



**FLOURISH  
BIBLE STUDY**

# JUDGES

LEADER'S GUIDE



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## INTRODUCTION

Ideally, you'll cover the introduction at your initial gathering, setting the stage for the entire study. Take time to talk through the setting of the book, biblical events that led up to this time period in Israel's history. Be sure to note the way the author of Judges arranges the material. The events in the book don't appear in chronological order but in a way that highlights the theological purposes the author is making. You might want to read aloud the callout that appears near the bottom of page 15. Be sure to look at the themes noted on pages 16–17, drawing special attention to the “downward spiral” that you'll encounter repeatedly in the study. The period of the judges was a dark time in Israel, and you're going to encounter fallen humanity at its very worst. The author's purpose wasn't to sensationalize but to expose Israel's need for godly leadership, for a king who could change not only dire circumstances but hardened hearts. God worked through this dark time to advance his plan to provide a king over Israel.

### WEEK 1: CARELESSNESS AND COMPROMISE

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

Before you discuss the questions in this week's lesson, take time to address the issue raised on page 20: “Perhaps you're wondering how a loving God could ever command one group of people to kill whole towns full of other people.” Look together at Deuteronomy 9:5 and the paragraph that follows this Scripture quote. An important takeaway from section 1 is the primacy of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The significance of Judah becomes clear only much later in redemptive history—this is the tribe from which King Jesus comes. You'll want to center your discussion on the ways in which God's people compromise obedience to the Lord. In what ways did they compromise? Then pivot to the consequences they experience for their compromise. Save time to discuss personal application using the Let's Talk questions.

#### ✦ ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO BACK (1:1–36)

1. Israel prays for God's guidance about who should take charge (1:1). Who does God name in verse 2? How does God's answer reflect a prophecy made way back in Genesis 49:8–12, when Jacob was blessing his twelve sons—the twelve tribes—before his death?

**Answer:** God names Judah. In Genesis Jacob prophesied that the Israelites would be led by the house of Judah.



2. In 1:3–4 we see the men from the tribe of Judah partner with the men from the tribe of Simeon, and they make some inroads in defeating their enemies. So far, so good, right? It would seem so. Until we get to the part about a local ruler named Adoni-bezek (1:5–7). Based on God’s earlier instructions in Deuteronomy 7:1–2; 20:16–18, how does Israel fail to fully obey the Lord in their treatment of Adoni-bezek?

**Answer:** Israel was supposed to completely annihilate their enemies, but in this case they dismember Adoni-bezek. This was a tactic used by pagan nations to ensure the prisoner wouldn’t be able to fight back.

3. Achsah may have embraced marriage to Othniel, but she didn’t like the portion of land where she’d have to live with her new husband because it was “Negeb,” which means it was dry and desert-like. What changed these circumstances?

**Answer:** Achsah asks for springs of water, which were necessary to sustain life in a desert-like region. This is one example in Judges where a woman’s involvement accomplishes something significant.

4. Judah forges ahead with the conquest in 1:16–18, accepting help from descendants of Moses’s father-in-law and the tribe of Simeon. And in verse 19 we’re told that, most importantly, the Lord is with Judah. What reason is given for why Judah had only partial victory?

**Answer:** Judah allowed fear to hold them back from obeying God fully.

5. How should we evaluate this failure in light of the promises given to Israel in Deuteronomy 20:1–4?


**Answer:** The Lord had promised to be with his people and to give them victory. Therefore, their fear and failure to obey fully was rooted in unbelief.

6. Next to jump into battle is “the house of Joseph” (1:22), which is a way to refer to the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s sons. In verses 22–25, how do these particular Israelites, the descendants of Joseph, fail to obey the Lord?

**Answer:** They compromised full obedience and turned to the enemy for help instead of relying fully on the Lord. As a result, the enemy grew stronger.

7. The rest of chapter 1 (vv. 27–35) lists how all the rest of the tribes—the northern tribes—also failed to fully obey the Lord’s commands concerning their takeover of Canaan. How did they fail, and what was the result?

**Answer:** They did not eliminate the enemy people but allowed them to live within Israel as slaves. In this way they thought to control what the Lord knew would only



harm them. This is exactly what happens to us when we try to control or manage some sinful practice rather than put it to death.

✦ **SAD CONSEQUENCES (2:1-12)**

8. According to 2:1–2, what promise had God made with that earlier generation, and what concrete acts of obedience was Israel supposed to offer in return?

**Answer:** God promised to keep his covenant always, which included provision and protection, and his people were never to make a covenant with the peoples of Canaan but be faithful to an exclusive covenant with the Lord.

9. What consequence now awaits them in verse 3, and how do the people respond?

**Answer:** As a consequence, the Lord will allow Israel’s enemies to live among them in order to show Israel that going their own way instead of the Lord’s way never results in blessing.

10. Starting with the former leader Joshua, the narrator of our story gives one more quick overview of Israel’s past in 2:6–10. What do we learn here about the spiritual condition of Israel while Joshua was living? What changed after he died?

**Answer:** Israel followed the Lord faithfully until Joshua died. After Joshua’s death, the Lord’s word was allowed to fade so that the next generations didn’t know him or his ways.

11. There is a vitally important connection between 2:10 and 2:11. In other words, God’s people did evil (v. 11) because they did not know the Lord (v. 10). What specific evil does the narrator identify in 2:11–12?

**Answer:** Israel goes after idols, the false gods of the Canaanites.

12. How does the Lord respond to Israel’s disobedience?

**Answer:** The Lord is angry and allows Israel to be defeated by their enemies. Here again, he wants Israel to see that disobedience and unfaithfulness to him never results in blessing but only in destruction.

✦ **DOWNWARD SPIRAL (2:13-23)**

13. Look more closely at 2:17. How do the people respond to God’s provision of these deliverers called “judges”?

**Answer:** They didn’t listen to the judges because their hearts were set on their own sinful pursuits.



14. According to 2:18, how and why does God work through these judges on behalf of his people?

**Answer:** The judges were God's instrument to help and protect Israel. God was "with" the judges such that they were empowered in a special way.

15. How does God use the remaining Canaanites in the lives of his people, and for what purpose (2:21–22)?

**Answer:** God allows the Canaanites to remain in the promised land to test Israel's faithfulness. Would they follow the Lord or the gods of these enemies? The Lord's test is designed to expose the true state of their hearts.

✝ **TIME FOR TESTING (3:1–6)**

16. How does God test, or discipline, his people here?

**Answer:** He teaches them the realities of war, realities that could have been avoided if the generation before them had trusted the Lord and obeyed him. In so doing, the Lord is exposing their weak faith in order to refine Israel.

17. What, in 3:5–6, does God's test expose about the people of Israel? Let Deuteronomy 7:1–6 guide your answer.

**Answer:** He exposes that their hearts are worldly, against the ways of the Lord. Their allegiance is shown in their intermarrying with the Canaanites and in serving their gods.

## **WEEK 2: GOING DOWN**

### JUDGES 3:7–31

One topic with which to begin this week's lesson is a quick discussion about the way Israel's judges differ from the sort of judges that preside over our legal system today. Israel's judges did preside over civic matters, but primarily they were military leaders appointed by God to lead Israel. As you get into the lesson, be sure to note the pattern of the downward spiral, a cycle that's repeated throughout the book. Your primary discussion this week will center on idolatry. You can anchor the conversation in two basic principles of idol worship: People turn to idols because (1) they believe idols have power to bless them; and (2) they imagine, wrongly, that idols can be controlled.



✦ **DOWN, DOWN, DOWN (3:7-11)**

1. Trace the pattern from the following verses.

**Answer:** 3:7. Israel sins against God. 3:8. God removes his protection from his people, and they are plundered by their enemies. 3:9–10. Israel cries out for God's help, and he sends them a deliverer. 3:11. Israel has rest from its enemies.

2. According to 3:7, how did worshipping the false gods—the Baals and the Asheroth—impact Israel's heart for God?

**Answer:** Idol worship made them forget God, meaning they lost interest in and desire for him.

3. In light of all God had done for his people over many generations, we have to wonder why Israel would be tempted to bow down to these false gods that were not God. It just makes no sense, right? After all, God was the one who'd given them this land and all its riches. So to help us understand, let's see what Scripture tells us about idols.

**Answer:** *Ps. 115:4–8.* Idols are empty illusions, and those who worship them become empty themselves. *Isa 44:9–20.* Worshiping idols leads to disillusionment, unclear thinking, and poor decision-making.

4. Read a song written by Moses in Deuteronomy 32:15–18. Long before Israel entered into the promised land of Canaan, Moses prophesied in this song that Israel, whom he calls “Jeshurun” here, would reject God once they got there. According to Moses's prophecy, what led the people to forsake God?

**Answer:** Material prosperity made them blind to their dependence on God, so they cast him aside and went after their fleshly desires.

5. What else do we learn about idols from Deuteronomy 32:15–18? Look also at Psalm 106:34–39 and 1 Corinthians 10:18–20?

**Answer:** Idol worship is fueled by demons.

6. What are we told in 3:9–10 about the deliverer God raises up, and what was the source of his power?

**Answer:** The Spirit of the Lord empowered his leadership.



✦ THE EDGY STORY OF EHUD (3:12-30)

7. The oppression of Israel at this time includes heavy taxes, which they are required to pay to King Eglon of Moab. What do you learn about the Moabites from the following passages?

**Answer:** *Gen. 19:30–37.* Lot’s daughters tricked their father into impregnating them. One of the resulting children was named Moab, the firstborn of the Moabite people. *Deut. 23:3–4.* The Moabites failed to provide for God’s people but sought their destruction.

8. When tax day approaches, Israel sends their new deliverer, Ehud, to King Eglon with the tax money. Ehud clearly has a well-developed strategy. How does Ehud manage to get a private audience with King Eglon?

**Answer:** After Ehud presents the tribute, he sends away the people who carried the tribute, but he did not exit along with him. He told the king he has a secret message for the king (v 19), which causes the king to excuse his attendants.

9. When Ehud approaches the king in his chamber, he says, “I have a message from God for you” (3:20). What was that message?

**Answer:** The sword and death. Ehud was bringing judgment on Eglon and justice on behalf of the Lord, and he communicated this message with violence rather than through words.

10. How does Ehud trick the king’s servants so he can make a clean getaway?

**Answer:** Ehud locks the door to the roof chamber, causing the servants to believe that the king was relieving himself. They grant him privacy and wait until they are thoroughly embarrassed before they check on the king.

11. What impressions do you get of both Ehud and Eglon from how the author unfolds the story?

**Answer:** *Ehud.* Ehud is clever, proactive, and efficient. *Eglon.* Eglon is evil, a glutton, and gullible.

12. What did God bring about for his people through raising up Ehud?

**Answer:** After killing Eglon, king of the Moabites, Ehud also defeats the armies of Moab. This brings about eighty years of rest for Israel.



✦ **SHAMGAR (3:31)**

13. When we look at the last portion of 3:30, which leads into the deliverance Shamgar provides, what is missing from the usual downward cycle?

**Answer:** Leading into the story of Shamgar, the text does not state the Israel was doing evil in the sight of the Lord, nor is there any indication that they cried out to the Lord for deliverance from the Philistines.

**WEEK 3: A TALE OF TWO WOMEN**

JUDGES 4:1-5:31

Two intriguing women—Deborah and Jael—take center stage this week. Christians sometimes draw on Deborah to make a case for women in positions of spiritual authority, such as elders or pastors. You’ll want to note that this isn’t an ideal way to apply the biblical text. We simply aren’t given the backstory to know the circumstances that led to her position. The historical context of Judges inhibits us from making a direct application of Deborah’s position into our modern context. Additionally, there is some question as to whether Deborah was a true judge. For one thing, unlike the other judges, she doesn’t directly deliver Israel from the enemy. Our takeaway from Deborah is her exalting of the Lord and his power to deliver. The story of Jael is a good opportunity to practice the Bible study principle of not reading into the text what isn’t there. We are told what she did, but we are never told why she did it.

✦ **A COMPELLING WOMAN (4:1-10)**

1. What do we learn about Deborah in 4:4–5?

**Answer:** She is known as a prophetess, and Israel trusts her wisdom—they travel to be counseled by her. We also learn that she lives in southern Ephraim, near Judah, with her husband, Lappidoth.

2. Where in 4:6 can we detect a subtle rebuke in Deborah’s words to Barak?

**Answer:** Deborah challenges Barak by asking him a rhetorical question. Deborah has the wisdom to discern what needs to be done (what the Lord has commanded), the fear of the Lord to be convicted that the command must be obeyed, and cleverness to bring it about through questioning Barak, a military leader.

3. What plan has the Lord outlined for Barak, and why does Barak have nothing to fear?



**Answer:** First Barak must gather men at Mount Tabor, 10,000 from Naphtali and 10,000 from Zebulun. Then the Lord will draw out Sisera (Jabin’s military general) and direct him and his army to the river Kishon. Finally, Barak will attack Jabin’s armies at the river. The Lord is orchestrating circumstances that will guarantee Barak’s victory—the Lord said “I will give him into your hand,” so the outcome was assured.

4. What impression do we get of Barak as he converses with Deborah in 4:6–9, and, according to Deborah in 4:9, how will this character assessment play out?

**Answer:** Barak’s hesitation to challenge Jabin’s army is due to his lack of faith and need for reassurance. He shifts responsibility off of himself and onto Deborah—a woman—essentially saying, “I will only go if you go, so it is up to you.” Deborah, in contrast, has great faith and agrees to go with him, but she points out that he won’t get any glory for the victory.

#### ✦ **A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN (4:11–23)**

5. What role does Deborah play on the day of battle?

**Answer:** Verse 14—she encourages Barak and reminds him what the Lord has promised.

6. Whom does the narrator of the story credit in 4:15 with routing the Canaanite army?

**Answer:** The Lord is responsible for the victory.

7. Now we find out why Heber the Kenite was mentioned earlier, in verse 11. He is the husband of Jael. According to verse 17, why does Sisera flee to Jael’s tent?

**Answer:** Heber the Kenite (Jael’s husband) and Sisera (general of Jabin’s army) were allies, so he believed it was a safe place to hide from Barak’s army.

8. Jael’s murder of Sisera seems almost surprising when we get to it in verse 21. Why do you think it shocks us so much?

**Answer:** It seems so shocking because what we saw of Jael up until the murder was kind and hospitable.

9. According to verses 23 and 24, what was the eventual outcome of this battle, and who is credited with the victory?

**Answer:** Jabin is first subdued, and then eventually completely destroyed. God is credited with the victory.



#### ✦ A JOYOUS DUET (5:1-23)

10. What do we learn in 5:2 about those who participated in the battle?

**Answer:** The leaders did what they ought to and took control. In addition, the people freely offered themselves and went to battle willingly instead of being persuaded.

11. Here in 5:6–7 Deborah is thinking of the danger these enemies threatened, forcing God’s people to cease traveling and remain at home. What changes this dire situation?

**Answer:** Deborah rising up as a mother in Israel.

12. What, according to verse 8, was the underlying reason for Israel’s fearful circumstance?

**Answer:** Israel chose new gods to have faith in instead of the Lord God.

13. Deborah brings ten of the twelve Israelite tribes into her song in verses 14–17. She doesn’t mention Judah and Simeon. Some from the ten she does mention held back, refusing to get involved in the battle: Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Gilead. (Gilead was part of the Manasseh tribe.) What do their excuses seem to indicate about their heart priorities?

**Answer:** Their great “searchings of the heart” indicates hearts that weren’t fully devoted to the Lord. Full devotion doesn’t hesitate but is eager to exalt the Lord and all his ways. Their hesitation caused them to choose other priorities over fighting with the rest of Israel. Reuben stayed with their sheep, Gilead refused to cross the Jordan river, Dan stayed with their ships, and Asher stayed by the coast. They found comfort and peace in their territories and did not risk their livelihoods and sense of stability to fight for and with their Israelite brothers.

#### ✦ WOMEN AND WAR (5:24-31)

14. Deborah’s song recounts in detail what Jael did to Sisera. As you consider the big picture of the story so far—God’s purposes for his people in the land of Canaan—why do you think Jael is celebrated as the “most blessed of women” (v. 24)?

**Answer:** She is blessed because she was used by God to achieve his will and protect his people. Throughout the Old Testament (see Gen. 12:3 and Num. 24:9), Scripture states that those who bless Israel will be blessed in return. This is a practical fulfillment of that promise.

15. Read Genesis 3:15, where the Lord tells the serpent (Satan) that the woman’s off-



spring will eventually crush his head. This promised defeat of the serpent is actually the very first announcement of the gospel in the Bible. Evil won't triumph! How does the episode recorded in 5:26–27 carry forward the promise of Genesis 3:15?

**Answer:** Jael is one of the heels that the Lord uses to crush the head of the enemy of the Lord and his people. In addition, Jael's conquering of Sisera further ensures that the Lord is preserving his people so that at the right time, a descendant of Eve, a Savior could return and ultimately crush the head of the serpent.

16. The song ends in 5:31 with a prayerful petition. Deborah couldn't have known the full extent of God's answer to this petition. How does 1 Thessalonians 5:1–10 reveal it to us?

**Answer:** The friends of the Lord are indeed children of the light—rising with the sun in its might. If you belong to God, you belong to the sober-mindedness, love, and faith of the day and not to the darkness, confusion, and sleepiness of the night. The day of the Lord is coming when his enemies, our enemies, will perish definitely and completely and the light will conquer the darkness.

#### **WEEK 4: WEAK PEOPLE, STRONG GOD**

JUDGES 6:1–8:35

Although deliverance through Gideon is the primary theme this week, be sure to touch on the Midianites as well—their earlier problematic history with God's people up through Gideon's day. These whole-Bible connections are good to identify whenever they come up because it shows us how the Bible isn't sixty-six separate books but one book, a unified story. When it comes to Gideon, be sure to talk about how his weaknesses and flaws point us away from him as an example for us to emulate but toward the Lord himself. The Lord is our deliverer, the one empowering every weak human he works through. If anyone in your group took time to compare the call of Moses to the call of Gideon, ask them to share what stood out most. Finally, be sure to talk about how we are to understand Gideon's fleece.

#### **✦ “THUS SAYS THE LORD . . .” (6:1–10)**

1. What does God do when Israel cries out to him for help? Why were God's people likely disappointed with this answer to their cry?

**Answer:** God initially sends a prophet instead of a judge. The prophet reminds them of who God is and what he has previously done for their ancestors. He reminds them that they were commanded not to fear the gods of the Midianites, and yet they



disobeyed. This is the first time God sends a rebuke through an unnamed prophet rather than a savior.

2. Through the mouth of the prophet, the Lord reminds his people of the past in 6:8–10. Who and what is the focus of this look backward?

**Answer:** v. 8: God delivered them from slavery under the Egyptians; v. 9: God saved them from Pharaoh’s pursuits after they were freed from Egypt and then drove out the inhabitants of Canaan; v. 10: God taught them the way of life—to follow his commands and not worship any gods before him or in place of him. The prophet reminds the Israelites that worshiping other gods never has and never will bring them life.

3. Why do you think the Lord gives this history lesson here, in the midst of such a devastating ordeal?

**Answer:** To remind the people of who he is and what he has done, and to point out that his people have forgotten. He is a God that remembers—he remembers his people and he remembers his promises to his people.

#### ✦ THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AND A MAN NAMED GIDEON (6:11–32)

4. The angel identifies Gideon as a “mighty man of valor” in 6:12. How in 6:13–18 does Gideon seem to fall short of the angel’s description?

**Answer:** Gideon, like Barak, is full of doubt and hesitation. He doubts the Lord’s steadfast, faithful love (v. 13 “the Lord has forsaken us”), then he doubts the Lord’s ability to choose a judge (v. 15 “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel?”), and finally he doubts that he is actually speaking to the Lord and requests a sign (v. 17 “show me a sign that it is you”). A mighty man of valor is not doubtful, but courageous; he is not hesitant, but unwaveringly confident.

5. How does 6:13 show that Gideon has a skewed perspective on Israel’s current circumstances?

**Answer:** Gideon says “if the Lord is with us” even though the Lord promised to never leave nor forsake them (Deut. 31:6). He assumes that because they are suffering, the Lord either left them or is not in control. When he looks back at the deeds of God toward his forefathers, he forgets their long suffering and repentance. He is letting his circumstances dictate how he feels about God rather than having God dictate how he feels about his circumstances.

6. The Lord is raising up Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites. In 6:15–16,



how does Gideon try to get out of this call on his life, and how does God refute Gideon's argument?

**Answer:** Gideon states that his clan is the weakest in Manasseh and that he is weakest in his Father's house. He is making an argument that he is the least worthy candidate to fulfill this role (similar to Moses in Exodus 3). Gideon does not realize that God uses weak vessels to shame the strong and to display his power (1 Cor. 1:27; 2 Cor. 12:9). God refutes his argument by stating that he will be with Gideon. Victory is dependent on God's strength, not on Gideon's ability.

7. Gideon is now convinced that he's had a face-to-face divine encounter, but from what the Lord says to him in 6:23, it seems he is also afraid. In order to understand his fear, we have to look back to a similar event in Israel's history—God's call on Moses. How does the Lord's encounter with Moses in Exodus 33:18–20 explain why Gideon is afraid?

**Answer:** God is so holy and full of glory that the sight of him overwhelms our mortal being and causes us to perish. He is pure goodness that cannot be fathomed. God was gracious to Moses when he hid him in the cleft and obscures his view. Gideon was afraid that if he had just seen God face-to-face, that he was now going to die.

8. Gideon's first task as the new deliverer is to rip down the place where the false gods are worshiped. What is revealed about Gideon in 6:27?

**Answer:** Gideon is not only afraid of seeing God; he is afraid of man, namely, his family and the men of the town. He does still obey and removes the altars as commanded, although he does so in a covert and cowardly way rather than with the confidence and strength as one called by God. He is still second-guessing whether God is really with him.

#### ✦ GIDEON'S FAMOUS FLEECE (6:33-40)

9. Two separate times Gideon asks God to perform the sign, and he includes a special plea the second time he asks. What does this seem to indicate about Gideon?

**Answer:** He knows that what he is doing is wrong and cowardly. He has been told multiple times that God will save Israel by his hand. He pleads with God, asking him to not be angry with him and yet still tests God once more.

10. Both times God gives Gideon what he asks for. What does this tell us about the Lord?

**Answer:** God is so patient with Gideon. God remembers that we are dust, we are prone to doubt, and that we are weak vessels. He is so gentle and kind toward us in our doubt and weakness.



✦ **TO GOD BE THE GLORY (7:1-18)**

11. How does God thin out the army in 7:2–3, and what reason does he give for doing so?

**Answer:** God instructs Gideon to send home the fearful first. This practice was permitted under Mosaic law (see Deut. 20:8)—sending home the fearful would stop fear from spreading across the entire army. God thins out the army so that when they are victorious, it will be obvious that their victory can be attributed to God’s strength and not their own.

12. The time has come. “Arise,” says the Lord to Gideon, “go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand” (7:9). Despite the Lord’s reassurance, what do verses 10–11 reveal about Gideon?

**Answer:** Gideon is still afraid. He does go down to the enemy camp with Purah to listen to what they are saying. He needs further reassurance and signs to believe that the Lord is trustworthy and in control of the situation.

13. How in 7:13–14 does the Lord once again reassure his appointed deliverer, and how does Gideon respond?

**Answer:** Gideon overhears a warrior telling a comrade about his dream. The comrade interprets the dream correctly, stating that the sword of Gideon will conquer the camp and that God has given Gideon Midian and all the camp. The comrade has more faith than Gideon! As soon as Gideon hears this, he falls down in worship. The dream, a sign, that the Lord gave to the soldier with the interpretation gave Gideon the confidence that he needed that the Lord was in control and was trustworthy.

14. How would you summarize the Lord’s dealings with Gideon in this section, and how has Gideon changed from the beginning of the section (7:1) to the end (7:17–18)?

**Answer:** The Lord is patient and gentle toward Gideon. The Lord’s plans to conquer Midian and the Amalekites was not dependent on Gideon’s fear or trust, but instead on the Lord’s strength. The Lord’s strength and control is even more evident in light of Gideon’s lack of strength and confidence. Gideon begins the section fearful and lacking confidence, and he ends the section confidently taking control, determining a strategy, and teaching the three hundred men what to do in this battle.

✦ **NO MORE MIGHTY MIDIAN (7:19-25)**

15. What began as a large army of thirty-two thousand men had been reduced by the Lord to just three hundred, and then this small army is sent into battle with no real



weapons. All along the way, the Lord reassures Gideon of victory. What does this reveal about God and how he works in the lives of his people?

**Answer:** Our growth toward holiness (our sanctification) is progressive. The Lord grows us daily as we learn more about his character, remember his works, and see how he provides for us. God knows that we will stumble and struggle on our journey toward holiness, and he supports us in those places with grace, mercy, and patience. His love and care for us are not dependent upon our degree of holiness. Because he loves us, he chooses to sanctify us through every circumstance we face.

#### ✦ TROUBLE ON THE HOME FRONT (8:1-21)

16. How does Gideon calm down the angry Ephraimites in 8:2-3?

**Answer:** Gideon responds to their anger with a humble and diplomatic answer that flatters them.

17. How does Gideon respond to the men of Succoth and Penuel when his request is refused?

**Answer:** Gideon warns them of the consequences of their actions, stating that when he returns in peace, he will bring destruction on them and their cities.

18. What reason does Gideon give for killing the two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna?

**Answer:** He is avenging the deaths of his brothers at Tabor. Some theologians argue that Gideon is serving as an “avenger of blood” for his brothers and Israel, as outlined in Numbers 35:16-21 and therefore had a responsibility to murder the murderers and finally bring to end the Midianite oppression of Israel. However, in light of the overarching theme of Judges (that Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes), it seems more likely that he was carrying out a personal vendetta.

19. As you ponder this section—from the time Gideon and his small army cross the Jordan River (8:1) to the slaying of the Midianite kings (8:21)—how is this venture different from Gideon’s earlier battle? In other words, what seems to be missing? And related, how is Gideon himself different?

**Answer:** This venture differs in that he doesn’t hesitate or ask for a sign. He never consults the Lord in this battle. He has gained courage and strength; however, he acts as though he no longer needs God because of his confidence.



#### ✦ GIDEON'S END (8:22-35)

20. What happened with Gideon's ephod, and who was affected by it?

**Answer:** Gideon led Israel into improper worship practices by creating an ephod out of gold. Although Gideon succeeded in refusing kingship, he became a pseudo priest of Israel by directing their worship toward a knock-off priestly garment. All of Israel was affected; they all were led to "whore after it."

21. After Gideon dies, the people of Israel fall into the same old sin—setting up false gods and worshipping them. In the process, what two vital things do they fail to do?

**Answer:** 1. They did not remember the Lord their God; 2. They did not show steadfast love to the descendants of Gideon (we are told he has around seventy sons, including Abimelech, whose name actually means "my father is king" despite Gideon's previous refusal to be named king).

### WEEK 5: A VERY BAD MAN (AND TWO LITTLE-KNOWN JUDGES)

JUDGES 9:1-10:5

Abimelech was "made" king, but he was only a counterfeit king. His utter badness serves to show God's people how much they need a ruler, but one very, very different from Abimelech. This is a primary way that the story of this evil man illustrates the Bible's big story—the need for a gracious, holy, righteous king, the Lord Jesus. You'll also want to bring in Genesis 3:15 again, showing how Abimelech's death is another pointer along the way to the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis 3:15. A good place to end the discussion is on what the story shows us about God—how he judges unrepentant sin and triumphs over evil.

#### ✦ ABIMELECH'S EVIL PLOT (9:1-6)

1. How does Abimelech manipulate his family and the other people of Shechem, and what does he hope to gain?

**Answer:** He appeals to family feeling in an attempt to get them on his side. Abimelech's argument is that flesh and blood will care for them and protect them better than Gideon's other sons (his own brothers). Ironically, he will end up killing his own brothers.

2. What else do you see in this section that reveals the true character of Abimelech?



**Answer:** He accepts money from the house of Baal-berith (“baal-berith” means Baal of the covenant, signifying they made a covenant with a false god), which shows that he does not fear the Lord. He uses the money to hire “worthless and reckless” mercenaries that match his own character. He then takes these men to murder his brothers. Abimelech proves himself evil, disloyal, and violent. In the slaughter they miss one brother, Jotham, so they really are not thorough or careful in their evil pursuits. Finally, Abimelech makes himself king, displaying a lack of wisdom, an abundance of pride, and a rejection of the true King of Israel, God.

✦ **JOTHAM’S FABLE (9:7-21)**

3. Jotham delivers his fable from the top of Mount Gerizim. This is significant because, in Moses’s day, this particular mountain had been identified as the place where God’s people would be blessed once they’d entered the promised land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 11:26–32). Later, when Joshua led Israel into this land, he did what Moses had instructed and blessed the people on that mountain (Joshua 8:33). With that backstory in mind, why is this location significant for the telling of Jotham’s fable?

**Answer:** Mount Gerizim had always been associated with blessing, but now Gerizim is the place of cursing. A curse is what the people of Shechem are bringing on themselves by choosing Abimelech to lead them.

4. When the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine are invited to rule, they decline. What commonality do you see in the reason each gives for saying no?

**Answer:** The responses of the olive tree, fig tree, and vine demonstrate humility. They accept that they are not created to rule over other aspects of creation, but to serve.

5. The fourth tree in the fable, the bramble, is a not so subtle jab at Abimelech. This is not the only time in Scripture that trees are used to teach an important lesson, and from some of those other instances, what can we infer about Abimelech’s character?

**Answer:** *2 Samuel 23:3–7*: worthless men are like thorns that are thrown away; Abimelech will be disposed of and will not thrive, he will be judged with harsh judgment (thrown into the fire; fire symbolizes judgment). *Jeremiah 17:5–8*: Abimelech is like the shrub. He does not thrive because he depends on the strength of men rather than the wisdom of God. *Luke 6:43–45*: it is impossible to do good apart from God. Abimelech is evil to his core and therefore will only be able to do evil things; his actions are evidence of his inward denial of God.



✦ **EVIL BURNS UP EVIL (9:22-57)**

6. What, according to 9:23, is the underlying cause of strife between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem?

**Answer:** An evil spirit sent by God that creates hostility between them.

7. Where do we see a partial fulfillment of this curse in the way Abimelech dies, and what does this tell us about Abimelech?

**Answer:** An unnamed woman, an offspring of Eve (remember Genesis 3:15) crushed the head of the opponent of God's people, Abimelech, with a millstone. Abimelech sided with the serpent rather than with God and was therefore dealt with as an adversary rather than as a son.

8. We learn something about how God judges unrepentant sin in 9:56-57. What do these verses show us about God's judgment?

**Answer:** God's judgment was an exact repayment of the evil that was committed by Abimelech and Shechem. God often judges by means of the sin itself. The verses describe that the evil was "returned," meaning exactly what was administered was repaid.

✦ **TOLA AND JAIR (10:1-5)**

9. What details about Tola and Jair does the author highlight for us, and which ones advance the storyline of the book?

**Answer:** *Tola:* he rose to save Israel, he is a descendant of Issachar, he lived in Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged for twenty-three years before his death. Israel indeed needed saving after the evil tyranny of Abimelech, and God continued to raise up judges despite the evil of the anti-judges that seized power. *Jair:* he is a Gileadite, so likely a descendant of Gad or Manasseh. He judged for twenty-two years before dying and being buried in Kamon. The number of sons, donkeys, and cities suggests significant women, wealth, and influence. Again, these minor judges show that God is still working in Israel in dark times and that he has not given up on them. In addition, minor judges show the temporary and fleeting nature of human leadership; the people need a ruler that is eternal, steady, and reliable.

## WEEK 6: FROM BAD TO WORSE

JUDGES 10:6-12:15

Most of your discussion this week is likely to center on Jephthah's vow and what happened to his daughter. You'll want to talk about how the author portrays Jephthah's character, and be sure that your group realizes that Jephthah *did* have a biblical way out of keeping his rash vow (Leviticus 5:4-6). You'll want to set this horrifying occurrence in the context of what was noted at the beginning of the week: God's people have continued to abandon him, and the consequences are multiplying. The spiritual condition of Israel is being exposed. Save sufficient time at the end for the "Let's Talk" questions, and if time allows, include some discussion about the link between root and fruit when it comes to our own spiritual lives.

### ✦ FROM BAD TO WORSE (10:6-16)

1. How has Israel's worship of false gods expanded over time?

**Answer:** It's not just the gods of the Canaanites (Baal and Ashtoreth), but gods of other nations as well (Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammonites, and the Philistines). There are seven gods/nations listed, seven being the number that typically signifies completeness. Their sevenfold idolatry was full-blown.

2. As usual, when life becomes unbearable, Israel cries out to the Lord for help. What's different about their cry this time around? You might want to compare 10:10 with their earlier cries in 3:9, 15; 4:3; and 6:6.

**Answer:** There is an admittance of sin and an exact report of what that sin specifically is.

3. How does the Lord's response in 10:11-14 show us the true state of his people's hearts toward him?

**Answer:** The people have utterly forsaken the Lord.

4. Consider how Israel responds to the Lord's sharp rebuke:

**Answer:** *What is noticeably absent in their response?* They acknowledge their sin but, it seems, rescue is their only motive. They express no sorrow over their sin. *What is their priority?* Their priority was to be relieved of their distress. They wanted immediate rescue from their circumstances, no matter the cost.

### ✦ ILLEGITIMATE (10:17-11:11)

5. Describe Jephthah's upbringing and where this lands him as a young man.



**Answer:** He is a Gileadite (like Jair was). He is a mighty warrior. His family is also noted: his mother was a prostitute, and his father Gilead had a wife who gave him sons. Because of Jephthah's position in his family, his half brothers drove him out (not wanting him to receive a portion of the inheritance). This caused him to live in the land of Tob, and he replaces his family with "worthless fellows."

6. Why is Jephthah understandably suspicious of the Gilead leaders' offer?

**Answer:** The elders were evidently the ones who cast him out. They did not want him to receive the blessings of being a part of the tribe, but they now want him to do his share in protecting the tribe.

7. Summarize in the space below how each judge came into the role of deliverer. What makes Jephthah's rise to the position different from the others?

**Answer:** *Othniel* (3:7–9): The Lord raised him up; *Deborah with Barak* (4:4–9): Deborah is given the gift of prophecy, and the Lord speaks through her to call Barak; *Gideon* (6:11–14): an angel of the Lord appeared to him and called him; *Jephthah* (11:4–8): there is no mention of the Lord's calling him to the role. The elders of Gilead commission him to be their judge.

#### ✦ JEPHTHAH'S APPEAL (11:12–28)

8. What effect does Jephthah's speech have on the Ammonites?

**Answer:** The king did not listen to Jephthah's speech.

#### ✦ A VILE VOW (11:29–40)

9. What does Jephthah offer in his vow?

**Answer:** He promises to sacrifice to the Lord whatever comes out of the doors of his house to meet him when he returns home after the battle.

10. In those days it was standard practice to make vows to the Lord and to fulfill them by means of a burnt offering, but the offering was supposed to be done in the manner prescribed by the Lord himself. According to the requirements for burnt offerings found in Leviticus 22:17–20, where did Jephthah go wrong?

**Answer:** Offerings to fulfill vows or freewill offerings were typically animals without blemish, not anything they felt like offering.

11. Who in 11:35 does Jephthah blame for this awful mess?

**Answer:** He blames his daughter, "Alas, my daughter! *You* have brought me very low."

12. He claims he cannot take back his vow, and indeed, making a vow to the Lord is a



very serious undertaking as we learn from passages such as Deuteronomy 23:21–23 and Ecclesiastes 5:4–5. At the same time, Jephthah has a way out. According to Leviticus 5:4–6, how could Jephthah be released from his vow?

**Answer:** He needed to confess the sin he committed, bring compensation for a sin offering (a sheep, lamb, or goat), and the priest would make atonement for his sins. The law allowed for lesser animals if the guilty party could not afford a lamb (two turtle doves, or even two pigeons), and if they could not even afford two doves or two pigeons, they could offer flour. There was definitely a way out.

13. As you consider the responses of Jephthah and his daughter to this predicament, what contrasts can you note between the two?

**Answer:** She understands the seriousness of vows and is willing to die in obedience to God rather than begging for her life or trying to find a way out of the situation. Her holiness and fear of God is in stark contrast to Jephthah’s foolishness and ignorance of the Mosaic law.

14. As we consider the very likely possibility that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter’s life, how does Deuteronomy 18:9–12 shed light on the spiritual condition of Israel at this point?

**Answer:** They have become like the nations that were killed to cleanse the land of Canaan. They have grown numb to the abominable worship practices of the foreign nation that the Israelites used to abhor. They are slowly losing their distinctiveness as a nation.

#### ✦ THE ARROGANCE OF EPHRAIM (12:1-7)

15. Why, according to Jephthah’s response, does Ephraim have no right to feel slighted?

**Answer:** He sets the record straight by reminding Ephraim that he did in fact call them to battle but they did not answer the summons.

#### ✦ IBZAN, ELON, AND ABDON (12:8-15)

16. Of the little bit of information we’re given, what does the narrator choose to tell us about each of these judges?

**Answer:** *Ibzan:* he was from Bethlehem, he had thirty sons and thirty daughters, he gave them to marriage outside the clan, and he only judges for seven years before dying and being buried in Bethlehem. *Elon:* he was a Zebulunite who judged for ten years. When he died, he was buried at Aijalon. *Abdon:* he is the son of Hillel the Pirathnonite. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys.



He judged Israel for only eight years before he died and was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim.

## WEEK 7: PHYSICALLY STRONG BUT MORALLY WEAK

JUDGES 13:1-16:31

You'll want to talk about the different stages of Samson's life, beginning with the story of his birth. Be sure that everyone in your group gets the link between Samson, Samuel, and John—how each was called to prepare the way for a king in Israel. This is one place in Judges that foreshadows the coming Savior, the ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ. Likely you'll want to touch on Samson's relationships with women. As you do, it would be good to focus on how these relationships serve as a mirror on his spiritual life. Also talk about Samson's Nazarite vow in this same context—how his handling of it reflects his walk with God. Finally, talk about what the Samson story teaches us about how the Lord works out his purposes in both individual lives and big-picture redemptive history

### ✦ MIRACLE BABY (13:1-25)

1. When the angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife and tells her she is going to have a baby, what two things does he tell her about this child in 13:4-5?

**Answer:** 1. The child will be a Nazirite from the womb and (2) and be instrumental in saving Israel from the Philistines.

2. Manoah is the one who prays in 13:8 that the angel will return and give them more information about this child, but to whom does the angel first direct his answer?

**Answer:** The angel responds to Manoah's prayers by returning to speak to his wife, Samson's mother.

3. Two other men in the Bible, the prophets Samuel and John the Baptist, came into the world in similar circumstances. Note the similarities and differences in the chart below.

**Answer:** Answers contained in the chart passages.

4. Manoah tries to get more from the angel—a meal, even just his name—but the angel just directs Manoah to worship the Lord, and then he departs. When Manoah realizes the angel's identity, he is afraid and laments to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (13:22). How does Exodus 33:18-20 explain why Manoah thought they might lose their lives?



**Answer:** When Moses asked to see God, God had to hide him in the cleft of the rock. God told Moses that his glory is so great that no human could look upon him and live.

5. How does Manoah's wife speak wisdom into her husband's fear in verse 23?

**Answer:** She speaks logically and with reverence. She essentially argues that if the Lord had intended to kill them, he would have. He would not have accepted offerings and had an extended conversation with them, but instead they would have likely been killed at the sight of him.

6. How does the Spirit of the Lord come into the story at the end of this section?

**Answer:** The Spirit of the Lord begins to "stir him," in other words, to work in him. The Spirit prompts him to go down to Timnah from Mahaneh-dan.

#### ✦ **SAMSON GETS MARRIED (14:1-20)**

7. Why do Samson's parents object to Samson's would-be bride?

**Answer:** She is a Philistine and there are many eligible women in his own tribe. It would have been surprising for him to desire to marry one of the daughters of his enemy.

8. What reason does Samson give for insisting on marrying her, and what does this tell us about Samson?

**Answer:** Marrying her was right in his own eyes, echoing the refrain throughout Judges that the people do what is right in their own eyes rather than what is right in God's eyes.

9. What do we learn in 14:4 about the Lord's involvement in Samson's attraction to the Philistine woman?

**Answer:** Underlying this union was the sovereign, guiding hand of the Lord who uses all things, good and bad, for his purposes.

10. What enables Samson to conquer the ferocious lion?

**Answer:** The spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.

11. How does Samson break his Nazirite vow when he takes the honey from the lion's carcass? (You might want to take another look at Numbers 6:1–21 to review the details of the Nazirite vow.)

**Answer:** Nazarites could not go near a dead body, even a relative who had died. It was to keep them ritually clean.



12. How does Samson’s wife learn the secret of the riddle?

**Answer:** She emotionally manipulates him by crying and questioning his love for her. She continues to weep before him for seven days, and then “presses him hard,” similar to what Delilah will eventually do.

13. Samson is very angry, but he keeps his word, acquiring clothes to give to the winners of the bet, the ones who could answer the riddle. Where and how does the Spirit of the Lord appear in this segment?

**Answer:** The Spirit of the Lord again rushes upon him, enabling him to kill thirty Philistines in the city of Ashkelon (one of the five Philistine capitals). Although the Philistines “win” the bet in Timnah, they lose in Ashkelon. This is one of the first steps toward overcoming the Philistine threat in Israel.

✦ **A BATTERED WIFE (15:1-8)**

14. What has happened to Samson’s wife at this point, and how does her father try to appease Samson?

**Answer:** After some time, Samson returns to Timnah and finds that his wife was given to another man since his father-in-law believed that he had abandoned her. The father-in-law appears to be sincere—he was not expecting to see Samson ever again. To rectify the situation, his father-in-law offers his younger daughter to Samson, but Samson refuses.

15. What is the outcome for Samson’s wife?

**Answer:** See v. 6: The Philistines are angry at Samson’s father-in-law and former wife for angering Samson and causing him to respond in this way. The Philistines burn his wife and father-in-law as retribution for Samson burning the fields. The wife ends up dying the way that she would have if she would not have provided an answer to the riddle (see 14:15).

✦ **FIGHTING THE PHILISTINES (15:9-20)**

16. The men of Judah want nothing to do with the fight between Samson and the Philistines. What do the men of Judah say in 15:11 that lets us know they are no longer even trying to follow the Lord’s command to rid the land of pagan enemies?

**Answer:** They admit that the Philistines are the rulers over them, and they choose to live under their rule rather than crying out to the Lord and assisting the appointed judge in overcoming their enemies.



17. Why do you think the men of Judah don't just go ahead and kill Samson themselves?

**Answer:** They are afraid of the Philistines rather than living in the wise fear of the Lord.

18. How does the Spirit of the Lord come into the story in 15:14–15?

**Answer:** The Spirit of the Lord rushes upon him again, and his bonds melt off his hands. The Spirit empowers him to then use a jawbone of a donkey and strike down one thousand men. Another victory over the Philistines.

19. Following his great victory over the Philistines, what complaint does Samson make to the Lord, and how does the Lord respond?

**Answer:** In his exhaustion, he recognizes that the Lord granted him this victory, and yet complains that the Lord has not given him water to drink, and that he will again fall into the hands of his oppressors since he is thirsty. The Lord graciously responds and provides water for Samson.

#### ✦ **SAMSON'S NIGHT IN GAZA (16:1-3)**

20. Based on what we know about the source of Samson's strength, how was he able to escape the ambush and walk safely out of Gaza?

**Answer:** Samson used his God-given strength to escape their attempt to capture him (v. 3). He tore apart the city gates, which likely weighed thousands of pounds! He also carried these massive gates all the way to Hebron, about 40 miles. Although we are not told many crucial details, this passage ought to remind us of Genesis 22:17 where God promises Abraham that "your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies," meaning that no nation or people will be able to stand against the Lord's people.

#### ✦ **SAMSON AND DELILAH (16:4-31)**

21. By what means is Delilah encouraged to trap Samson, and what incentive is she offered to do so?

**Answer:** She is encouraged to seduce him so that they can learn the source of his strength and overpower him. In exchange, she will receive 1,100 pieces of silver, an incredible sum of money. The verb "seduce" is the same verb used in 14:15 when his wife is encouraged to "entice" him. The parallels between the stories are undeniable.

22. Samson sees right through her manipulative tactics and teases her. He seems un-



disturbed by her not so subtle attempts to bring him harm. Why do you think he overlooks or fails to see what she is doing?

**Answer:** We are told in verse 4 that Samson loves Delilah. He is blinded by his love for her, has shown a love for riddles and games, and also is likely convinced that he is untouchable. He has overcome every situation he has been placed in thus far, so the Lord will again help him overcome whatever schemes Delilah spins.

23. How does Delilah finally get Samson to reveal the secret of his strength?

**Answer:** She is persistent and relentless, emphasized by three different verbs in verse 16: “pressed hard,” “urged,” and “vexed” (vexed meaning she grew impatient with him). This pressure that she puts on him is enough to unlock his heart and reveal his secrets.

24. The narrator tells us in 16:22 that Samson’s hair begins to grow again. What do you think is the spiritual significance of the regrowth?

**Answer:** This is a statement of hope. It hints that the Lord is not done yet with Samson, and he will regain his strength through the power of the Lord.

25. Why do you think Samson turns to God for help at this challenging occasion rather than during earlier ones?

**Answer:** His illusion of self-sufficiency is over. He knows he can’t get out of this predicament on his own.

26. What does Samson’s prayer in 16:28 reveal about Samson’s motives?

**Answer:** Samson desires revenge for his two eyes. His two eyes will be avenged with one act of vengeance. It is lamentable that his eyes, which led him to sin (loving the beauty of women, first his wife, then the prostitute, and finally Delilah), would be what he grieves most in these last moments of his life.

27. Despite Samson’s motives, the Lord answers his prayer and empowers Samson to bring down the house and a significant multitude of Philistines. What does this tell us about the Lord and how he works?

**Answer:** The Lord consistently turns evil for good. Although Samson was often killing the Philistines for the wrong reasons, and breaking his Nazarite vows, the Lord still accomplished his plans through Samson.



## WEEK 8: NO KING

JUDGES 17:1-18:31

Micah's religious practices reveal a lot about Israel at this time. He went through the motions of worshiping God, but he did so in his own way, with little regard for the way in which God wanted to be worshiped in those days. This is significant, because it helps us understand the author's overarching theme, which he sets out in 17:6: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The Danites also attempted to worship God in their own way, because they wanted religious practices that were easy and comfortable. You'll definitely want to include some ways we're tempted to prioritize ease and comfort in our worship practices today. Ask the group to share examples of God-honoring worship. Where do they see it, and what does it look like—and what about it is God-honoring?

### ✝ MICAH AND HIS MOTHER (17:1-6)

1. Micah's mother takes the returned money and has it made into two images to use in worship and gives the images to her son to put in his house. In the process, she dedicates her plan to the Lord. How does Exodus 20:4-5 show that her dedication was misguided?

**Answer:** She creates an idol. Mosaic law forbids creating graven images. Micah then builds a shrine for his little idols and household gods, and then further sins by ordaining his son as a priest, which was also forbidden under Mosaic law (only Levites are allowed to serve as priests).

2. Read Isaiah 46:6-7. What does this passage add to our understanding of Micah and his mother?

**Answer:** The idols and gods made by human hands are silent and are not capable of helping them in any way. The work hard for a god that does not work hard for them.

3. How in 17:6 does the narrator of our story assess what Micah does?

**Answer:** Micah is doing what is right in his own eyes without any leadership, guidance, or judge over him to instruct or punish violations of the law. It's an every man for himself situation. They are sheep without a shepherd.



#### ✦ ALONG COMES A LEVITE (17:7-13)

4. We're told that the Levite left Bethlehem because he wanted to "find a place" (17:8-9). Based on the deal he strikes with Micah, what do you think he was looking to find?

**Answer:** He is looking not only for a place to live, but a place to work. The ESV Study Bible notes: "This Levite had been living as a sojourner, a resident alien, in Judah. The Levites did not have their own tribal territory, but they had 48 cities, scattered among the other tribes (Joshua 21). However, Bethlehem was not one of those cities, and this Levite was only too happy to settle in Micah's household in Ephraim and become his private priest, displacing Micah's son."

5. What does Micah believe this arrangement will accomplish for him?

**Answer:** Micah believes that the Lord will bless him and cause him to prosper because he has a Levite priest. He has constructed an environment and a religious system that he believes he can control. This is similar to how Israel uses the ark of the covenant in battle against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4.

6. How does Isaiah 1:11-17 shed light on Micah's religious setup? What clues have we been given from Micah's life so far that enable us to make this assessment?

**Answer:** Micah is misusing the tools of worship in a way that the Lord had not ordained and, more importantly, with improper motives.

#### ✦ DAN'S DOWNFALL (18:1-31)

7. The spies from Dan come to the home of Micah, and there they encounter the Levite priest, whom they recognize, and they ask him to petition God for guidance. They want to know if their land grab will be blessed. In what way is the priest's answer unclear?

**Answer:** He states that the Lord will be watching them. It is yet to be seen if the Lord will be pleased with their actions.

8. Why does the priest decide to leave Micah's house and go along with the tribe of Dan, and what does this tell us about the motivation of the priest?

**Answer:** The Danites ask him a rhetorical question: Is it better to be a priest for one household or for an entire nation? The priest is glad to go with them, and takes the various idols in Micah's shrine with him. The priest is motivated by money and prestige rather than piety.

9. We almost feel sorry for Micah as he chases after the Danites and is forced to return



home without his possessions. But as we think back to how Micah acquired his shrine and its objects (17:1), how do the following passages shed light on his loss of them?

**Answer:** *Psalm 7:14–16:* Causing evil, making evil decision, harms the one committing the sins as much as the one he sins against. Micah created evil objects, and then lost the objects he created. It would have been better if he never created the objects in the first place (like it would have been better for the wicked man in the psalm to never even dig a hole for him to be able to fall into). *Proverbs 26:27:* Again, the evil that Micah devises backfired. He was the victim of his own crimes.

10. It seems that the Danites want to worship God but they want to do it in their own way, not bothering to go all the way to the central sanctuary at Shiloh, the only official worship site, to do it. How does Deuteronomy 12:5–14 shed light on why the worship shrine set up at Dan is outside of God’s will?

**Answer:** The Israelites were instructed to worship God exactly how he prescribed for them to worship. This includes worshiping exactly where God instructed them to worship, the place that God chose.

11. Micah and his mother thought nothing of melting down some silver and making carved images to place in the household shrine. Then the Danites came along and took the carvings and set them up in their own shrine. Why, according to the following passages, was making and setting up such images a dangerous practice?

**Answer:** *Exodus 20:4–6:* Creating images for the purpose of worship was strictly forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Immoral behavior is contagious, so creating these idols affects not only the creator of the images, but also those around them (their children and grandchildren). *Deuteronomy 27:15:* The person who creates one of these images, even for private worship, will be cursed. *Psalm 97:7:* The person who worships images is put to shame.

12. This week, in the midst of these sad tales of hardened hearts and callous disregard for life, the narrator tells us twice that Israel has no king (17:6; 18:1). What point do you think he is trying to make? Let the passages below shape your answer.

**Answer:** *Psalm 110:1–2:* A king established by God would subdue and rule over his enemies rather than be influenced by them. *Jeremiah 23:5–6:* The coming king will be wise, just, and righteous. *Ezekiel 37:24:* The coming king will be like a shepherd, caring and protecting his people rather than leading them astray. *Acts 13:22:* The coming king will be devoted to God and will therefore do the will of God rather than pursuing his own desires. *Hebrews 1:8–9:* The coming king will have an eternal throne and will love righteousness and hate wickedness, not a temporary



throne, loving wickedness and scorning righteousness. Revelation 19:11–16: The coming king is full of glory and righteousness; he conquers, rules, and administers justice perfectly.

## WEEK 9: CRASH AND BURN

JUDGES 19:1–20:48

There's no need to focus on the goriness of this week's events, but it's important to point out the connection between these events and what happened back in Genesis 19. The author of Judges wants us to grasp the reality of how low God's people have sunk, how far from God their hearts have grown. When it comes to the treatment of the concubine, you'll want to point out the fact that such callous disregard of women is an aspect of a godless society. The contrast can be seen in how Jesus treated women in the Gospels, and in passages such as Ephesians 5:25–29. Misperceptions abound today in evangelical circles about how conservative Christianity treats women. In reality, the more the Scriptures are followed, the better women are treated. You might want to spend some time discussing this. Then, after all this heaviness, it would be good to end this week's discussion on the note of God's grace, so be sure to save sufficient time to cover the first Let's Talk question.

### ✦ A MATTER OF HOSPITALITY (19:1–21)

1. Of what does the narrator remind us at the very beginning of this episode?

**Answer:** There is no king in Israel. No king means no person instituting and enforcing the laws of God, therefore, as the refrain states throughout the book, they all did what was right in their own eyes.

2. What do you note about the relationship between the Levite and his concubine in this opening scene?

**Answer:** The wife is unfaithful and has returned to her father's home. The Levite, in response, seeks after her to win her back with kindness. This reflects the relationship between the Israelites (symbolized by the unfaithful concubine) and God (the Levite husband pursuing his unfaithful wife).

3. They set out toward home and soon come to Jerusalem, which was called Jebus at the time of this incident. Why doesn't the Levite want to spend the night in Jebus?

**Answer:** The city of Jerusalem was full of foreigners and not Israelites (v 12). He desired to seek refuge with his own people, believing that it would be safer.



4. The travelers come to Gibeah just as the sun is setting and set up for the night in the town square. How in 19:15 is the end of their day set in contrast to its beginning?

**Answer:** None of his own people were willing to extend hospitality. This is in contrast to the concubine's father who happily housed them day after day. This is especially notable since the law clearly outlines that Israelites were supposed to take care of Levites since they did not inherit any land (see Deut. 12:19).

5. What does the narrator of our story tell us in 19:16 about the identity of the old man who offers the travelers hospitality?

**Answer:** The man is not a native, but is instead from the hill country of Ephraim (this is where the Levite was from, mentioned in v. 1). He was returning from working in the field.

#### ✦ HEARTS OF DARKNESS (19:22-30)

6. Sadly, this isn't the first time in the Bible this sort of evil has occurred. In the chart below, note the similarities you find between the story here in Judges 19 and the story in Genesis 19.

**Answer:** Answers contained in the chart passages.

7. What do you think the narrator is trying to tell us from this fact?

**Answer:** The narrator has reached the climax of Judges: the people of Israel are now more sinful and evil than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They have reached the bottom of the downward spiral.

8. Not only the host but the Levite himself, the concubine's lover, shows no feeling whatsoever toward her suffering. How do the following passages reveal how the Lord wants women and wives to be treated?

**Answer:** *Genesis 2:24:* Husbands put their wife's welfare above their parents (or their tribes). Holding fast is a form of covenantal faithfulness whereby he vows to honor, protect, and provide for her. *Deuteronomy 24:5:* The first year of marriage is set apart and rather than fulfilling vows to country (going off to war, public duty), the husband is to prioritize developing a strong foundation with his wife. *Proverbs 5:18-19:* Sex is a blessing and gift which ought to be enjoyed between husband and wife. Delight and rejoicing is a part of marriage. *Malachi 2:16:* A husband ought to be faithful to his wife and love her. Abandoning her is a defilement and grieves God. *Ephesians 5:25-29:* Husbands ought to love their wives sacrificially. *1 Peter 3:7:* A husband is to understand the needs of his wife and be gentle with her.



✦ **ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! (20:1-18)**

9. The tribes of Israel strategize their approach to Gibeah, and then they spread out beyond Gibeah to all the territories of Benjamin, men who'd perpetrated the evil attack. How do the people of Benjamin respond in 20:13 to the other tribes' request?

**Answer:** The people of Benjamin do not listen to their brothers, their fellow Israelites whom they ought to be aligned with.

10. The people of Benjamin take the first step toward full-scale war, mustering troops and special operations forces in preparation to go up against the rest of Israel. Why are the odds stacked against them from the get-go?

**Answer:** This passage emphasizes the numbers: Benjamin has assembled twenty-six thousand warriors in addition to the seven hundred men of Gibeah. The Israelites, however, were able to muster four hundred thousand men—fifteen for every one Benjamite. In addition, verse 11 notes that the men of Israel were united. The Lord was on their side. They inquired of him (v 18), and he responded with instruction.

11. Before battling Benjamin, Israel turns to the Lord for guidance—something we haven't seen them do for a long time. How does the answer they receive in 20:18 mirror the answer they were given back at the very beginning, in Judges 1:1-2?

**Answer:** In both instances, the Lord chooses Judah to go into battle first.

12. The fact that the tribes are guided here the same way they were back in Judges 1:2 actually gives us a hint of light in this otherwise dark story. The specific guidance they receive from the Lord points far into the future. How do Genesis 49:10; Matthew 2:1-6; and Revelation 5:5 enable us to identify this light?

**Answer:** Judah is the chosen tribe. The coming King David will eventually be from the tribe of Judah as will Christ. The theme of Judges is to show how Israel desperately needed a king, one appointed by God himself, to rule them in God's name.

✦ **BENJAMIN NO MORE (20:19-48)**

13. Despite Israel's renewed unity, the war against Benjamin isn't going to be as easy as they'd hoped. After the first hard day of battle, how does Israel prepare for the second day of fighting?

**Answer:** After the first day of battle, they weep before the Lord and inquire of him. They pray and ask him if they ought to fight a second day, and the Lord responds in the affirmative.

14. How does the Lord answer Israel's inquiry in 20:28?



**Answer:** The Lord tells them that they shall go up in battle again, and that he will give them victory.

15. The battle takes a decisive turn. What does each of the three—the Lord, the people of Israel, and the people of Benjamin—do in 20:35–36?

**Answer:** *The Lord:* He defeats Benjamin. *The people of Israel:* Destroy 25,100 men of Benjamin. *The people of Benjamin:* Recognize that they cannot win.

16. A carefully planned ambush completes the destruction of Benjamin. Everywhere they turn, they face swords or smoke. There is no escape. Despite their utter defeat, what happens during this chaotic scene to indicate that Benjamin might have a future?

**Answer:** Six hundred men of Benjamin flee into the wilderness. The Lord did not completely wipe out the descendants of Benjamin.

## WEEK 10: ROCK BOTTOM

### JUDGES 21:1–25

Identify the grace notes that permeate this final portion of Judges and what these notes show us about the heart of God. The big emphasis this week is on the whole point of Judges—the people need a king. Judges is meant to show us what happens to people—not just Israel—when they go their own way. If people will just come under the authority of a king, they will flourish. Because we know the end of the story, we can grasp that, in Judges, God’s grace is most powerfully at work in preparing the people to receive the king they need before they even want this kind of king. Talk about how the sin and destruction of Judges prepared God’s people to receive this king, first King David and much later, King Jesus. That’s where we find the gospel according to Judges.

#### ✦ AN OATH REGRETTED (21:1–4)

1. Israel cries out to the Lord in 21:3. What does their cry indicate about their spiritual understanding at this point?

**Answer:** They fail to see that sin is responsible. Sin has a blinding effect on those who hold to it.

#### ✦ LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES (21:5–15)

2. Capitalizing on this technicality, what does Israel do in 21:10–12?



**Answer:** They plan to solve the problem created by the first oath by applying the curse to the people of Jabesh-gilead. But they apply it selectively, holding back where it seems advantageous. They heap violation upon violation: they do not devote the people of Jabesh-gilead to *complete* destruction. They save out 400 young virgins to solve the Benjamite oath problem.

3. What is still lacking for Benjamin at this point?

**Answer:** There are still not enough women for the men of Benjamin.

4. What is mixed up about Israel's affections and understanding in 21:15?

**Answer:** They are siding with Benjamin and having compassion on the tribe because of what the Lord did.

#### ✦ THE DAUGHTERS OF SHILOH (21:16-24)

5. What is this new plot, and how does Israel explain the loophole to the understandably upset fathers and brothers of Shiloh in 21:22?

**Answer:** They are planning on ambushing the daughters of Shiloh during a feast in which the women come out of the city dancing in a procession. They plan to abduct the young virgins and take them to the land of Benjamin. They plan on convincing the fathers and brothers to yield, since they are not offering the women willingly (and thus breaking the curse that states “cursed be he who *gives* a wife to Benjamin”). The loophole is that they are not *giving* the women, they are unwillingly *allowing* them to be snatched.

6. What happens to the young women of Shiloh?

**Answer:** The women are abducted by the Israelites, and the Benjamites rebuild the towns that were devoted to destruction.

#### ✦ A KING IS COMING (21:25)

7. He wants us to see a connection between these two facts—(1) no king and (2) self-determination. As you reflect on all that's happened in the book of Judges, what connection do you think we are supposed to see?

**Answer:** The judges were insufficient because they were just as sinful as the people they were called to render judgment over. They lacked a knowledge of the law of the Lord, lacked courage and boldness to follow it themselves, and lacked the ability to administer the law. Without a righteous ruler, the people of Israel are left in a state of utter sin and chaos. When people do not know the Lord and his ways, they do



what they think is right in their own eyes, so there is not only competing motives, but a lack of unity among the tribes of Israel.

8. Read the account in 1 Samuel 8:4–7. What do we find out here about what God’s people are really seeking?

**Answer:** They desire to have a king to be like the other nations.

9. Samuel warns the people that the kind of king they want will prove disastrous, but they won’t listen, so the first king of Israel, a man named Saul, is appointed. Sure enough, his reign is a fiasco. Sometimes God gives us what we want in order to show us what we really need. What a mercy this is! And that’s exactly what the Lord does for Israel. What do we learn in the following passages about the king God plans to give Israel?

**Answer:** *2 Samuel 7:4–17:* God’s king will bring peace. The king appointed by God will bring rest, victory, and a dwelling place unlike the judges who did not do what was right and were afflicted by their enemies. *Psalms 89:19–29:* The king will be anointed by God and will not be overcome by enemies but will be exalted forever.

10. Read Isaiah 9:6–7. What do we learn from Isaiah the prophet about the kind of king God has always intended to give his people?

**Answer:** He will be a wise counselor, a benevolent protector, and one who brings peace. He will come from the throne of David and will rule with justice and righteousness. His kingdom will have no end.

11. What more do we learn about this King of kings from the following passages?

**Answer:** *Luke 1:30–33:* He will come in the flesh. *John 19:16–22:* He will sacrifice himself and die on a cross. *1 Timothy 6:13–16:* He is greater than any king. *Revelation 17:14:* Although nations war against him, he is a conqueror, and those loyal to him are protected and favored.

#### ✦ A LOOK BACK AT THE JUDGES (HEBREWS 11:32–34)

12. To what does the author of Hebrews attribute the judges’ heroic acts?

**Answer:** Faith. It is the instrument through which the Lord worked.

13. Knowing, as we do, how deeply flawed these judges were, what does their inclusion in the Hebrews “heroes of faith” list reveal to us about how God works to accomplish his purposes?

**Answer:** God uses incredibly sinful and imperfect humans to further his kingdom and accomplish his purposes.