israel

A 5-Week Bible Study

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Judges: Week 1

The Rise of Apostasy in Israel/Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, & Barak; Chapters 1-5

Day 1

1. Read **Judges 1**.
2. Chronologically, the events of Judges take place sometime after what event?
3. Look back at Joshua 24:31. How does Judges 1 illustrate that immediately after Joshua's death, Israel continued to serve the Lord?
4. In response to the Lord's command and promise to give them the land, the men of Judah (along with Simeon, whom they recruited to join them) fought and were victorious at Bezek, Jerusalem, and then in land south of there. What biblical principle did the author record the pagan king Adoni-bezek verbalize before his own destruction?
5. The conquest of Debir in vv. 11-15 is a repeat of the story recorded in Joshua 15. How does the story of Caleb, Achsah, and Othniel reflect obedience to God both in regards to the land as well as regarding respect for women?

6. As chapter 1 progresses, we start to see hints of digression from full obedience to the Lord's commands. One of the primary commands to Israel upon their entry into the promised land was what? Read through all of Deuteronomy 7 if you have time; if not, look at vv. 1-5 to answer this specific question.

7. Beginning in v. 16, how does Israel start to digress from this command?

8. In v. 19 what benefit did Judah have? Even with this guaranteed benefit, what could Judah not do? The fault clearly did not lie with God, so what was the reason for Judah's failure (cf. Deut 7:17-24)?

9. The rest of the chapter lists the failure of the remaining tribes to fully obey the Lord in destroying the inhabitants of the land they conquered. Verses 22-26 give specific details of one example. Again, we have the Lord's presence being explicitly said to go with the tribe Joseph as they went up against Bethel (then Luz). They seem to try to recreate the situation in Jericho: spying out the city, enlisting a Canaanite to help them enter the city, and promising kindness to the man and his family for helping. This Canaanite, however, did not offer to help Israel and made no profession of faith in God. Whereas Rahab became integrated into the Israelite community of faith, what did this man do?

Day 2

1. Read **Judges 2**.
2. Chapter 2 begins with the angel of the LORD going up from Gilgal to confront Israel. Gilgal was the place where Israel camped after miraculously crossing the Jordan River and set up a memorial reminding them and all the nations of the earth of God's might, so that Israel would serve the LORD forever (Josh 4:19-24). Joshua 5 goes on to record several other key events occurring at Gilgal: the circumcision of the people, the first Passover in Canaan, and the Commander of the army of the LORD (probably the same person we see here, the incarnate God) appearing to Joshua at the commencement of the conquest. It thus might be very significant that the narrator mentions the angel of the LORD coming from Gilgal about not keeping their covenant with the LORD.
3. The angel of the LORD begins his accusation against Israel by describing his past actions for Israel's sake in bringing them out of Egypt and into the land he promised them. He accused Israel of not obeying his commands to make no covenant with the peoples of the land, but rather to break down their altars (cf. Ex 23:20-33; 34:11-15; Deut 12:1-3). What truth about God is emphasized in verse 1, highlighting the absolute lack of gratitude in Israel's abandonment of God (thus, "What is this you have done?" in v. 2)?
4. In a sense, God gave Israel what they wanted. They refused to completely drive out the peoples and destroy the idols, so God said he would do what? How did Israel react? (Note that this short-lived reaction is the last time Israel would react this way in the book.)
5. Whereas Judges 1 was simply a reporting of events that occurred after Joshua's death, in chapter 2 the narrator describes God's understanding of them, either with God's words (vv 1-5, 20-22) or his own. The narrator begins by recalling Israel's obedience during Joshua's life and shortly after his death and the death of the elders who had seen God's great works for Israel (cf. Joshua 24:28-31). Verse 10 describes what happened after their death. What was the root problem of Israel's sin?

6. What did Israel's lack of remembering and knowing the LORD result in, according to verses 11-13?

7. How did God initially act in response to their apostasy (vv 14-15)?

8. Israel was in terrible distress because of God's judgment (v 15). What did God do for Israel?

9. There is no recorded repentance on Israel's part before God sends each of these judges, despite Israel's persistent and worsening idolatry after the death of each judge. Although God had every covenant right to bring all the curses of Deuteronomy on Israel for their disobedience and was very angry at their apostasy, verse 18 specifies what motivation for God's bringing deliverance through these judges?

10. Verse 18 describes the real deliverer of Israel. (Which is interesting since vv 14-15 describes God as the one who actually was their enemy as well.) When the Lord raised up a judge, he was with that judge and did what all the days of that judge?

11. The end of the chapter returns to the LORD once again speaking for himself. He is angry over Israel's breaking their covenant with him and disobeying his voice (to go to speechless idols!). In fact, when he describes Israel, he calls them "this people," a term in the Hebrew (*goy*) which is the same as "the nations" in verse 21. God promised that he would no longer do what? Why?

Day 3

1. Read **Judges 3**.
2. Verses 1-3 list the nations that God left behind instead of driving out of Canaan and give the reasons God did that. It was to test those in Israel who had not seen war in Canaan, so that they might know war and teach it to those who didn't. Why do you think it was important that this generation of Israelites know this war? Why was this considered a test (v 4)?
3. Verses 5-6 describe the "results" of the test. Did Israel pass? What evidence does the text give for your answer?
4. Throughout the rest of the book, we will see a cycle of Israeli evil, divine judgment through oppression, Israel crying out, God raising a deliverer, the removal of the oppressor, rest for Israel, and then the death of the judge. The book starts with a complete cycle involving Othniel; various aspects of the cycle will be highlighted with the different judges. Though a complete one, the Othniel cycle is not given many details. Of importance, though, there is nothing negative said of Othniel.
5. Verse 7 describes Israel's forgetting the Lord. The Hebrew word for forget, *sakah*, has the idea of not just not remembering but also suppressing. God responded by selling Israel into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim, a ruler from the Mesopotamian area. This continued for 8 years, until God again responded to Israel's cry for deliverance (note this was a cry of despair, not repentance). God used Othniel to deliver Israel. Look back at Judges 1:11-17 for a description of who he is. How do verses 9-10 further describe him in this new role?

6. After God delivered Israel through Othniel, the land had rest for 40 years until Othniel's death. The next account is written almost as a parody, to highlight the foolishness of Moab and its king and to bring glory to God. In verse 12 we see who as the active agent against Israel, simply using Moab as the means of punishment for Israel's evil?

7. The Moabites were related to Israel through Abraham's nephew Lot (cf. Gen 19:36-37). Moab had long sought to defeat Israel (cf. Balaak and Balaam in Num 22-24); now they did because the Lord strengthened him to do so. Eglon (likely unaware that he was accomplishing God's plan) had the Ammonites and the Amalekites join with him and they defeated Israel near Jericho (cf. Deut 34:3) and subjugated them for how long?

8. Again in response to Israel's cry, God sent a deliverer, Ehud. How was he described in verse 15? Note that while some might consider Ehud's physical description here to be a handicap, Judges 20:16 & 1 Chron 12:2 place this in a far different light. These men were very skilled at using a sling with their left hand, probably being trained to become proficient with both hands. In comparison with "very fat" Eglon (v 17; his name is even related to the word *round*), Ehud was likely physically superior to Eglon (and we will see he was far more clever as well).

9. Given the opportunity to bring tribute to Eglon, Ehud starts planning. He had an 18-inch double-edged dagger made, hidden by his right thigh. Ehud and his company presented their tribute to the "very fat" Eglon, then began to return, going past idols at Gilgal (perhaps this brief mention emphasizes how normal idolatry had become to Israel). Ehud returned to Eglon with a "secret message." Dull-minded Eglon and his attendants all leave Eglon alone with Ehud. When Ehud announces that he has a message from God, Eglon rises from his seat, giving Ehud the perfect opportunity to stab him in the gut, so deeply that the handle partially went in. He lost control of his bowels in death as well. Ehud escaped, leaving the Moabites to eventually find their king lying dead in his own feces. Ehud returned to gather and lead an army of Israelites against Moab, finally giving a theological perspective to what has been portrayed as a Ehud-instigated assassination. How did Ehud motivate Israel in verse 28, and how was this a reversal of what the Lord had done 18 years earlier (v 12)?

10. Very little is recorded about Shamgar (v 31). Who was he and what did he do?

Day 4

1. Read **Judges 4**. Chapters 4 and 5 give the whole story about Barak and Deborah, with chapter 4 written in prose and chapter 5 in a poetical song.
2. After Ehud's death, Israel again did evil, and God responded by selling them into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan, whose army was commanded by Sisera. Why did Israel cry out for help?
3. Typically, the next element we see in the cycle here is the Lord raising up a "deliverer" (cf. 3:9—Othniel and 3:15—Ehud). However, in verse 4 we see a woman, Deborah, described. What description is given of her and how does verse 5 further explain her "judging"?
4. In her role as a prophetess (note the absence of any mention of the Levitical priesthood, who would normally communicate God's will through the Urim and Thummim), what message apparently from God did Deborah communicate to Barak?
5. What was Barak's response? Do you think Barak was a complete coward without the presence of a strong woman and/or do you think it possible that Barak wanted assurance that one who spoke for God would be with him?

6. How did Deborah respond to Barak's request? Her words lead one to believe that she herself would get the glory, but the story will take an interesting turn.

7. What seemingly unrelated information does verse 4 give us?

8. After Barak had called up his 10,000 men and readied for battle at Mount Tabor, how did Deborah encourage him?

9. Briefly describe the battle between Barak's army and Sisera's.

10. The plot twist in verses 17-22 brings out the importance of verse 11 as well as explains Deborah's words to Barak in verse 9. How did the glory of victory go to a woman?

11. The final verses focus on whom? Who truly brought the victory to Israel?

Day 5

1. Read **Judges 5**. This song, believed by many to have been written by many, accompanies the historical narrative of chapter 4. It is characterized by figurative language and a ballad-like style.
2. After an introduction in verse 1, in which Deborah and Barak are recorded as singing this song, stanza 1 is made up of verses 2-3. To whom do they sing and whom do they bless? Why? In whose hearing do they sing?
3. Stanza 2, verses 4-5, describe how the earth responds when the LORD marches. What do you think this imagery communicates about the LORD?
4. In Stanza 3 (vv 6-8) Deborah introduces herself, although she does not name this time period after herself. Rather, she calls this the Days of Shamgar and Jael, interestingly 2 foreigners who both aided Israel. She refers to herself as a mother in Israel who arose to help Israel in a dire time. What characterized Israel during this time?
5. In Stanza 4 (vv 9-11) Deborah blesses the LORD and tells both the rich and poor, along with all the people gathering in the town center to speak of what?

Judges: Week 2

Gideon & Abimelech: Chapters 6-9

Day 1

1. Read **Judges 6:1-32**.
2. The cycle begins again, with Israel committing evil against the Lord. The Lord gave Israel into the hands of the Midianites. The narrator gives a more detailed description of the way the Midianites oppressed Israel in verses 2-5. What was Israel's response (v 6)?
3. Again, before mention of a judge/deliverer, a prophet is inserted into the cycle. Like Deborah the prophetess, this unnamed man spoke for God (perhaps causing one to wonder what the Levitical priesthood was doing?!). Summarize below the prophet's message.
4. With the prophet's closing words of accusation for Israel's disobedience, one might expect the next scene to be further judgment or simply allowing the Midianite oppression to continue. How does the following scene instead show God's grace and mercy?
5. In verses 11-16, we see God's call through the Angel of the Lord for Gideon save Israel from Midian. Despite Gideon's accusations of the Lord's abandonment of Israel and his own fear and doubts, what does the Lord call him? Of what does the Lord repeatedly assure him to offset Gideon's doubts of his personal weakness?

6. Even with the promise of God's presence and the assurance of a victory, Gideon still wanted a sign from the Lord, asking him to wait while he prepared meat and bread for a sacrifice. When Gideon returned, the Lord took over, telling Gideon to place the meat and bread on a rock and pour the broth on top. When the Lord touched the sacrifice with his staff, the contents burned up and the Angel of the Lord disappeared. What was Gideon's response and how was he reassured?

7. That night the Lord also told him to pull down his father Joash's Baal and cut down his Asherah (the female equivalent to Baal in the fertility religion). Then he was to build an altar to God and sacrifice the bull he had used to pull down the Baal and Asherah. What did Gideon do?

8. How did the men of the town respond when they saw what was done? How does this further illustrate the Canaanization of Israel?

9. What was Joash's response to the demands of the men? What other name did Gideon then become known by and why?

Day 2

1. Read **Judges 6:33-7:25**.
2. In verses 33-35 there is a contrast. The Midianites, Amalekites, and people of the East join together and camp in the Israelite valley of Jezreel. Gideon too gets his clansmen, the Abiezrites, along with his tribe of Manasseh, as well as men from the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. But how is Gideon specially prepared according to verse 34?

3. Gideon, clothed with God's Spirit, guaranteed success by God, and now with an army that came together at his call, told God and did what in verses 36-40? How did God graciously respond despite Gideon's doubting of God's words?

Gideon's laying out a fleece is often used as an example for how Christians could try to figure out the will of God. Here's a couple of questions to think through whether this is a valid application of this story. 1. Is this story intended to be instructive or is it simply narrative (telling what happened)? 2. Does the narrator present Gideon's actions as exemplary or as evidencing lack of faith? 3. Whereas people will use this "laying out a fleece" concept to try to figure out God's will, God had already communicated his will to Gideon. Is this the way God communicates his will today?

4. With Gideon now finally assured that God wanted him to lead Israel against Midian, the 32,000 Israelites soldiers that joined him camped together south of the valley where the Midianites camped. But God told Gideon that the number of men Israel had was too many. Why did God want to reduce Israel's army numbers? How did he do so, and how many finally remained?

5. That night the Lord told Gideon to go up against the Midianites and promised that he had given them into his hand. Almost in the same breath, God added that if he was afraid to go, Gideon was to take his servant Purah down to the camp, hear what they said, and be strengthened. What did Gideon see that might have worried him in light of his own army of 300 (v 12)? What did Gideon hear that caused him to worship God and lead with confidence?

6. Gideon divided his 300 into 3 groups, giving each man a trumpet and a torch with a jar to initially cover it and hide the light. Notably, no weapons were distributed. When they came to the camp in the middle of the night, they broke their jars and revealed their lights, blew their trumpets, and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon.” As Israel themselves ironically had no swords, how did God bring about the death of many of the Midianites (v 22)?

7. As the Midianite survivors fled, Gideon calls upon men from the other tribes—likely the ones he had just dismissed—to pursue Midian and cut off their routes of escape, finally capturing and killing whom?

Day 3

1. Read **Judges 8:1-28**.
2. Despite the Midianite victory, problems still remain in the nation of Israel itself. In verses 1-3, the Ephraimites fiercely accuse Gideon for not asking them to initially fight against the Midianites. Whereas many of the men were afraid and sent home (cf. 7:2-3), these men were offended and angry not to be asked to fight. Their anger only subsided when Gideon soothed their egos by saying what?
3. Verse 4 seems to pick up where chapter 7 ended, with Israel chasing down the remaining 15,000 Midianites. Gideon crossed the Jordan with his 300 men and, being exhausted, asked the Israelites living on this other side of the Jordan for bread. The people both of Succoth and of Penuel refused to help. What did Gideon say in response?
4. Gideon finally caught up with the remaining Midianite army, catching them unawares, throwing the army into a panic, and capturing the kings. As Gideon had previously threatened, he took vengeance on Succoth and Penuel. He captured a young man from Succoth and extracted from him the names of the elders of the city. He presented the kings to them, then thrashed them with thorns. When he went to Penuel, he not only destroyed their defensive tower, but he also killed all the (Israelite!) men. Do you think that Gideon is veering off of God's plans for him as Israel's deliverer?

5. Gideon confronted Zebah and Zalmunna about the men they had killed at Tabor, whom we find out were Gideon's full brothers. We now see that what has been Gideon's primary motivation for pursuing the Midianite kings?

6. Israel then called upon Gideon and his line to rule over them, as he had rescued them from Midian. In doing so, what had Israel forgotten (cf. 7:2ff)?

7. Although Gideon refused the official title of king, saying that the Lord would rule, he didn't deny that he had been the one to rescue Israel from Midian. He had already been acting like a king in carrying out personal vengeance on both Midianites and Israelites and taking for himself the spoils of the kings. How did he further these king-like actions immediately after refusing kingship?

8. Despite Midian's being subdued, and Israel having rest for 40 years, what did Gideon, the deliverer of Israel, lead the people in doing according to verse 27?

Day 4

1. Read **Judges 8:29-9:21**.
2. Judges 8:29-31 give us a bit more biographical information about Gideon/Jerubbaal (note that the narrator goes back and forth between these two names in this short section). What else do we learn about him before his death in verse 32?
3. Whatever Gideon's faults and his leading people in a false worship of the ephod in his home, he must have quelled Baal worship, because as soon as he died, what happened (verse 33)?
4. Baal-berith means the "lord of the covenant." God had made Israel his covenant people and drew them out from the peoples, and now Israel rejects the covenant and makes the covenant god of the peoples their god. How does verse 34 further describe Israel's rejection of God?
5. Verse 35 gives another Israelite response to Gideon's death, one that will be further explained in the next chapter. How did Israel treat Gideon's family after his death, despite his having played a major role in the defeat of the Midianites and rest in the land for forty years?

6. Heading into chapter 9, it is interesting (and sad) to note several things. The Canaanization of Israel is evident even in the use of names; Gideon is referred to exclusively as Jerubbabai, and Yahweh is simply referred to as Elohim (the generic Hebrew word for any god). As in chapter 8, there is nothing heard from God. This chapter emphasizes the problems coming from within Israel, rather than from without.
7. Back in 8:31, we were informed of the birth of Gideon's son Abimelech, whose mother was Gideon's Shechemite (Canaanite) concubine. What did Abimelech convince his mother's extended family to think?

8. Abimelech's family convinced the leaders of Shechem that he should be their leader, and they took 70 pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-berith to hire mercenaries to help Abimelech to do what?

9. After the murder of all his half brothers, except Jotham, possibly one by one (the idea of one on one stone could be similar to Saul's use of a slaughterhouse stone on which he sacrificed animals; cf. 1 Sam 14:33-34), what did the leaders of Shechem do?

10. Jotham came out of hiding to speak to the leaders of Shechem from a safe place. His words implied that he spoke for God and thus they should listen to him. Jotham told a fable to the leaders about trees who wanted to anoint a king over themselves. Jotham then questioned their integrity in anointing Abimelech king. He questioned their integrity in killing off the sons of Jerubbaal who fought for them and risked his life to save them from the Midianites and then choosing the son of his slave wife to be king simply because he was related. He concluded that if they acted in good faith they could rejoice; if not, what curse did he invoke on them, like the bramble in his fable?

Day 5

1. Read **Judges 9:22-57**.
2. Immediately, the narrator tells us the length of Abimelech's rule—only 3 years—as well as the fact that vengeance for Gideon's sons was wrought on both Abimelech and the Shechemites who aided him. Who was behind the treachery between Abimelech and the leaders of Schechem; what did he do?
3. Instead of a response by Abimelech to the Schechemites' highway robbery, the narrator introduces a new character, Gaal. He seems to be a full-blooded Shechemite to whom the men now give their full support. When Zebul, Abimelech's second-hand man in Shechem, hear that Gaal was garnering support for himself and against Abimelech, he secretly sent a message to Abimelech, advising him to set up an ambush. Not only did Abimelech have victory over Gaal, but what did he do the following day to the city and its inhabitants?
4. Apparently some of the leaders and part of the city remained. These leaders gathered in the Tower of Shechem which guarded or was part of the temple to their god, El-berith. What did Abimelech and his men then do?

5. Abimelech and his men move on to conquer Thebez, where they were apparently successful. The people had retreated to their tower, and Abimelech was about to burn it down when what happened?

6. The narrator bookends his story about Abimelech's rule with God's justice and role as avenger. Summarize verses 56-57.

Judges: Week 3

Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzon, Elon, & Abdon: Chapters 10-12

Day 1

1. Read **Judges 10:1-16**.
2. Verses 1-5 give very short accounts of two men who judged Israel for a total of 45 years. After Abimelech's short and unstable reign, Tola arose and saved Israel. Following Tola. The next was Jair. How is he described? (Remember this description and note how he contrasts with Jephthah whom we will see next.)
3. The description of Israel's evil in verse 6 includes the most extensive list of gods they served. Describe the evil Israel did.
4. What reaction did God have to the people's idolatry?
5. For the first time, in Israel's crying out to God, what did they do in verse 10?

Day 2

1. Read **Judges 10:17-11:28**.
2. When the Ammonites were called to arms and camped at Gilead, the Gileadites wondered among themselves who would fight against the Ammonites and be head over the Gileadites. Instead of the Lord raising up a deliverer, as has been often the case, verse 1 of the next chapter simply describes whom?
3. Describe Jephthah as pictured in verses 1-3. How do Jephthah and his family further illustrate the Canaanization of Israel?
4. After being interrupted by the description of Jephthah, the narrator return to the issue at hand—the attack by the Ammonites. The elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah back from Tob to lead them militarily and fight against the Ammonites. Jephthah protested, because he accused them of driving him out. What did the Gileadites promise him that finally convinced him to come back? (Notice what motivated Jephthah to fight and note the silence from the Lord in this whole matter.)
5. Jephthah immediately took charge. He sent a message to the king of the Ammonites asking why he was making war against him. What was the king's answer?

6. Jephthah responded with a brief history of that time: When Israel came, they asked both Edom and Moab if they could simply pass through their land. Both refused, so Israel traveled around them. When they got to Heshbon, the land of the Amorites, they requested of King Sihon to go through. Not only did Sihon refuse, but he also attacked them. The Lord delivered Israel and conquered Sihon, and Israel took the land in question (which was the Amorites' not the Ammonites' anyway) which the Lord had dispossessed its original inhabitants of.
7. In verses 23-24, what point did Jephthah drive home with the Ammonite king (possibly also revealing his Canaanized thinking)?
8. After comparing this nameless Ammonite king to Balak, king of Moab, who never confronted Israel about land claims, what question did Jephthah ask in verse 26?
9. Jephthah made it personal in verse 27, saying that he had not sinned against the king; thus, the king did *him* wrong by making war on *him*. He called on the Lord to judge between them. How did the king respond?

Day 3

1. Read **Judges 11:29-40**.
2. Despite the manner in which Jephthah was chosen to lead, the Spirit of the Lord did come upon him before he went to fight. What vow did Jephthah make? (Because the Spirit of the Lord was on him, it wasn't necessary for him to "bargain" with God. Jephthah was likely trying to manipulate God to bring about his own victory.)
3. Despite the Lord's words in 10:13 that he would save faithless Israel no more, what did the Lord do in verses 32-33? What does this reveal about the character of God?
4. Who was the first to meet Jephthah at the door when he returned home victorious?
5. How did Jephthah respond when he saw his daughter? (Note the focus of his response.)

6. When Jephthah said that he couldn't break his vow, his daughter told him he should keep his vow. Her words actually give a theological explanation for the battle. Jephthah in verse 27 had said that the Ammonite king did him wrong and the Lord would be the judge; here his daughter describes his victory how?

7. She asked that she be allowed to 2 months with her companions to weep for her virginity. She did and then returned home so her father could fulfill his vow. Some believe that she simply was set aside as a perpetual virgin because the emphasis on the text is her virginity. But it seems that the emphasis on her virginity attests to her young age and childless status at the time of her sacrifice. Continuing one's line through one's children was very important to Old Testament Israel. Recall how the text emphasized that his daughter was his only child. In killing his own daughter, what did Jephthah do to his family line (especially in light of his being an outcast himself from his half-brothers and father as a son of a prostitute)?

8. Interestingly, despite Jephthah's great efforts and sacrifice to be a leader, who was remembered yearly for four days for her actual sacrifice?

Day 4

1. Read **Judges 12**.
2. Once again (cf. 8:1-3), the Ephraimites complain about not being called up to war. What did they threaten to do to Jephthah? What did Jephthah say in order to calm down the situation?
3. Words didn't help, and he gathered fellow Gileadites to fight against the Ephraimites, because Ephraim called Gilead fugitives of Ephraim. The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan and only allowed those to pass who were Gileadites, as proven by their saying Shibboleth correctly (not Sibboleth, which revealed the "fugitive" Ephraimites). This battle between Israelites resulted in the death of how many Ephraimites?
4. How many years did Jephthah serve as judge before dying? (Note the lack of reference to the Ammonites being stayed or the land having rest, as is often mentioned at a judge's death.)
5. The next verses give a summary account of three judges who also served a fairly short time as judges in Israel. How do Ibzan and Abdon especially contrast with Jephthah?

Day 5

1. In trying to keep the whole story of Samson together for next week, it might now be helpful to take a look at how the New Testament views these judges. **Read Hebrews 11:1-12:2.**
2. According to 11:2, 5-6, faith is the means of what?
3. This is a very familiar chapter, with a list of people whom God commended for their faith—faith in God which led to obedience and sometimes extraordinary acts of bravery, sacrifice, and leadership. It is not surprising to see Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses on this list. Despite all their faults, they were often exemplary. Were you surprised to see Barak, Gideon, Samson, and Jephthah included in this “hall of faith”? Why or why not? (Here’s an interesting note: The Spirit of the Lord is said to have come only on Gideon, Samson, and Jephthah [and Othniel] in the book of Judges. Barak was accompanied in battle by Deborah, a prophetess of the Lord.)
4. While the narrator of Judges certainly puts many of the judges in a negative light—especially Gideon, Samson, and Jephthah—the author of Hebrews makes it clear that these were men who had faith in God. Remembering that both Judges and Hebrews are God’s words, we must conclude that at least these 4 judges were men who had faith in God, but who also struggled with sin, and the struggle was very public and preserved in Scripture for some of these men. What were some of the ways these judges showed their faith (cf. Heb 11:32-34)?

Judges: Week 4

Samson: Chapters 13-16

Day 1

1. Read **Judges 13:1-24**.
2. Again, Israel did evil in God's sight, so God gave them over to whom for 40 years? (These people actually had been/will be a problem for Israel for some time—cf. Judges 3:31;10:7; 1 Samuel 12:9.)
3. Although we might expect Israel to cry out to God for deliverance and God to send a deliverer, instead we have the story of a Danite named Manoah and his barren wife. The Angel of the Lord appeared to her, letting her know that her barrenness did not go unnoticed by God. He promised her a son and gave her what instructions? What reason for these instructions did he give in verse 5?
4. Normally, the Nazirite vow was a voluntary vow of dedication to God for a set period of time. This was unique in that God commanded it for this child from conception until death, even telling his mother to abstain from unclean foods. Technically she should have been doing this normally in following the Law, so perhaps this shows the apostate state of the nation even in this little detail. When the woman told her husband what happened, how did she describe the Angel of the Lord?

5. Manoah wanted to see this “man” for himself and prayed that he would return and teach them what they were to do with the child (despite his wife having already been told so). His prayer was answered, but again the Angel of the Lord appeared only to his wife. When Manoah came, he asked questions about the child’s manner of life and mission, but the Angel of the Lord simply repeated his earlier instructions to Manoah’s wife. When Manoah offered the “man” a meal, it was refused. What was suggested instead? What does the narrator clarify in verse 16?

6. When Manoah asked for the man’s name that they might honor him after his words came true, what response did he get?

7. In the narrator’s telling of the sacrifice, how does he describe the Lord?

8. After Manoah and his wife watched the angel of the Lord taken up in the flame that came down to consume the sacrifice, what was their response? What did they realize? (Note how their understanding of this Angel of the Lord progressed from verses 8 to 18 to 21 to 22.)

9. When Manoah stated his fear that they would die, his wife logically reminded him that they would not die if the Lord had accepted their offering, as well as announced that they would have a child who would deliver Israel. What does verse 24 tell us of their child?

Day 2

1. Read **Judges 13:25-14:20**.
2. All of the events in chapters 14-15 develop from the events of 14:1-3--Samson's seeing a Philistine woman of Timnah and demanding his parents get her for him for his wife. Despite his parents' plea that he find a relative or at least an Israelite to marry instead of one from the uncircumcised Philistines, why did Samson choose her according to verse 3?
3. Although Samson himself is motivated by passion, these first three verses that start the events of the first two chapters are surrounded by divine intent. What does 13:25 describe?
4. In 14:4, the narrator explains that Samson's father and mother did not know what?
5. On Samson's way to Timnah a roaring lion approached him. He protected himself barehanded and ripped the lion apart. How was he able to do this?

6. Samson talked to the woman in Timnah and what words again (see verse 3) describe her?

7. On his return to Timnah, Samson decided to take a look at the lion he had killed. Instead of rotting, the carcass had instead become home to some bees who built a hive inside. He ate some honey and gave some to his parents. Why did he not tell his parents where the honey had come from (cf. 13:4-5)?

8. Samson prepared a feast (literally a drunk banquet) as apparently the Philistine grooms traditionally did. The Philistines brought along 30 “companions” for Samson to whom Samson put his impossible-to-solve riddle with 30 garments as the prize for solving. How did the Philistines force Samson’s wife to nag the answer out of Samson?

9. Despite what appears to simply be only an act of revenge by Samson , how does the narrator explain the cause of the events in verse 19?

10. What happened to Samson and his wife?

Day 3

1. Read **Judges 15**.
2. When Samson decided to go see his wife, bringing her a goat (in lieu of flowers 😊), his father-in-law wouldn't let him see her; why?
3. What did Samson do in revenge, although it seemed that he felt he had every right to do so?
4. Having escaped being burned once (cf. 14:15), Samson's wife and father are burned up by the Philistines for their actions which instigated Samson. Samson again takes revenge "one last time." What does he do?
5. After his "final" act of revenge, Samson went into hiding. The Philistines came after him, camped in Judah, and raided Lehi. Instead of raising an army to fight against the invading Philistines, what did the men of Judah do when they found out the Philistines were seeking Samson? How did Samson respond?

Day 4

1. Read **Judges 16:1-22**.
2. We now see Samson in the southernmost part of Philistia, in Gaza, visiting a prostitute. Apparently, Samson is a wanted man in all of Philistia and not just the locals in Timnah, for they set up an ambush for him at the city gates. What did Samson do?
3. The story moves to Samson's third Philistine lover, Delilah. Joshua 13:3 states that there are 5 rulers of the Philistine cities; what did they offer to Delilah for what service?
4. The first time Delilah asked Samson and he willingly gave her an answer—though a wrong one. He lied, saying that if he was tied with 7 fresh bowstrings (made from animal guts, thus breaking his Nazirite vow), he would lose his strength. What happened when he was tied up?

Day 5

1. Read **Judges 16:23-31**.
2. The leaders of the Philistines gathered to celebrate Samson's capture. Verses 23-24 emphasize that they believed what?
3. Samson was called, led by the hand of a boy, to entertain the Philistine leaders and their 3000 guests. At Samson's request, the boy guided his hands to rest on the pillars. While "resting," Samson prayed. Finally referring to God as Lord (sovereign) Yahweh, what did he ask?
4. Solomon said that he was willing to die with the Philistines, but what was his motivation?
5. In verse 30 the narrator comments on the "accomplishment" that Samson—the one set aside by God from birth—had done. How does he describe Samson's accomplishments?

6. His brothers and family came and took his body, burying him in the tomb of his father. The narrator notes that Samson did what?

7. Despite Samson's actions and personal motivations, how did God work to accomplish his plans for Israel and the Philistines?

Judges: Week 5

The Canaanization of Israelite families: Chapters 17-21

Day 1

1. Read **Judges 17**.
2. The book of Judges so far has focused on the sin of national Israel, the foreign nations come as a means of discipline, and the deliverer God raises up to help. The rest of the book gives a picture of regular life in Israel. Chapters 17-18 describe the apostasy of Israel's religion. Chapter 17 describes the apostasy within a family and the Levitical priesthood. Who is introduced in verse 1?
3. What did Micah confess doing? Why do you think he confessed?
4. Micah's mother went from saying what about the thief of her silver to saying what of her son after his confession?
5. What did Micah's mother do with the silver he returned to her? (Note the actual amount, though, that was given for this purpose.)

Day 2

1. Read **Judges 18**.
2. In verse 1, the narrator repeats what commentary on these events—perhaps both those in the previous and present chapters?
3. Note that the absence of a king may refer to Israel's lack of acknowledging God as king, in which what should have been the response to Micah's and the Levite's actions in chapter 17? (If simply referring to the lack of an earthly king, the conquests in chapter 18 take place without necessitating kingly leadership.)
4. The problem for the Danites was that their inheritance hadn't fallen to them. In Joshua 19:40-48, their lot had been assigned, but apparently they had not been able to claim that land. Judges 1:34-36 describe a failed attempt to gain some land from the Amorites. Thus, the Danites have been living in Zorah and Eshtaol (13:2, 25; 18:2, 8, 11) but had need to expand. They should have claimed the land the Lord had allotted to them, but instead they send scouts to find land. The narrator draws many similarities to Joshua's sending out the spies to view the land. Joshua had sent the two spies to especially check out Jericho, where they came to and hid in the house of a harlot. The Danites sent 5 men to spy the land and explore it and they came to the house of Micah, a place where spiritual harlotry was taking place. How does the Levite describe what he was doing and how he came to be doing it, showing his disregard for God's commands?
5. The Danites take advantage of the opportunity to get support from a deity, so they ask the Levite to inquire of God (elohim) whether their journey would be successful. What was the Levite's vague response?

Day 3

1. Read **Judges 19**.
2. Chapters 19-21 are a unit with each event affecting the next, causing a domino effect. 19:1 and 21:25 begin and end this unit within the context of there being no king in those days. 21:25 also gives what assessment as to why each of the individuals and tribes did what they did in these three chapters?
3. Judges 19:1-2 describe the first “domino” to fall that brought on the following events. What happened?
4. How does the girl’s father respond when the Levite goes to Bethlehem to get the girl back? (Note how this behavior greatly contrasts with the reception they initially receive in Gibeah.)
5. The Levite finally pulled himself away on the fifth day, and they left to return to the hill country of Ephraim in the evening. The man, his concubine, a servant and the 2 donkeys traveled until the day was nearly over. When they arrived near Jebus, the servant suggested they stop there for the night. Why did the Levite refuse to stay there and where did he want to go instead?

6. According to verse 15, 18-19, what kind of hospitality were they shown in Israelite Gibeah?

7. The group met an old man also from the hill country of Ephraim who was now staying in Gibeah. After he heard the Levite's story, what did he tell him and offer him?

8. The narrator calls attention to the scene that follows in verse 22 with the word "behold." When worthless fellows from town surrounded the house and demanded that the young man be brought out, what did the old man offer instead? (What story from Genesis does the narrator mirror here, comparing these Israelites to godless pagans of old?)

9. When the men surrounding the house refused the offer of the two women, how did the Levite respond to save himself? What happened?

10. When the man (now called her "master," not her husband) went to leave in the morning (apparently without her), what did he see and do?

Day 4

1. Read **Judges 20**.
2. In verses 1-2, what was the response of Israel to the Levite's gruesome message and call to action?
3. When asked what happened the Levite modified his story to make himself look the victim. When he asked for Israel's advice and counsel, the tribes unanimously decide to stay and fight Gibeah. With no reference to the LORD, how does Israel decide who will go against Gibeah in verse 9?
4. In time period characterized by disunity in Israel and at a time when Israel is supposed to be unified to continue the conquest of *Canaan*, what does the narrator note in verse 11?
5. What was the response of the tribe of Benjamin, when they were asked to give up the men who had done so wickedly so they could be put to death?

6. Finally, Israel inquires of God at Bethel who should go up first to fight? Who does God send and what happens in this first battle? (vv 18-21)

7. Israel took courage and prepared to fight again at the same place. Before they did, though, they went to the LORD again, weeping, and asked if they should fight their brothers again. What does God say and what happens in this second battle? (vv 22-25)

8. After two losses, the people fasted and prayed and presented offerings to the LORD at Bethel They asked the Lord whether they should battle their brothers once more or cease. This time, what did the Lord tell them?

9. The parenthetical reference in verses 27-28 is helpful to placing the time of these events. Interestingly, the individual mentioned here is the only person named in these last three chapters. Also sobering, the speed of Israel's degeneration is made clear here. Who was the high priest during these events?

10. Verses 26-48 describe the final battle between Israel and Benjamin. Verses 46-48 describe the end results of the destruction of Israel; what happened? What was the means of that destruction according to verse 35?

Day 5

1. Read **Judges 21**.
2. What had the men of Israel initially sworn when they met at Mizpah to discuss the matter of the Benjamites? What problem did this create?
3. When the people weep bitterly about the situation and ask God why this is happening, followed by the building of an altar and the offering of sacrifices, what response does God give?
4. In response to God's silence, Israel comes up with their own plan, motivated by what in verse 6?
5. Summarize below how Israel managed to get 400 wives for the 600 remaining Benjamites (vv 8-14).

10. Without any real heroes in the book of Judges (save for the commendable Othniel and Deborah), and with the book ending on a discouraging note, it might feel challenging to feel that you learned much from the book. Looking at this book in light of the big picture of God's working in Israel throughout the Old Testament, how can you see God's mercy and sovereignty at play?

11. Is there anything else you learned from your study of the book?