

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

JUDGES 21.25



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THE BOOK OF JUDGES
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THE BOOK OF JUDGES
PART ONE



kites at a local park, riding a ferry, building a fort in the woods, watching a family movie, dancing together, playing a board game...anything! It does not need to take up the entire day, though it may sometimes. The activities don't have to be expensive adventures, but some special ones might. They don't have to be elaborate, but they do need to be consistent.

A FINAL WORD

Remember that having a family Sabbath time does not make your family less sinful. In other words, don't build up unrealistic expectations for this evening. You will find that some nights will be incredible and others will be terrible. Some nights little Johnny will behave like an angel while during other times, he may act and sound like a demon.

The successful leading of your family is not always going to end in a perfectly planned and organized road to spiritual formation. **The value is in your commitment to lead your family because it honors God to do so.** From your commitment, or lack thereof, your children will see what is valuable to you. Every family will plan, approach, and implement their rhythms differently. And while everyone's experiences may not all work out the same way, everyone must work them out.

- Jesus Story Book Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones
- Jesus Calling (365 Devotions for Kids) by Sarah Young
- Long Story Short (10-Minute devotions) by Marty Machowski

Rhythm of *Eating* Together

It is important to eat together as a family as much as possible because you can use this natural gathering time to talk about God. Occasionally, it is fun to eat a special meal (or treat) together. It is helpful to connect this time with your family worship evening. The intent of this part of the day is not simply to indulge, but to praise God through enjoying his creation, specifically, the amazing foods that God has given us. This part of the day will require pre-planning but it should be something you look forward to all day—smelling the aromas, seeing the colors, feeling the textures, etc. It can be a special BBQ outdoors, a dinner the family makes together, ice cream sundaes, your family’s favorite meal, a unique experience (Fondue), or something unusual you’ve never had!

Rhythm of *Singing* Together

Worship through Song together, even if you’re not musical. Encourage your children to worship God with their voice by singing one or two short songs. Choose a song familiar to everyone OR teach them one. Try and sing this same song every week for a month so they learn it. You do not need instruments as God has given us all a powerful one. If you cannot think of any songs, allow your children to make some up. Write them down and sing them next week.

Rhythm of *Praying* Together

There are many ways to have a prayer time beyond just bowing our heads and hoping for the Spirit to move us to say something. Children, old and young, like a little structure to give them direction. A simple way to pray is to follow the A.C.T.S acronym. Prayer begins with **ADORATION** to God. Then, you **CONFESS** whatever intentional or unintentional sins that might be on your heart. Then, you **THANK** god for all of his blessings, for provision, and especially for salvation in Christ. And finally, you make **SUPPLICATIONS** to God, presenting your needs and requests.

Rhythm of *Playing* Together

It has been said that the families that “pray” together stay together. We believe it is equally important to PLAY as a family together. Like the feast, this will require some pre-planning. It should be something the family will look forward to, something you talk about all week even if cryptically (“Sabbath is coming this Saturday!”). Your play time together can happen in the morning, afternoon, or evening. It can take the form of going on a field trip to Deception Pass, flying

{un}faithful

The Book of Judges (Part 1)

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Appendix 3: Family Worship

Pastoring your Family to Remember God and His Works

Deuteronomy 6 teaches that the parents of children, not the church, are primarily responsible for teaching their children about God. Many of us have failed in our God-given responsibility to pastor our homes, abdicating it to other people, institutions, or groups. As a result, worship has become something we do for 20 minutes on a Sunday and prayer something that we do at meals or bedtime. As part of this study, we're encouraging families to become more intentional in their worship of God together during the week.

An important part of leading your family is to develop a *rhythm of worship* for your family, otherwise, it simply feels forced and unnatural every time. It is important to start implementing new practices slowly, especially if this is a new concept for your family. Without doubt, you can make a commitment each week to organize your schedule around a ONCE A WEEK family worship and Sabbath time. You might find it *more effective*, however, to weave some of the suggested practices throughout your already established routines (e.g. family meals, movie nights, etc.).

In other words, don't ignore God's command, but don't become a Pharisee about following them either. Jesus said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" In other words, an intentional time of Sabbath is a gift to be enjoyed. Jesus will not love you more if you practice the Sabbath...but be warned...you might start to enjoy and love Him more if you do! Here are some suggestions for different rhythms, there are certainly others:

Rhythm of *Learning Together*

Set aside a specific time to talk about the things of God together. This can come directly from Scripture, from the lessons they are studying in church, or from a supplementary text geared toward the ages of your children. This can be accomplished during the morning, before dinner, or even during the meal. Obviously, the depth of these discussions will depend on the ages and personalities of the children. The point is not that you learn everything there is to know in a given passage. **The point is that you demonstrate it is important to spend time discussing God's Word together.** Be sensitive to the ages of your children, it may be difficult for younger children to sit for long periods of time if they are not used to it. If you have older children, be flexible.

Some helpful resources include:

Appendix 2: Map of Judges



Read this first

This series is not for the faint of heart. The book of Judges is one of the most disturbing narratives in Scripture, chronicling some of the most provocative people who have ever lived, doing some of the most violent things imaginable (This is probably why most churches choose not to preach it).

The book of Judges is the continuing story of God laboring to gather a community of worshippers, for Himself, from within an evil and rebellious world. The repetitive theme of, “everyone did what was right in their own eyes,” not only sets the tone for the culture, but describes the attitudes of some of the darkest “heroes” in God’s story of redemption. We must all fight the temptation to “judge” the judges for, in truth, we are no different. We are equally unfaithful and fully convinced of our own “rightness”. In truth, when we read about the ever-rebellious Israel with its misguided leaders, we see ancient versions of our own present-day idolatry—individual and corporate.

In our study, we are confronted with the injustice that sinful idolatry invariably brings. We are also confronted with a God too big to explain. His methods of using sinful men to deal with sin, and His relative silence regarding the sinful ways in which they do it, leads some to question or deny God’s character. Without question, God does raise up evil men (there are no other kind) to do His work; but he does not commend every decision they make as they work. Some of their decisions are foolish, rash, and contrary to God’s Word. If nothing else it proves that those who know God, even those who are used by God, cannot escape the effects of sin. Yet, we see that our God is sovereign; He accomplishes His mission, not despite sinful men, but through them.

God is faithful though men are not. Although we sin and fail, God uses us to advance His kingdom by the power of His Spirit. So, as we come face to face with our own unfaithfulness, our prayer is that we will be driven to despair, but to the cross—where God proved His faithfulness to us. Come quickly Lord Jesus.

Prepared by Sam Ford & Jim Fikkert
On behalf of the 3Strand Church Network

The format of this book

Each study begins with a key verse that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. If memorized, these verses will provide an important mental resource for the main ideas of Judges. Each verse is followed by a brief and general summary of the passage to help individuals or families prepare before Sunday or track with the series if a sermon is missed. Next, there are a few study questions for individuals or groups. Finally, the end of the book includes some helpful material to aid your study.

For preparing your family for Sunday

The Bible teaches us that parents, not pastors, are responsible for the biblical and spiritual training of their kids. As you are studying and learning, you need to teach your kids, share with them how God is challenging you, and impart to them a passion for Christ, His Word, and His Way (See Deuteronomy 6.4-9). Our hope is that parents will spend some time during the week preparing their family for Sunday. The book of Judges provides some exciting stories. For some of the more provocative stories, parents would be well-advised to obtain an age-appropriate or graphic Bible to read as a family.

Additionally here are some ways to prepare your family for Sunday:

- Family preparation should always include reading of the passage that will be preached on Sunday. Following the reading, begin an age-appropriate discussion using the booklet as a guide. Remember, the intent is not to teach them everything about the passage, but expose them to the Word and let them ask questions. It will prove helpful to review previous passages and the overall context of the letter.
- Family preparation should always include prayer. This should be done as a family and individually. Pray for the needs of your own family, for the church family, the pastor, the mission, and the larger needs of our community. Individually read and pray with each of your children throughout the week and try to dialogue with them about their prayer life. Ask probing questions that fit their specific maturity. Pray for your children's prayer life.
- Family preparation should always include singing. Singing songs has historically been used by the church to not only praise God but also to remember important biblical truths. Psalms is a song book, Jesus sang with

		tribe of Ephraimites (12:1-16) who had been offended because they had not been asked to join in the battle against the Ammorites.
9. Ibzan (?Judah or Zebulun) see Joshua 19:15 None Specified	Judges 12:8-10	Ibzan was a socially prominent man who had 30 sons and 30 daughters for whom he arranged marriages. Jewish tradition identifies him with Boaz of Bethlehem-Judah.
10. Elon (Zebulun) None Specified	Judges 12:11, 12	He was buried at Aijalon in Zebulun (Judges 12:12)
11. Abdon (Ephraim) Son of Hillel None Specified	Judges 12:13-15	Abdon, the son of Hillel was a man of wealth and prominence. He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons (Judges 12:14). He was a native of Pirathon and was later buried there (Judges 12:13,15)
12. Samson (Dan)? Son of Manoah Philistines (Judges 13:1)	Judges 13:1-16:31; Hebrews 11:32	An angel announced Samson's birth. He was consecrated as a Nazarite from birth (Judges 13:5,7; 16:16; Numbers chapter 6). He had a fatal fondness for Philistine women. Samson was a man of immense strength: he killed a lion bear-handed (Judges 14:5,6); he killed 30 Philistines at Ashkelon (14:19), and "thousand" with a jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:14-19). Other amazing deeds included catching 300 foxes, tying them in pairs with torches and turning them loose to burn the gain fields of the Philistines (Judges 15:1-8), and carrying off the gate of Gaza (Judges 16:1-3). Samson was conquered by the Philistine girl, Delilah, who cut his hair, the source of his strength. He was blinded and imprisoned at Gaza (Judges 16:4-22). He called out to God who allowed his strength to return. He pulled down the Temple of Dagon killing himself and about 3,000 Philistines (Judges 16:23-31).

(Judges 6:3,33;7:12)		routed the Midianite army (7:16-25). He took revenge on the men of Succoth and Penuel for not giving his army bread (8:5-9, 14-17). He killed the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna in revenge for the killing of his brothers at the battle of Mt. Tabor (8:18-21). He made a gold ephod that led the people into idolatry (8:24-27).
*Abimelech (Manasseh). Son of Gideon by a concubine (*He usurped power and should not be counted as Yahweh's judge) Civil War	Judges 8:33-9:57; 2 Samuel 11:21	Abimelech killed all his half brothers with the exception of Jotham, the youngest (Judges 9:5). He defeated Gaal (Judges 9:26-41), captured and then razed the city of Shechem (Judges 9:42-49). He was severely injured when a Thebezen woman threw down a millstone from the besieged city wall, which struck him on the head. He then had his armorbearer kill him with a sword (Judges 9:50-54).
6. Tola (Issachar) Son of Puah None Specified	Judges 10:1,2	Tola was probably from one of the leading clans of Issachar (Genesis 46:13; Numbers 26:23)
7. Jair (Gilead-Manasseh) None Specified	Judges 10:3-5	Jair may have been a descendant of the same Jair who distinguished himself during the days of Moses and Joshua (see Numbers 32:41; Deuteronomy 3:14; Joshua 13:30; 1 Kings 4:13; 1 Chronicles 2:21). He had 30 sons who were itinerant judges (10:4).
8. Jephthah (Gilead-Manasseh) Son of Gilead by a harlot (Judges 11:1) Philistines (Judges 10:7) Ammonites (10:7) Civil war with the tribe of Ephraim (12:4)	Judges 10:6-12:7; Hebrews 11:32	Jephthah was the son of Gilead by a harlot (Judges 11:1); he was driven away by his half brothers (Judges 11:2, 3). The Elders of Gilead brought him back and made him their chief at Mizpah (Judges 11:4-11). Jephthah refused to give up Gilead to the Ammonites (Judges 11:26). He fought the Ammonites and conquered some 20 cities (Judges 11:32,33). The swearing of a foolish vow cost him his daughter (11:31-40). He defeated the

His disciples, and the early church catechized doctrine in songs. One simple idea is to get your family in the practice of singing songs that will be sung at Church. This is especially for young children who cannot yet read well so that our songs on Sunday will feel familiar. Your children will sing more confidently and have a greater sense of participation when Sunday comes. Another idea is to find doctrine written to music. A great example is found here: <http://songsforsaplings.com/>

These are simple ways for parents to begin to shepherding their family. Your efforts, not your expertise, will set an example for your children.

For study as an individual

Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to understand what is written in the Bible and give you the strength to respond to it faithfully. Work through the study and write out answers to the questions. Resist any temptation to dismiss questions as they often build on one another. It is essential to ponder how the truths apply to your life—not just other's. After you have spent time on your own studying the text, it is important for you to share with others who are wrestling with the same text.

For study in groups

The Bible is meant to be read and studied in community. So take the time to do it on your own first, and then consider gathering with others to discuss what you have learned. There are a couple of reasons for this:

First, though each section in the book is intended to complement the sermon, sometimes the Spirit leads the pastor toward a different emphasis. Studying after the sermon will ensure you can discuss both the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study guide itself.

Second, studying in groups helps to hear different perspectives on the same truths. When you are together, share the implications you learned for your own life and discuss the implications for your lives together. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth. Use this guide as a launching point for discussion and genuine

care for one another. Resist the urge to have to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Remember, our small groups are more than just a place to study the Bible or rehash the sermon. They are smaller expressions of our larger church body God uses to help us grow. It is in these “mini-churches” that we learn to know God, practice loving one another, and work to make Him known to others.

*¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints and **members** of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being **joined** together, **grows** into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being **built together** into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Ephesians 4.19-22

Appendix 1: Judge Quick-Reference Chart

Judge & the judged	Scripture reference	Major Events
1. Othniel (Judah) Son of Kenaz the younger brother of Caleb Cushan-Rishathaim, King of Meso -potamia (Judges 3:8)	Judges 1:11-15;3:1-11;Joshua 15:16-19; 1 Chron. 4:13	Othniel was the nephew of Caleb (Judges 3:11) and became his son-in-law after the capture of Kirjath Sepher (Judges 1:12-13)
2. Ehud (Benjamin) Son of Gera Eglon king of Moab; the Ammonites; the Amal-ekites (Judges 3:12-13)	Judges 3:12-30	Ehud was a left-handed Benjamite who personally killed Eglon the fat king of Moab (Judges 3:21-22) He led in the slaying of 10,000 Moabites (3:29).
3. Shamgar (?) His name is not Hebrew. Son of Anath Unidentified Philistines (Judges 3:31)	Judges 3:31-5:6	He killed 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (Judges 3:31). The "Song of Deborah refers to "in the days of Shamgar ben Anath" in Judges 5:6; possibly the son of a mixed marriage = Hurrian/ Israelite?
4. Deborah /Barak (Ephraim and Naphtali) Jabin, Canaanite king of Hazor (Judges 4:2) Sisera, gen-eral and vassal of Jabin; may have been a Hittite (Judges 4:2-22; 5:26-28)	Judges 4:1-5:31; 1 Samuel 12:11;Hebrews 11:32	Deborah was a prophetess and a judge. She was the wife of Lapidoth (Judges 4:4; 5:7). Deborah and her general, Barak, defeated Sisera, the general of the Army of Canaanite King Jabin of Hazor at the Battle of Kishon on Mt Tabor (4:13-16). The Song of Deborah (ch 15) recounts the great victory. Barak is listed among the "Heroes of the Faith" in Hebrews 11:32
5. Gideon (Manasseh) Son of Joash the Abiezrite. Midianites (Judges 6:1,3,33; 7:12) Amalekites (Judges 6:3, 33;7:12) "People of the East"[some translations say Kedemites]	Judges 6:1-8:32Hebrews 11:32	The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon at Ophrah (Judges 6:11-18). Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal (Judges 6:25-27). Seeking God's will Gideon put out a fleece twice for a sign (6:36-40) On God's command he reduced the size of his army from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300 (7:2-8), and successfully

WK15 JUDGES 9

Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal. (9.56-57)

In the same place (Shechem) where Joshua had renewed the covenant and called the people to serve the Lord alone, comes Abimelech's plea to make a reasoned decision for his rule. From the same mountaintops where Joshua had led a worship service, reading the commands and warnings of God, we receive a new warning. This warning comes from Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, who warns the people not to sign their allegiance over to Abimelech. The warning here is: *anything achieved without good faith and integrity (9.16) will eventually return unfaithful results.* The law of God was established to guide and direct, but when people replace His Word with their own, it leads to destruction of both the leaders and followers.

{UN}FAITHFUL ALLEGIANCE

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. How does Abimelech gain leadership? What arguments does he use?
3. What can we expect from the wrong sort of government (leadership)? What eventually, and inevitably, happens to people who support the wrong kind?
4. Read verse 23 again. What do you think it means that God "sent an evil spirit" to bring conflict into Abimelech's life? How does that make you feel?
5. Read Mark 8. 34-38. Jotham boldly preached the truth at the risk of his own life. How does this encourage or challenge your own level of boldness in denouncing or affirming sin in your friends, family, or community?

The Introduction

A Brief History: *The Prequel to Judges*

When (if) we read the Old Testament, we often make one of three mistakes in our approach: 1) We misunderstand the Old Testament as only a series of stories and events that teach good principles for today; 2) We dismiss the Old Testament as only applicable to Israel as a nation, and not to the church today; 3) We ignore the Old Testament completely because it is difficult to understand.

Without the Old Testament, the New Testament makes little sense. That is because Old and New Testaments are both part of one larger story with Jesus as the hero. The entire purpose of the Old Testament is to point towards a future redemption when God will save His fallen chosen. Gods' covenant people, the people of His promise, hope in the coming of Jesus Christ—God's salvation. In the Old Testament His covenant is lived out in the life of Israel until Jesus *comes*, and in the New Testament in the life of the church until Jesus *comes again*. A review of what has happened before Judges will help us to understand what place the narrative has in the overall meta-narrative that is Jesus' story.

To begin, the first five books of the Old Testament are called the books of the Law or the Pentateuch. They include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The book of Genesis (The Promise Made):

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It begins with the Creator. What follows is a description of the beginning of God's creation. Ultimately, this important narrative provides insight into the nature of relationships between God and creation; man and creation, man and God; and man and man. This book alone establishes the foundational theology and understanding of God's designs beginning with creation being perfectly FORMED. Tragically, the pinnacle of His creation, mankind, causes the DEFORMATION of all of creation through rebellion. Sin enters the world when Adam decides that what is good, right, and truthful does not rest with God's Word alone. In love, God removes them from the garden so that they won't eat from the tree of life and continue to live in their sin. The plan to save men had already begun.

Although sinful man is utterly destroyed by a flood, sin lives on and mankind stupidly attempts to build a self-glorifying culture without God. He then chooses Abraham, a Babylonian who is not a moral man, perhaps even a godless man. God selects him by Grace and makes a covenant with him, promising to make

His seed a great nation that will, in turn, bless the world. The remainder of Genesis follows his family line to establish the Covenant people (Israel) through Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. It ends with one of Jacob's (Israel) youngest of 12 sons (12 tribes) named Joseph, providentially saving Egypt and taking care of the family during a famine.

The book of Exodus (Freed to Worship):

Eventually, Joseph dies and everything he did for Egypt is forgotten. Blessed by God, the "Hebrews" are made to be slave laborers in Egypt. The word "Exodus" means departure as the book tells the story of the redemption of God's people from enslavement, led by God through a man named Moses. Exodus records God declaring his "name" through a series of miracles ending with the parting of the Red Sea. The book provides foundational theology with regard to who God is, and what He expects from His people. It records God establishing His written law, the sacrificial system, and the building of the Ark of the Covenant (a representation of God's presence—not in fact His presence).

The book of Leviticus (The way of Holiness):

The book of Leviticus is about holiness. As Israel travels toward the Promised Land, the book of Leviticus records a series of divinely given laws and regulations for worship and living (e.g. birth, bodily discharge, sex, food, diseases, etc.) including the specifics concerning offerings. As God's covenant people, Israel stands as God's earthly representative; therefore, God establishes authority over every aspect of their religious, communal and personal life as a means of attaining holiness and glorifying Him.

The book of Numbers (The rebellion in the wilderness):

The book of Numbers continues to follow the travels of Moses as he leads Israel toward the promised land through three different areas. Their goal is to travel from Sinai to the plains of Moab on the border of Canaan. In Jewish terms, the Book of Numbers is known as the "Rebellion in the Wilderness". This is because Israel proves unfaithful when, as they approach the border of the Promised Land, instead of excitement and faith, there are murmurings of rebellion among God's people. Instead of a response of gratitude, faith, and obedience, they respond with unbelief, climaxing in their refusal to enter the Promised Land after a report from scouts. Instead of fearing God, they fear men. Instead of living out their identity as God's redeemed covenant people, their lack of faith condemns them to live out their lives in the desert. In short, God waits for a generation to die (anyone over age 21) so He can start with their kids plus two faithful spies named Caleb and Joshua. Even Moses himself, through his own disobedience, forfeits his right to enter the promised "rest" of God.

WK14 JUDGES 8

Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you." (8.23)

Beware when the gifts of the Spirit become divorced from the fruits of the Spirit. Gideon had been a trembling leaf when God took hold of him and turned him into a great judge. Now Gideon has begun to trust the power. He is now pursuing personal vendettas, personal aspirations, and personal glory. We see a man who still speaks in the words of a faithful follower: "*the Lord will rule over you*", but then goes on to set up a structure in which he receives the glory. With the construction of the Ephod, Gideon builds an idol much like the ones he broke down when we were first introduced to him. He replaced the High Priest with himself, declaring his rule and direct contact to God. Like many men do today...

{UN}FAITHFUL ZEAL

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. When God gives you a measure of success, how do you handle it? What happens to your attitude of dependency upon him?
3. What did Gideon desire more than what God had already given him? How have you mistreated others in your pride?
4. Why did Israel "forget" what Gideon and God had done? What was the substitute?
5. Gideon did not "end well." Gideon started out with the Spirit but, as time went on, departed from his calling. This was also true of the Galatians (Gal. 3.3) and the Ephesians (Revelation 2) who lost their first love. How has your faith changed over time? Are you in an upward or downward phase?

WK13 JUDGES 7

The Lord said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ (7.2)

Once Gideon has had his faith reassured, God decides to put on a real show. If Gideon had been afraid to face the Midianites with 22,000, God would deliver them into his hands with 300. There is nothing special about the men whom God chooses. While it would be great to add some sort of righteous measurement to how people drink water, this is not what this story is about. This is the story of God overcoming rational odds, radical fighting methods, and hesitant leadership. He continues to use broken people, in ridiculous ways, to do His work in this world. Stories like this are meant to act as the dream of the Midianites for us. Our faith should be strengthened as God's absolute sovereignty is confirmed.

FAITHFUL ODDS

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. In what ways, like Gideon, do you struggle to believe God when things are, or appear bad? What promises of God do you struggle with believing?
3. Why was God so intent on showing Gideon his weakness?
4. How does God assure Gideon? Why did Gideon need this kind of assurance?
5. Gideon's first response to the assurance was to worship. What happened next? How does this inform where we must start in our own approach to those “impossible” battles?

The book of Deuteronomy (The Law revisited):

The title means ‘repetition of the law’ due in part because the Law of God is re-recorded. The entire book is a review of the different promises, commands, and mighty acts that reveal God's character. Written in the form of a treaty between a king and his vassal state, it calls on Israel to remember what God had done for them. In response, the people are called to a complete and total commitment to God; but the book ends with God telling Moses that they will ultimately fail. However, even with the people's failure, God is true. It makes sense then that Deuteronomy, as the capstone of the Five books of the Law, takes us to edge of the Promised Land but, like Moses, not into it. With the death of Moses, we see that the Law can only take us so far. While in some sense it can lead us in the way of God, it cannot lead us into His presence.

The book of Joshua (The Promise Kept):

The prequel to Judges is the book of Joshua. Meaning, “Salvation from God”, the book of Joshua is one of the most controversial, action-filled, and seemingly blood-thirsty books of the Bible. It is not a story about man's ability to wage war, but is God's commitment to fight for purity of worship and fulfill His covenant promises. It provides a historical look at Israel as they enter the land promised to Abraham. The first half of the narrative records the military conquest of Canaan under Joshua's leadership. With relatively few setbacks, General Joshua follows God into battle and subdues the land through faithfulness to His word. A sense of peace saturates the second half of the narrative, as the land is divided and the spoils of war distributed among the tribes. Having possessed the land fully, Joshua ends by charging Israel to live in the land faithfully. With the death of Joshua, there is a sense that the next generation is now responsible to keep the peace in the land that the people have entered.

The story of the Judge & the judges

Bookended by the conquering of the Promised Land under Israel's first General (Joshua) and the establishment of the monarchy under Israel's first King (Saul), the book of Judges records what happens after Joshua and his generation has died. Their failure to do as God commanded now has its consequences – **Judges 2.2-3 you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.** What they had failed to do was to completely destroy God's enemies so as to purify the land. They had forgotten Moses' promises, disregarded Joshua's warnings, and thus failed to obey God's commands. Instead, they accommodated the sin in their land, rebelled, and eventually loved false gods and hated their brothers and sisters.

The priests, charged with protecting the purity of worship in God's family, are barely mentioned in the book of Judges because they have utterly failed to do their job.

It appears that God has given up on His people. Somewhat passively, He seems to allow men to do "what is right in their own eyes" as He allows a generation of people to forget Him. But He does not forget. The book Judges is where God demonstrates His perfect memory; where He actively makes good on His promise to curse any covenant infidelity in his people. God, the one true Judge, judges his people's sin. And, to punish His guilty people, He raises up foreign nations, the enemies of His people, to act as His executioners of his judgments. He punishes their sin through oppression.

Yet, in the midst of the just punishment of an unfaithful people, God proves faithful to his covenant. In response to the cries (not the prayers) of His people, He raises up an unlikely series of "broken men" described as judges (or deliverers) to throw off the enemies, save His people and, ultimately, bring glory to our covenant-keeping God. All of God's "heroes" are sinful, imperfect, and dark. The hopeless situations God places His people in, and the hapless leaders God uses to save them, only serve to further demonstrate that God's redemption is essentially a story about Him: ² *The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'* Judges 7.2

The Cycle of Sin in the book of Judges

The record of God's people in Judges is a cyclical tale of worship and rebellion. God is consistently faithful to his promises while man is consistently unfaithful to his obligations. This pattern not only helps organize the relationship between God and his people in the narrative, it also parallels the experience of our own relationship with Him. Throughout the various stories, the following pattern of sin, suffering, supplication, and salvation appears:

- 1- *The Israelites sin by worshipping false Gods.*
- 2- *The Lord gets angry as this violates the covenant.*
- 3- *The Lord hands them over to their enemies.*
- 4- *The Israelites cry out to God for deliverance from their oppression.*
- 5- *The Lord raises up a military deliverer (judge) to rescue them.*
- 6- *The Israelites experience a period of peace under the judge.*
- 7- *The Israelites forget God's salvation and begin another cycle.*

WK12 JUDGES 6.36-40

Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece." (6.39)

Want to know the will of God, 'put out a fleece.' This false modern interpretation of this story makes it necessary for us to address it. We see that after Gideon's initial test of God and the following protection of God, little has changed for Gideon. We see that His test for God is not to test God's plan, for He declares God's promise right off the bat. His test is a test of God's faithfulness. This is not a prescriptive: *here is how we should approach God in order to get an answer.* It also isn't entirely prohibited: *never do this or God will burn with anger against you, because God fulfills Gideon's request.* We see God reacting not so well to being tested in other parts of the Bible, but in Gideon's case, God was willing to reach down and steady the hand of His fearful child. God will give reassurance of faith to those who truly seek it.

FAITHFUL TEST

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. How does Gideon begin his prayer?
3. Gideon already knows the will of God, so what exactly is he testing God for? How might this inform your own prayer life?
4. Have you ever tested God by asking for a sign? How did that work out? Is this passage simply a description of what happened for Gideon, or a some kind of prescription for what we can do today?
5. Even though, like Gideon, we have the Word and the Spirit, is it acceptable to struggle with our faith? Why or why not?

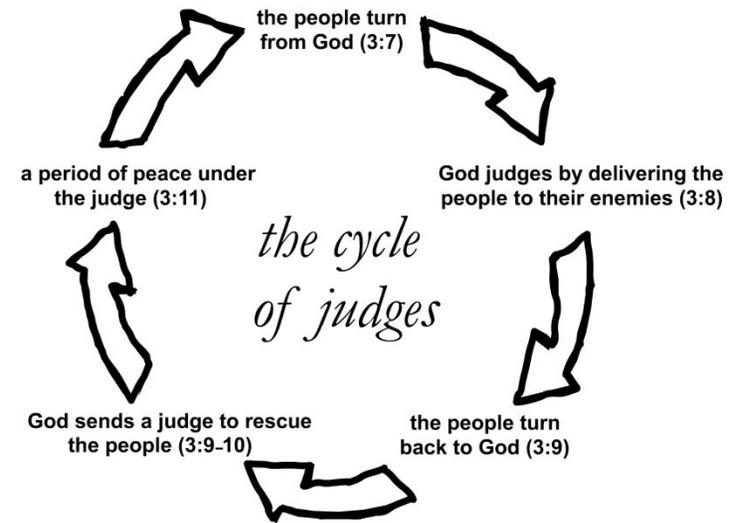
WK11 JUDGES 6.11-35

And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." (6.16)

God once again does not leave His people in the results of their sin, but makes a way for salvation. The calling of Gideon is described in more detail than the rising of any of God's workmen up to this point. In it we see a divinely sent visitor to call Gideon specifically to his task. The presence of this visitor reflects the reality of God's presence throughout Judges, the OT, and all history. We do not have a God who calls us to do His bidding and leaves us to fulfill it out of our own strength. Instead, we serve a God of power; a God who leaves men trembling in fear every time He makes His presence felt. As Gideon acts on God's command (under the cover of night), we see God's presence in the working out of the situation.

FAITHFUL PRESENCE

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. What are Gideon's objections to God's call? Even though God has told you that you have everything you need, what are your objections?
3. Read verse 13 again. When have you blamed God for things that were actually your fault?
4. According to verse 27, why does Gideon proceed at night? How have you struggled with the fear of men? (Was Gideon's response to God's call faithful, unfaithful, or both?)
5. Gideon got in trouble for tearing down the Baal altar and the Asherah pole? In essence, he attacked the community's idols. How have you gotten into trouble for standing up for truth or condemning idols in your community?



In summary, the book of Judges reads like an epic miniseries, each episode more or less disturbing than the last. The unifying theme for the whole narrative is simply God's faithfulness to an unfaithful people.

The Different ways to read Judges

Understanding the book of Judges begins with determining who the author is. The Book of Judges is an anonymous writing. Jewish tradition holds that Samuel wrote the book. Scholars disagree about this, though Samuel's authorship best fits the evidence of the book. The book probably was compiled during the early monarchy. The recurring expression "in those days Israel had no king" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25) indicates that the book was written from a later period when there was a central authority in Israel.

Regardless of who wrote it, we believe the Bible was, "breathed out by God" (2Tim. 3.16), meaning, it contains the actual Words of the one true eternal God. Not only does this make it authoritative, it makes the meaning somewhat inexhaustible. In other words, the same Scriptures have the power to teach us new and deeper truths every time we read them. As such, there are a few different approaches to consider as we study each part of this book. Some passages may emphasize one approach above another. Rather than

diminishing the value or veracity of the record, these different approaches only prove the depth of riches contained therein:

1. **The History:** This book cannot be read as a pure historical chronology—the numbers simply don't work out. More than likely, some of the judges were contemporaries and most of them were localized. Wherever and whenever these events take place, the book of Judges is a record of events that actually happened.
2. **The Politics:** Some scholars believe that the book of Judges was written as political defense for the current King. Specifically, it may have been written as an apology for the house of David (Judah) over the house of Saul (Benjamin) during the civil war that ensued after Saul's death. From the beginning, the tribe of Judah is elevated while Benjamin is relatively diminished.
3. **The Covenant:** The “right in their own eyes” theme that drives the narrative is first found in Deuteronomy 12. There are other connections with Deuteronomy including the various commands regarding the land that Israel fails to fulfill. Just as obedience to the commands has promise of blessing, disobedience has promises of punishments. As such, we will need to contemplate Judges as a prophetic lesson on covenant fidelity as expressed in Deuteronomy.
4. **The Church:** In Romans 15.4 and again in 1Corinthians 10.11, Paul writes that the stories of Scripture were written for our instruction. The book of Judges is not just history, apology, or theology. The stories are written to build our faith, teach us to love, and fill us with hope. God's faithfulness serves to encourage our own faithfulness and Israel's idolatry serves to warn us against unfaithfulness as the people of God.
5. **The Messiah:** Hebrews chapter 11 tells us that the book of Judges ultimately points to Christ. The judges themselves are empowered by God's spirit to step out in faith, without fear, and save His people. 12 different times, we see God save through an anointed individual man who trusts God. As these 12 individuals lead Israel, we are lead toward the Messiah, a word that means “anointed”—the true leader God will raise up to save His people eternally. According to Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus affirms this as the perspective for all of Scripture.

WK10 JUDGES 6.1-10

And I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.' But you have not obeyed my voice.” (6.10)

The people of Israel once again rebel and once again are placed under the hand of an enemy nation. They again cry out to God and God sends...a prophet. It seems like just as Israel was getting used to the idea of do what we want, get in trouble, call out to God, get rescued, God breaks the cycle. Why? Because they had forgotten that it was a real, offended God whose covenant they were treating as a walking mat. The prophet does not make promises of salvation or destruction to Israel, he simply states the promises and facts of their disobedience. God also answers our pleas in this way. We go to the Bible desiring an easy, practical answer to our problems and we get a description of our sin and God's grace. We want a fix, and God gives us faith.

FAITHFUL ANSWER

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. Once again, Israel sins and verses 1-6 give us a picture of just how dire the circumstances of Israel become under Midianite oppression. Why do you think God allows this kind of suffering?
3. Israel needs and wants deliverance, but God sends a prophet to condemn instead. When have you marveled at the “inappropriate” answers God gives us in our most urgent time of need?
4. God breaks the routine-like cycle of Judges here to remind Israel exactly what the point of all of this is. Why is it more important, to God, that we understand our circumstances versus simply being relieved of them?
5. How is the criticism of God's word a kind and loving grace to us?

WK9 JUDGES 5

That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord! Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. (5.2-3)

The story of Deborah and Barak offer us more than just a description of events and characterizations of heroes. It also shows us that Godly leadership is more than just courage and bow-staff skills. It is also about people leading their people in worship. Deborah and Barak have more than just a knowledge and appreciation for the work of God. It is their joy! Out of that joy comes this song; the declaration of their faith. These leaders of Israel were not just responsible for overcoming the powerful opposition from the outside, but also crushing the sin that bubbles up from within. While Israel hated their time under the thumb of foreign rulers, we continually see that it is when times are good that they turn back to sin. Worship focuses the glory on God AND reminds us of His glory. It is a two-sided blade, that the way God commands us to praise Him gives back to us in Knowledge of God.

FAITHFUL DECLARATION

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. How is Yahweh described as coming to the aid of His people? How are the people of Israel described as responding to their enemies?
3. Why do you think Deborah goes into such detail in her song?
4. Think of what it was like for the “ordinary” people, the farmers, who had to leave their families and sacrifice whatever they would produce in order to join Barak. Deborah sings in celebration of their willingness to do this. To what does such an example call you?
5. How are Deborah’s last words in this hymn both a prayer to Yahweh and a call to Israel?

The 12 “judging” Israelite Deliverers

Today’s judges are well-educated individuals who hold court to hear complaints or make legal decisions. They are given the responsibility to interpret the law and the authority to pronounce guilt, innocence, punishment, and/or retribution. The judges do not represent themselves; rather, they represent the authority of the state. In the Old Testament, Moses functioned in this kind of capacity for Israel. He judged disputes among the people until he was overwhelmed by the sheer task of the size (Exodus 18). As a result, Moses identified different leaders to help make judicial decisions. Similar to our Supreme Court, only the most important or difficult cases were brought to Moses.

There was a clear mantle of leadership passed from Moses to Joshua. When Joshua died, there was not a particular man identified to lead Israel as the new “buck stops here” judge. From all signs, men failed to lead their families, chiefs failed to lead their tribes, and priests failed to lead their nation. So, to help lead Israel against their enemies, the LORD stepped in and “*raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.*” At the same time, there is not a single individual ever directly called a “judge” in the entire book. The only time the term is used is when it refers to God as “The Judge” (11.27).

There are twelve Judges, each one associated with a different tribe:

	Judge	Tribe	Oppression & Rest (years)
1	Othniel	Judah	8 + 40
2	Ehud	Benjamin	18 + 80
3	Shamgar	Simeon(?)	?
4	Deborah/Barak	Naphtali	20 + 40
5	Gideon	Manasseh	7 + 40
6	Tola	Issachar	23
7	Jair	Gad	22
8	Jephthah	Reuben	18 + 6
9	Ibzan	Asher	7
10	Elon	Zebulun	10
11	Abdon	Ephraim	8
12	Samson	Dan	40 + 20

Under the one true judge, the LORD, different men and women rise to “judge” and “deliver” Israel from their enemies. The judges in the book of Judges are entirely different than Moses or Joshua. Most, if not all, of these judges serve a military function—some less formal than others. Far from heroic, these individuals appear disturbed and disturbing. They do not fit the stereotypical protagonist. On the contrary, they are bad men often doing bad things...in the name of the Lord. Let us not believe that pure motivations abscond one from responsibility for sinful decisions. Sinful men cannot save anyone; but our God is faithful and powerful enough to save despite (and even through) unfaithful men. Lastly, we must also fight the temptation to self-righteously criticize these judges as “unholy” tools for holiness as we fight to remember that God has only sinful broken tools (men) to work with.



The “judged” Canaanite Tribes(s)

The Canaanites are the people who inhabited the Promised Land when the Israelites crossed the Jordan in the book of Joshua. They were the cursed descendants of Ham (Gen. 10.6), the youngest son of Noah, who had sinned against his father during a strange episode following the flood (Gen. 9.18-26).

Canaan was the youngest son of Ham whose family, over time, grew quite large and encompassed six different tribes including *the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites*. Biblically, “Canaanite” is sometimes used to designate the non-Israelite inhabitants of the land in general (Gen. 12:6; Num. 21:3; Judg. 1:10). The Israelites, prior to entering the Promised Land, were commanded utterly to destroy the descendants of Canaan and then possess it (Ex. 23:23; Num. 33:52, 53; Deut. 20:16, 17).

Many find it hard to understand why God would annihilate an entire race of people like the Canaanites. *Perhaps a better question is why He allows any idolatrous cultures or individuals to live at all.* Nevertheless, Abraham had been

WK8 JUDGES 4

Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman (4.9)

In the story of Deborah, Barak, and Jael we see God using means that might defy conventional wisdom. The judge is not a man. The judge is not a military leader. The military leader is not the one who defeats the opposing military leader. A woman who breaks a family promise by putting a stake through a man’s head as he sleeps is God’s tool for salvation. The leader who is mentioned later in the Bible as faithful is the one who needs to be prodded to trust in God’s promises. While none of this makes for an easy breakdown, it points back to God’s providential leadership. We see Him declaring victory, foreshadowing the role of Jael, and even moving the people around to fulfill His plan. God calls people as *He calls them* to fulfill His will.

FAITHFUL CALLING

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. Why are some people reluctant to see Yahweh as a warrior God?
3. Was Barak faithful or unfaithful? How do you exercise faith like Barak?
4. How did Israel overcome overwhelming odds? Where does this apply to your own life?
5. Do you feel there a dilemma in that way the God uses Jael to bring salvation to Israel? How should a Christian “go and do likewise”? And how not? Why?
6. Sisera is stupid for sex because sin is irrational. What temptations cause you to lose your head and behave foolishly? How is this cycle broken?
7. Read Judges 5.24-27. Is Jael an example of “everyone doing what is right in their own eyes”? If so, why is she celebrated in Scripture rather than censored?

WK7 JUDGES 3.31

After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel. (3.31)

Shamgar kills 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. This is all that we are given on Shamgar, but we can draw a lot from what we have, as well as what is left out. His name is foreign, and his surname (ben Anath) seems to be a nickname that attaches him to the goddess of war. Nothing is said of Israel's disobedience or who has enslaved them. Instead, everything is focused on what Shamgar did (killed Philistines), and the implications for Israel (deliverance). We see God's plan being accomplished, without a lot of details or descriptions attached. We are much more comfortable with God when He stays within the order that we understand Him in, but He occasionally reaches outside of that so that we NEED to rely on Him.

FAITHFUL CONFUSION

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most challenged?
2. Why do you think so little is recorded about Shamgar? What reminder does this provide about the real hero of the story?
3. In what ways does God's silence here, or lack of detail about His plan to work things out (in your own life), make you uncomfortable?
4. What is the significance of the size of the enemy and the weakness of Shamgar's weapon? Who are the enemies of the faith today and how we are to fight against these enemies? Are we to imitate these judges or do we have different weapons at our disposal?
5. According to Judges 5.6, the days of Shamgar were dark and dangerous. It was during this time that God used one weak man in the weakest of ways to bring salvation. How does this encourage you in today's darkened culture?

told, hundreds of years prior to Joshua's conquest, about the evil people in the land. In fact, God told Abraham that his descendants would wait until the fourth generation to possess the land because, "...the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete" (Genesis 15.16). So, as God graciously cared for Abraham and his family, He mercifully waited for the Amorites to have their fill of good times.

In other words, the nations which Israel destroyed weren't saints. On the contrary, the Canaanite culture and religion were deeply contaminated with idolatry and sin. In the book of Judges, the people of Israel face the consequences of having failed to heed God's commands to expunge sin from the land. Different logical arguments can be made about why they failed, but at the heart is a simple answer—disobedience rooted in disbelief of God's Word. In the book of Judges, we see the nation of Israel fighting their fleshly attraction



to this highly immoral pagan culture. Why did it attract the Israelites? The Canaanites were not cavemen. Their culture was very wealthy with highly developed urban centers full of art, literature, architecture, and more. The Canaanite cities were vastly superior to any Israelite towns and the lure of materialism was as powerful as it is today.

Additionally, wealth in this culture was directly related to the production of food. The growth of food became connected with spirituality, and "fertility" of the soil became connected with the fertility of men and women. The Canaanites developed a celebrated system of sacred prostitution as a way of religious life. Archeology has proven that religious practices included sex worship, commanded religious prostitution, incest, and other forms of sexual immorality, as well as human sacrifice. The Bible records their zeal for sexual perversion, divination, and pagan "hanky panky" (Lev. 18.24-25; Deut. 18.12).

In essence, Israelites became idolatrous because they were attracted to money and sex. The Angel of the Lord speaks in the second chapter of Judges, condemning Israel for their failure to obey God in expunging the Canaanites. Now he promises, "I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become

thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.” The narrative, therefore, is in fact a fulfillment of what God had already warned would happen in Numbers and Deuteronomy—they would be ruled by their enemies.

Enemy	Years of Bondage	Judge	Deliverance and Rest	Scripture
Mesopotamia	8	Othniel	40	3:7-11
Moab	18	Ehud	80	3:12-31
Canaan	20	Deborah	40	4:1-5:31
Midian	7	Gideon	40	6:1-8:28
Ammon	18	Jephthah	6	10:6-12:7
Philistia	40	Samson	20	13:1-16:31

The Theology in the book of Judges

Theology can be simply defined as the study of God. Our Creator has revealed much about Himself in all of creation, everything from His existence to many of His divine attributes (Romans 1.18-23). This revelation is given to everyone in the world generally. The Scriptures, however, are God’s special revelation to His people. The Scriptures not only protect us from worshipping creation, they reveal to us who our Creator is, what He is like, and what He wills. Ultimately, this revelation points us to His Son Jesus Christ, the complete revelation of Himself.

God uses every biblical author, whether a king, peasant, or fisherman, and every written word, whether song, history, or building plans, to reveal something about Himself. The Book of Judges is no exception. Throughout our study, we will learn something about:

God’s Faithfulness: Throughout the book of Judges, God faithfully pursues and responds to his people. Like a loving Father parenting an incorrigible child, He remains faithfully consistently and responsive to men. But God’s faithfulness, as with God’s entire story of redemption, is not about men. God’s story is about God. To that end, the book of Judges reveals a God who is faithful to His own name—His character. He is faithful to His holiness and hatred of sin. He is faithful to His promised blessings. He is faithful to His promised cursings. And, ultimately, He is faithful to His own name and own glory.

WK6 JUDGES 3.12-30

And Ehud said, “I have a message from God for you.” And he arose from his seat. (3.20b)

Ehud, the left-handed Benjamite stars in an arresting caper of fat kings and mistaken bowel movements. This is the sort of story that Christians struggle to explain and non-churched people are thrilled to find in the Bible. But there is a clear message here; it is a message of God’s faithfulness. We see it given twice in this story, first when Ehud rises from his chair to give King Eglon a ‘message from God,’ a dagger into his fat belly. The second and more clear message comes as Ehud leads the charge of Israel against the Moabites and declares, ‘the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands.’ Eglon had been a message of wrath from God to His people, and Ehud was a message of God’s deliverance.

FAITHFUL MESSAGE

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. Read Romans 15.4, 1Corinthians 10.11, and 2Timothy 3.16. Should the believer, or the preacher, merely gloss over the more difficult passages of Scripture? What should be our approach?
3. How does the way we tell a story (or how the author tells the story of Ehud) affect its interpretation? Do you believe God intends for this story to be humorous? Why or why not? (See *Intro: Theology & God’s Humor*).
4. Though God’s enemy is humiliated, Ehud apparently had to humble himself to accomplish the task at hand. In what ways are your own dignity and pride keeping you from engaging in the task God has for you?
5. Tragically, Ehud’s story reflects a time when the people did what was right in their own eyes—even God’s “heroes”. How has this been true in your own life?

WK5 JUDGES 3.7-11

But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them. (3.9)

Israel turns away from the one true God and turns toward the false Caananite gods named Baal and Asheroth. God's anger burns against them. His jealous love will not allow them to give their hearts over to another. This is not just about protecting His glory, but about saving them from idol worship that leads to death. God acting is much more loving than God remaining indifferent. The people cry out in distress (not repentance) and God responds in absolute grace by raising up Othniel. Little is said about Othniel allowing the true hero of the story, Yahweh, to shine forth. In His righteous anger, God raises up the opposition. In His righteous love, God raises up and empowers Othniel to deliver His people. In the end, God ultimately determines the length of his life and time of peace.

FAITHFUL ACTION

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. How is God's anger 'good bad news'? How does it bring hope to God's people?
3. Why does God respond to the unbearable circumstances of Israel BEFORE they repent (knowing they will rebel again)?
4. Unlike charismatic leaders such as Gideon or Samson, the record of Othniel is brief, somewhat boring, and straightforward. Why do you think the book of Judges begins the story of a "family man" like Othniel?
5. How would Othniel compare with the most prominent leaders in today's church? How does God display the essential characteristics of godly leadership through Othniel—how does this picture Christ?

God's Grace: God's faithfulness is contrasted starkly with man's unfaithfulness. The "heroes" of the book of Judges are not momentary glimpses of man's faithfulness as much as they are demonstrations of a gracious God. Israel does not deserve to be saved or loved. They reject God then cry for his help when things go poorly. Like a gracious Father, God responds, only to be rejected soon after saving them. Despite their constant rebellion and pursuit of other gods, God does not abandon them. Equally, if not more so, deserving of destruction, God chooses to show grace.

God's Wisdom: God is perfectly wise. God does the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, always. God has not revealed all of his ways to us (Deut. 29.29), and even those that He has revealed, often seem foolish to our finite minds. Though His methods may be confusing, strange, or even disturbing, through faith we trust that His ways are right. In his letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded that, "*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1Cor. 1.27-29)*

God's Silence: God is silent throughout most of the book. There are no prophets to be heard. The priests are nowhere to be found. There is no king to be followed. God's own people do atrocious things and yet, God remains silent. Just because God doesn't tell us what He thinks about these events, doesn't mean He doesn't think about these events. God's silences make us pay careful attention to the few times He does speak—the words we do hear. God's silence in Judges help us to accept the silences we experience today. And God's silences remind us to look harder for where He is already acting.



God's Spirit: Throughout the Book of Judges, we observe three different figures: Yahweh, the Angel of the Lord, and the Spirit. While God may be silent for most of the book, the sending of His Spirit on various individuals gives us insight into His will and His ways. God not only raises leader, he anoints them with His Spirit to accomplish His work. Even with his anointing, it is difficult for leaders to avoid the effects of sin. In other words, all human leadership ultimately falls short of God's glory. The giving of His Spirit not only teaches us how God anoints men to lead his people but, ultimately, their failure points us toward His "anointed" (Messiah) Son Jesus Christ.

God's Sovereignty: Men and women are raised up by God to lead. These individuals act as God's agents to deliver His people from evildoers. These individuals punish, and sometimes they do so sinfully. We quickly learn that God is in control of everything. That means that God is even in control of sin. He allows, ordains, and/or purposes the sinful choices of man as tools for His work. God's sovereignty does not take away from man's culpability; rather, it clearly reminds us that God is the true hero of the book of Judges.

God's Humor: Though many of the stories in the book of Judges do disturb us and make us wince, there is also much to entertain us and make us laugh. At times, the writers employ humor with their use of names and in how the stories are structured—they're funny. We are not celebrating or minimizing sin through our laughter at a humorous story; but we are learning something about God by the way He tells the story.

The Bible does say that God laughs, usually at the wicked who go after false idols, revealing that laughter did not result from the fall of man—it was a part of God's creation. We have all experienced laughter as a powerful tool that can bring both joy and healing. The Bible also says that Jesus was fully human and it's difficult to believe that, after three years with blue collar workers, that he never laughed or joked about anything. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*" indicating the anti-thesis of weeping is laughing.

WK4 JUDGES 2.12-3.6

And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. (2.12)

The great cycle of Judges is foreshadowed: Israel is unfaithful, God raises up a people to enslave them, they cry out for help, God raises up judges to save them, they worship God until they fall back into self-reliance. In this, we see the gracious faithfulness of God. God is just and faithful to punish Israel for its sin. They broke the covenant. But we also see a God who loves His people and acts on their behalf.

FAITHFUL ANGER

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. How does it make you feel that God empowers Israel's enemies as a tool for punishment?
3. What angers God in the book of Judges? How does the LORD's anger display His faithfulness?
4. What was the groaning of God's people? Is it the same as repentance? (See 2Cor. 7.10-13).
5. The cycle of sin, oppression, crying to God, and salvation, helps to organize the narrative of Judges. How does this cycle compare with your own faith experience?
 - a. Have you ever taken license when God blessed you?
 - b. How have you experienced the consequences of these actions?
 - c. When have you cried out to God for relief from sin's consequences?
 - d. When has He saved you only for you to return to your sin?

WK3 JUDGES 2.7-11

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. (2.10)

We return to the death of Joshua to see what happens following his passing. We see that the next generation did not know Yahweh. One generation experiences the great victories and mighty works of God, and the next generation does not know Him. Are we to suspect that the great stories had not been passed down? I don't think so. Instead, the problem lies in the fact that they were just that: stories. The failure of the generation was not that they did not pass on the memory, but that they did not pass on the covenant statutes. The next generation wrongly assumed that they were good.

...Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them...

Judges 2.16-17

GENERATIONAL {UN}FAITHFULNESS

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. Is the unfaithfulness of Israel the fault of Joshua and the elders? When are leaders to blame for unfaithfulness in the people they lead? (Read Joshua's final speech in Joshua 24)
3. What leads to apostasy? Read Deuteronomy chapter 6 aloud. To whom is this passage of Scripture most directed? What is God most concerned with them doing?
4. What happens when a person, family, church, or a entire generation forgets the LORD and His work? What is your role or responsibility to the next generation? Why or why not? (See 2Timothy 2.2 and Titus 2)
5. Remembering the wrong things is just as dangerous as remembering nothing at all. What is *the most important thing* all Christians must remember and teach the next generation? Why?

{un}faithful

WK1 JUDGES 1.1

After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" (1.1)

This book opens much like the book of Exodus and Joshua, with the death of Israel's leader. But unlike Joshua, the heir apparent is not apparent. The people call out to God to raise up a new leader. This is important because it shows Israel's dependence on leadership. God does not rebuke this desire, He raises the leaders up, but He does so in a way that the leaders themselves cannot receive the glory. The book of Judges is the story of God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness.

INTRO TO {UN}FAITHFULNESS

1. Read through the introductory material in this study guide. Share your experience, thoughts, and expectations about our study of this book of the Bible. What idea or concept most impresses you? Disturbs you?
2. How might our understanding of our own sinfulness change how we view the people or events in the book of Judges?
3. One of arguments in the book of Judges is that we need leaders, specifically, the right kind of king (Jesus). How have you lived autonomously from God, as if there were no King who gives commands?
4. God sends his Spirit into our hearts in such a way that, although we continue to be wayward, fail, and remain unfaithful, God remains faithful. How does it make you feel to know that God, through His Spirit, accomplishes his mission through sinful unfaithful men...like you?
5. What does the book of Judges emphasize about God and men? In what way can you see that this O.T. book points us to Jesus?

WK2 JUDGES 1.2-2.6

And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?" (2.1a-2)

Judges begins in the final stages of the conquest of Canaan. Joshua showed us the march into the land, the initial battles, and the beginning of the establishment. Judges shows us what happens when the people get comfortable. When people get comfortable, they begin to trust their own outlook. The Israelites take their victories and their power and use it to make a judgment of God's commands. They were to destroy the Canaanites, not enslave them. They were to be faithful to God, not to their own comfort. Though sinful disobedience often appears wise, rational, even justified, it never is.

COVENANT {UN}FAITHFULNESS

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged? Most intrigued? Most challenged?
2. Read Deuteronomy 12.1-28. What was Israel's covenant responsibility? What *different* things did God promise to do? What does this teach us about God's complete faithfulness?
3. Knowing all that Yahweh had done, why do you think Israel forgot and forsook Him for the gods of the Canaanites? How is this similar to your own experience?
4. Unlike the book of Joshua, the tribes in Judges chose comfort over fighting; chose to manage their enemies instead of annihilate them. What is wrong and dangerous about half-hearted obedience?
5. Just as grace delivered Israel from Egypt and brought them into the land, so grace saves us and brings us into the family of God. Now that we "rest" grace, just as Israel rested in the land, how are we called to live? How is this possible?