

Judges

EXODUS FROM EGYPT

"What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?"

Timeline

1406 +
ISRAELITES ENTER CANAAN

1375 +
PERIOD OF THE JUDGES BEGINS

1367-1327 +
OTHNIEL

1209-1169 +
DEBORAH

1162-1122 +
GIDEON

1105 +
SAMUEL BORN

1075-1055 +
SAMSON

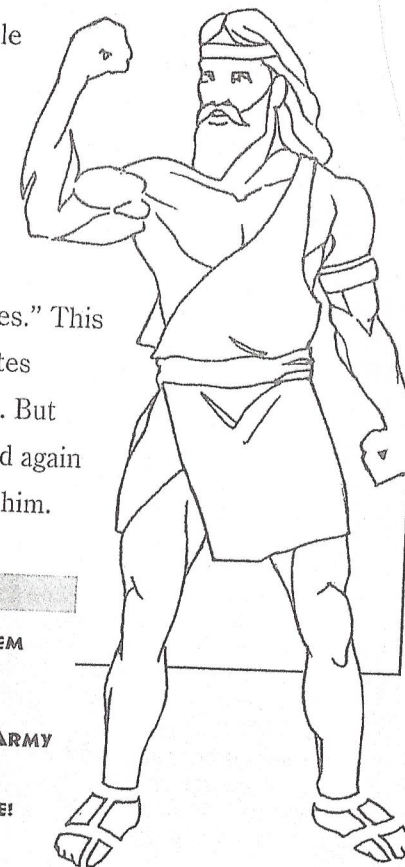
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AN INTRODUCTION

JUDGES

After Joshua died, the people of Israel began to disobey God. They forgot God and worshiped idols. So God allowed enemies to defeat the people of Israel. But when the Israelites turned back to God for help, the Lord gave them leaders to save them. These leaders were called "judges." This book tells how the Israelites disobeyed again and again. But God helped them again and again when they turned back to him.



Headlines

A THORNY PROBLEM FOR ISRAEL

Judges 2, page 309

BARLEY LOAF BEATS ARMY

Judges 7, page 317

SAY IT RIGHT, OR DIE!

Judges 12, page 327

SAMSON BRINGS DOWN THE HOUSE

Judges 16, page 332

STOLEN WIVES WED

Judges 21, page 339

HOW DID DELILAH TURN THE WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN INTO A WEAKLING? SEE JUDGES 16.

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Cycles of disobedience, conquest by other nations, then dramatic deliverances.

WHO WROTE IT? Christian and Jewish traditions say the author was Samuel.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? In the 1300s to the 1100s B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? The period of the judges begins a generation after the people of Israel settled in the Promised Land and spans roughly 200 years.

THE BREAKDOWN

Chapters 1-2: The pattern: disobedience, defeat, and deliverance

Chapter 3: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar

Chapters 4-5: Deborah

Chapters 6-9: Gideon

Chapters 10-12: Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon

Chapters 13-16: Samson

Chapters 17-21: Examples of spiritual corruption

KEY CONCEPTS

Forsaking the Lord

God's judgment

Repentance

God's deliverance

SCORECARD

Othniel: Caleb's nephew, the first judge

Ehud: The second judge, a political assassin

Deborah: The fourth judge, a prophet

Gideon: The fifth judge, a farmer and reluctant hero

Jephthah: The eighth judge, who made a rash vow

Samson: The twelfth judge—physically strong, but spiritually weak

WORTH MEMORIZING

- **17:6** In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **FOLLOWING GOD ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE EASY.** In the book of Judges we see God's people facing immense challenges and surviving through tough conditions. God used fighters to lead his people. The judges weren't afraid to get their hands dirty.
- **NEED FOR DETERMINATION AND CONSISTENCY.** While many of us want to "keep our options open" and not be too committed to one thing, the book of Judges shows the consequences of failing to commit to God. Partial loyalty and partial obedience to God end up hurting everyone in the long run. The satisfying life is focused on one goal: living for the Lord.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF

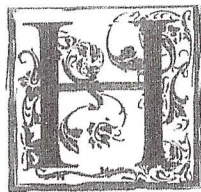
Judges?

+++

Without the Lord, today's victory won't last long.

READING TIME

10 MINUTES 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60



Have you ever heard the phrase: “Christianity is just one generation from extinction”? When we read Judges, we see how easily the heritage of faith can be fumbled from one generation to the next. Judges 2 says that after the Israelites conquered and possessed the land, everyone went to his own area and the people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua. But after Joshua’s generation passed away, “another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10, NIV).

There resulted a series of sin cycles—sin, judgment, cries for help, and deliverance. The people would fall into sin, fall prey to their enemies, and cry out to God; and God in His mercy would send a judge or a deliverer like Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, or Deborah. Their influence would last awhile, then the whole process would repeat itself. This repetitive pattern in Judges conveys a powerful lesson: To the very utmost of our

ability we must focus our energy on raising our children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, teaching them the truths of Scripture and giving them testimonies of faith.



KEY THOUGHT:

When generations arise without a knowledge of God and His commands, they fall into a downward spiral of sin, defeat, judgment, and despair.



KEY PRAYER:

Lord of my heart, may You vanquish my foes. I will find strength in my love for You, and Your love for me.

JUDGES

THE BOOK OF JUDGES STANDS in stark contrast to Joshua. In Joshua an obedient people conquered the land through trust in the power of God. In Judges, however, a disobedient and idolatrous people are defeated time and time again because of their rebellion against God.

In seven distinct cycles of sin to salvation, Judges shows how Israel had set aside God’s law and in its place substituted “what was right in [their] own eyes” (21:25). The recurring result of abandonment from God’s law is corruption from within and oppression from without. During the nearly four centuries spanned by this book, God raises up military champions to throw off the yoke of bondage and to restore the nation to pure worship. But all too soon the “sin cycle” begins again as the nation’s spiritual temperature grows steadily colder.

The Hebrew title is *Shophetim*, meaning “judges,” “rulers,” “deliverers,” or “saviors.” *Shophet* not only carries the idea of maintaining justice and settling disputes, but it is also used to mean “liberating” and “delivering.” First the judges deliver the people; then they rule and administer justice. The Septuagint used the Greek equivalent of this word, *Kritai* (“Judges”). The Latin Vulgate called it *Liber Judicum*, the “Book of Judges.” This book could also appropriately be titled the “Book of Failure.”

WATCH WORDS

- judge (deliver or rule)—2:16 (also 15:20)
- cry out (call out and seek God’s help)—10:10 (also 3:9, 15; 6:6, 7; 10:10)
- fight (clash, battle)—11:9
- deliverance (victory, safety)—15:18
- sustenance (preserving of life, recovery, or revival)—17:10

KEY VERSE:

“Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.”

Judges 2:16



KEY ACTION:

We must break the cycle of apathy, sin, ruin, defeat, and despair with the power of lasting repentance and revival.



BASIC SURVEY

JUDGES

AUTHOR: Unknown; some suggest the prophet Samuel.

DATE: Written approximately 1050 BC, covering events that occurred as far back as 1375 BC.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Israel goes through cycles of sin, suffering, and salvation.

DETAILS, PLEASE

After Joshua's death, Israel wasn't ruled by kings like other nations, but was a loose-knit confederation of tribes governed by judges. Lesser-known judges include Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. More familiar figures are Deborah, who led a military victory against the Canaanites; Gideon, who tested God's will with a fleece and defeated the armies of Midian; and Samson, who defeated the Philistines.

QUOTABLE

> They abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them (2:12 NLT).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Several judges had unusual families by today's standards: Jair had thirty sons (10:4), Abdon had forty sons (12:14), and Ibzan had thirty sons and thirty daughters (12:9). Jephthah had only one child, a daughter, whom he foolishly vowed to sacrifice to God in exchange for a military victory (11:30–40).

SO WHAT?

The ancient Israelites got into trouble when they “did that which was right in [their] own eyes” (17:6; 21:25 KJV) rather than what God wanted them to do. Don't make the same mistake yourself!

READ JUDGES 10:6–17 AND PSALM 103.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 46. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 41. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 41. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

CYCLES OF APOSTASY AND REPENTANCE

After Joshua's death, the Israelites constantly walked away from their oath to serve God. As a result, they lost the power to expel the Canaanites from the promised land. “The children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem” (Judges 1:21 KJV), and this was characteristic of many tribes, which allowed idol worshippers to stay in their midst—with tragic results. God said to His people, “You have not obeyed My voice. . . . Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you’” (Judges 2:2–3 NKJV).

That's exactly what happened, as the Israelites began a cycle of worshipping idols, suffering punishment by attackers, crying to God for help, and receiving God's aid in the form of a human judge (or “deliverer”).

“So He delivered them into the hands. . . of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Whenever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity. . . and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. . . . For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers” (Judges 2:14–16, 18–19 NKJV).

This pattern would continue for most of Israel's history.

READ JUDGES 2 AND PSALM 106.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 46. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 42. →



After Joshua died, the Israelites repeatedly worshipped other gods—a scene much like the one depicted in *La fiancée de Bélius* by Henri Motte (1846–1922).

CLOSER LOOK

DEBORAH AND BARAK

A common complaint the Israelites gave for not driving out the Canaanites was that they had iron chariots. When the men of Ephraim and Manasseh told this to Joshua, he assured them that they could “drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots and are strong” (Joshua 17:18 NKJV). Now, some fifty years after Joshua, a Canaanite king named Jabin reoccupied Hazor, built up an army of nine hundred chariots, then conquered all the Israelites of the north, particularly in the Jezreel Valley where the Kishon River flowed. Jabin oppressed them for twenty years.

Now, God raised up a woman named Deborah to judge Israel. One day she summoned the warrior Barak and told him that if he assembled an army on Mount Tabor near the Kishon River, God would lure the Canaanites in to fight and would deliver them into his hands. Barak knew that God’s presence was with Deborah, so he said, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go” (Judges 4:8 NIV). So Deborah went.

Apparently, God sent a sudden, heavy downpour, causing the Kishon River to overflow its banks, and most of the nine hundred chariots were swept away (Judges 5:4, 21). Barak then attacked those who had survived. This battle broke the back of the Canaanite army. “And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin until they finally destroyed him” (Judges 4:24 NLT).

READ JUDGES 4-5.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 43. →



Deborah was one of the judges of Israel, and she led the Israelite army to victory over the Canaanites. She is portrayed here in the painting titled *Jael, Deborah and Barak* by Salomon de Bray (1597–1664).

CLOSER LOOK

GIDEON AND THE MIDIANITES

For seven years, whenever it was harvesttime in Israel, hordes of Midianites on camels swept in from the southeastern deserts, and their vast flocks and herds completely devoured the Israelites’ crops. The Israelites cried out to God for deliverance, and one day an angel appeared to a man named Gideon. He announced, “Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!” Gideon replied,



Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) depicted Gideon’s victory over the Midianites in *Battle of Gideon against the Midianites*.

“Sir. . . if the LORD is with us. . . where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about?” (Judges 6:12–13 NLT). Gideon would *get* his answer.

Gideon had faltering faith and had to be reassured repeatedly. He is famous for setting fleeces (sheepskins) out before the Lord and requesting miraculous signs as proof that God was with him. But in the end, he had the faith to obey and gathered an army of thirty-two thousand men. Then God

really tested Gideon’s faith by saying, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me’” (Judges 7:2 NASB). So He had Gideon send everyone home except for three hundred men.

God had Gideon position these men on the hills around the enemy camp by night. Then every man smashed a clay pot, held up a torch, and blew on a trumpet. The Midianites panicked, began killing one another, and fled. Then all Israel rallied and helped defeat them. God often uses our strength and skills, but there are times when He wants to defy logic and do a miracle.

READ JUDGES 6-7.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 46. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

OTHNIEL RISES UP

During Joshua's initial wars of conquest, Caleb promised, "I will give my daughter Aksah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher" (Joshua 15:16 NIV). Othniel led an army to conquer this city then married Aksah. Then he enjoyed many years of farming, loving his wife, and raising a family. But when he was old, a foreign king, Cushan-Rishathaim, oppressed Israel for eight years. Then "the Spirit of the LORD came on [Othniel], so that he became Israel's judge and went to war" (Judges 3:10 NIV). He rallied the Israelites and drove out the invaders. Then he judged Israel for forty years. God obviously wasn't through with Othniel just because he had become old (see Psalm 71:9).

READ JOSHUA 15:13-19; JUDGES 3:7-11; AND PSALM 71.

HIDDEN TREASURE

EHUD THE LEFT-HANDED JUDGE



Ehud Kills Eglon by Ford Madox Brown (1871–1893) shows how Ehud used his left hand to slay the king of Moab.

Now, the Israelites sinned against God, so "the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel" (Judges 3:12 NASB). Eglon made Israel pay tribute for eighteen years. A left-handed Israelite named Ehud normally delivered their payments, and God gave him a daring plan. Ehud fastened a dagger beneath his robe on the right side. The guards suspected nothing, because in a nation of right-handed warriors, a weapon was invariably fastened on the left side. After Ehud delivered the tribute, he told Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, O king." Eglon ordered, "Keep silence!" He sent his attendants from the room and closed the doors (Judges 3:19 NKJV). Ehud then slew the despot, escaped by the porch, rallied the Israelites, and drove out the Moabites.

READ JUDGES 3:12-30 AND PSALM 18.

HIDDEN TREASURE

SAMSON THE STRONGMAN

About 1150 BC the Philistines overran Israel. Now, an Israelite named Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman. When he was going to visit her, a lion attacked him, but "the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands" (Judges 14:6 NIV). At his marriage, he told a riddle about this. The Philistines, however, forced Samson's wife to tell the answer, so he went out and killed thirty Philistines. Afterward, Samson caught foxes, tied torches to their tails, and set them loose in the grain fields. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily on Samson, and "finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men" (Judges 15:15 NIV).



Lucas Cranach (1472–1553) portrayed Samson's incredible strength in his painting *Samson's Fight with the Lion*.

READ JUDGES 13-14.

HIDDEN TREASURE

SAMSON'S DOWNFALL

Despite his incredible strength, Samson had a weakness for women, and it brought about his downfall. Several years later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The Philistines offered her great rewards if she discovered the secret to Samson's strength, so Delilah "tormented him with her nagging day after day until he was sick to death of it" (Judges 16:16 NLT). Samson finally revealed that his strength was due to his long hair, so while he slept, Delilah cut it off. Samson's strength immediately departed, and the Philistines captured and blinded him. One day they brought Samson out to mock him. But his hair had grown back, and in one final, mighty act, he pushed apart the two main pillars supporting the temple roof. The entire building collapsed—killing thousands of leading Philistines and setting his people free.



Samson's love for Delilah was his downfall and is depicted in *Samson and Delilah* by Matthias Stom (c. 1600–1650).

READ JUDGES 15-16.

WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Gideon, a judge in Israel, defeated the entire Midian army with only 300 men—after sending the rest of his 32,000 soldiers home (7:1-25).

JUDGES

When Will They Learn?

The Israelites would rebel against God and suffer oppression from an enemy. The people would then repent and call out to God, who would send a leader, or judge, to rescue them. Then they would have peace in the land . . . **until they rebelled again.**

Nazirite

Samson was chosen by God and set apart to serve him before he was born. He tore apart an attacking lion with his bare hands (14:5-6), captured and set fire to 300 foxes to burn up an enemy's field (15:4-5), killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15), tore out the gates and doorposts of a city by hand (16:3), and destroyed the temple of Dagon by pushing down the two main support pillars, collapsing the entire structure (16:27-30).

DID YOU KNOW?

▶ Shamgar, a judge in Israel, killed 600 Philistines with an oxgoad, a sharp or metal-tipped stick used to drive oxen and cattle carrying heavy loads (3:31).

▶ Sisera, an enemy of Israel, was killed by a woman who ran a tent peg through his head into the ground while he was sleeping (4:21).

BY THE NUMBERS

21
CHAPTERS
618
VERSES
16,174
WORDS

LIFE LESSONS: You are never outnumbered with God by your side (3:31). God helps you overcome doubts (6:1-40).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW JUDGES?

JUDGES IN REVIEW



TIME TRAVELER

1. You just drove a tent peg through Sisera's head. What is your husband's name?



WHO SAID IT?

2. "Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, 'A woman killed him.'"

- A. Heber
- B. Abimelek
- C. Eglon
- D. Cushan-Rishathaim



TIME TRAVELER

3. Your name is Othniel, and God raised you up as a deliverer for Israel. Who is your older brother?



MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. Who was the king of Canaan while Deborah was the judge of Israel?



CRYPTIC PHRASES

5. When the people of Judah attacked the Canaanites, they advanced against the people living in Debir. What was Debir's former name?

- A. Kiriath Arba
- B. Ashkelon Jebus
- C. Kiriath Sephir
- D. Kenaz Hormah



MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. What word could the Ephraimites not pronounce correctly that cost them 42,000 men?

- A. Shibboleth
- B. Mephibosheth
- C. Aroer
- D. Peniel



HOT SEAT

7. I am a Benjamite. After my tribe's rebellion, the rest of the Israelites had sworn that they would no longer give their daughters to be our wives. How did we acquire enough wives for ourselves after that happened?

- A. Redeemed them with silver
- B. Redeemed them with a young bull
- C. Took them from neighboring nations
- D. Caught women dancing and carried them off



TIME TRAVELER

8. You, the king of Aram Naharaim, were just defeated by Othniel, judge of Israel, after keeping the Israelites as your subjects for eight years. Who are you?



WHERE IN THE WORLD

9. In which city did a woman drop an upper millstone on Abimelek's head?



HOT SEAT

10. I am the only judge of Israel noted as from the land of Zebulun. Who am I?



WHO DUNNIT?

11. This man, the father of one of the judges, and his wife saw the angel of the Lord ascend toward heaven in the flame from a burnt offering. Who was he?



TIME TRAVELER

12. You are a foreigner from the Valley of Sorek who betrayed Samson to his death. What was your reward for this achievement?

- A. Silver
- B. Gold
- C. Position of authority in the land
- D. Samson's properties

ANSWERS:

1. Heber (4:20-22) 2. B (9:50-55) 3. Caleb (1:13) 4. Jabim (4:4, 23-24) 5. C (10:3-4) 6. A (12:6) 7. D (21:15-23) 8. Cushan-Rishathaim (3:8) 9. Thabaz (9:50-53) 10. Eglon (12:11-12) 11. Manoah (13:20-21) 12. A (16:4-5, 18)

Someone you
should know

Barak

Imperfect Yet Faithful

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to become a “man of faith”? A clerical collar? A perfect record? A life apart from the chaos and turmoil of life?

If that's what you think, then think again. And learn something about genuine faith from an imperfect man named Barak.

Barak lived during the difficult time of the judges, after the death of Joshua but before the prophet Samuel and the kings of Israel came along. “In those days,” says the Bible, “all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6). The Hebrew nation oscillated between outright rebellion against God and a forced submission to divine rule. Whenever they fell into a pattern of disobedience, God sent brutal pagan armies to beat them up until they cried out for relief. Then God would raise up a deliverer (called a “judge”) to lead the people back to godliness and victory. But after the judge's death, the dreary cycle began all over again.

He led a
successful
army but
hesitated
and missed
the glory.

Barak grew to manhood after the death of a judge named Ehud. When the Israelites once more rejected God's commandments, “the LORD turned them over to King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king” (4:2). Jabin's top general, Sisera, commanded an army of nine hundred iron chariots and

“ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years” (4:3). When the people of Israel finally cried out to God for deliverance, he provided them with a dynamic woman named Deborah as the new judge. She recruited Barak to assemble a large army to defeat Sisera. She even gave him a divine plan to accomplish the task. Yet Barak wavered.

“I will go,” he said, “but only if you go with me” (4:8).

Doesn't sound much like mountain-moving faith, does it? Hardly the kind of response that would recommend you for the “Faith Hall of Fame.”

And yet, there he is in Hebrews 11:32. “How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak . . .”

Deborah told Barak that she would accompany him, but she warned that because of his reticence to move ahead on God's word alone, he would not gain any honor for the coming victory. Sure enough, the armies of Israel so smashed their enemies that “not a single one was left alive” (Judges 4:16). And yet Barak gained no glory for his overwhelming triumph; his enemy, Sisera, died not in battle but at the hands of a housewife named Jael (4:17-21). A post-victory song gives Barak only a couple of brief mentions, while Jael receives several stanzas lauding her bravery (chapter 5).

Could Barak have done better? Surely. Yet God accomplished great things through him and his faith, imperfect as both may have been.

THE POINT: Genuine faith doesn't mean perfect faith.

Someone you
should know

Gideon

Unlikely Hero

IF YOU EVER start to doubt God's patience with you, consider the life of Gideon.

During Gideon's youth, the pagan nation of Midian terrorized the Israelites, stealing their food and taking whatever else they wanted. One day Gideon was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress so the Midianites wouldn't see him. While he was working, the angel of the Lord met him and greeted him with a hearty “Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!” (Judges 6:12).

Gideon must have laughed. *Me? A hero? Don't you see where I am? Don't you see what I'm doing? Don't you wonder why I'm down here in this hole, when the normal way to thresh wheat is up where the wind blows freely to get rid of the chaff?* The angel's words seemed to mock him. Gideon reminded him that he was the youngest member of the weakest clan in the tribe of Manasseh (6:15).

And yet, God meant what the angel had said. He had a mission for Gideon: “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites.” And how was the young man to accomplish such an implausible feat? “I will be with you,” declared the Lord. “And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man” (6:14, 16).

God saw what Gideon could not see. He determined to lead the young man patiently to become what he never dreamed he could be.

Gideon didn't become a “mighty hero” right away. God first gave him a small but important task—destroying the town's altar to the god Baal. Gideon did as the Lord commanded, but at night to avoid being seen (6:25-27).

Then Gideon was ready for the second stage of his development. God filled Gideon with his Spirit and prompted him to call together an army to attack Midian (6:33-35). Yet Gideon still had doubts. Twice he asked God for an unusual sign to prove that he would, in fact, keep his previous promise. And twice the Lord showed Gideon that his word was true (6:36-40).

Finally the time came for Gideon and his army—32,000 soldiers in all—to attack the forces of Midian, a coalition 135,000 strong. Gideon had tested God, but now God would turn the tables and test Gideon. God told Gideon to send most of his troops home until those that remained numbered only 300. Why? “If I let all of you fight the Midianites,” God said, “the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength” (7:2).

Gideon complied, and that night God made him into the “mighty hero” the angel had prophesied. Through one of the oddest battle plans ever conceived, the Lord routed the Midianites, ushering in about 40 years of peace, throughout the remainder of Gideon's long life (8:28).

Centuries later, the apostle Paul wrote words that Gideon would no doubt echo: “God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:16).

THE POINT: Never doubt the patience and wisdom of God

Someone you
should know:

Jephthah

Watch Your Mouth

MEN OF ACTION can get things done, but sometimes they also speak and act without thinking. In the heat of the moment they blurt out something—and afterward wish they hadn't.

A judge named Jephthah was a "great warrior." When his half brothers drove him into exile because his mother was a despised prostitute (Judges 11:1), Jephthah fled to Tob, a desolate town some 15 miles east of Ramoth-gilead. There he collected a group of disgruntled rebels and adventurers.

When Israel's ancient antagonists, the Ammonites, began attacking Hebrew settlements, the besieged men came to Jephthah to ask him to lead their troops in a counteroffensive. Jephthah, still smarting from his brothers' rejection, said to them, "Aren't you the ones who hated me and drove me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now when you're in trouble?" (11:7).

The chastised men sidestepped that grudge from the past and promised to make Jephthah their ruler if he took up their cause. He did so and immediately tried to settle the dispute with the Ammonites through diplomatic means. When his efforts failed, war became inevitable. God was with Jephthah, and "the Spirit of the LORD came upon" him to empower him to fight effectively (11:29).

God
empowered
Jephthah to
fight effectively,
but his daughter
paid the
price for his
impulsiveness.

Then Jephthah did something rash and impulsive. He vowed that if the Lord would grant him victory, he would make a burnt sacrifice of the first thing that came out of his house after the battle.

Jephthah led his troops to an overwhelming victory that day. He went home in triumph—and the first thing out of the gate to congratulate him was *not* the random sheep or goat he had expected. To his horror, it was his only child, his teenage daughter.

Scholars have debated for centuries whether Jephthah actually took the life of his daughter, or whether she simply lived out her days as a virgin, thus blocking the continuation of Jephthah's line. Since we are told that "young Israelite women . . . go away for four days each year to lament the fate of Jephthah's daughter" (11:40), it seems likeliest that he did indeed take her life, even though the Mosaic law expressly forbade any such pagan practice (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31).

Perhaps Jesus had the sorrowful Jephthah in mind centuries later when he told his disciples, "Do not make any vows! . . . Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:34, 37). In a similar manner James counsels us, "Never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned" (James 5:12).

Are you a man of action? Then take heed. Remember Jephthah and his foolish vow—and think before you speak.

THE POINT: Think of the possible consequences before you speak.

Someone you
should know:

Samson

Appetites out of Control

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE has a message for ambitious coaches: Do you want to win? Then you first have to master yourself. In trying to explain why many ball clubs refuse to hire coaches with serious weight problems, one general manager asked, "How can you demand self-control from players when you don't have it yourself?" The NFL

wasn't the first organization to espouse this principle; the need for self-control comes right out of the Bible.

If one man from the Old Testament shows how talent and promise go unfulfilled due to a lack of self-discipline, it has to be Samson.

Commonly known as the strongest man who ever lived, Samson received his awesome physical might from God so that he might liberate his fellow Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines. From birth Samson's parents were instructed to rear him under the strict rules governing a "Nazirite"—someone whose life had been dedicated to God in a special way (Numbers 6:2-21; Judges 13:3-5, 13-14).

The Bible says that Samson gained his great strength particularly through keeping a vow never to cut his hair (Judges 16:17).

Although from an early age Samson enjoyed a special touch from the Spirit of the Lord (13:25), he never mastered his raging appetites—and that neglect eventually led to his death. Consider four areas in which Samson lacked self-control.

- *Lust.* When Samson saw a good-looking Philistine woman, he demanded that his parents arrange a marriage to her, despite their warnings (14:1-3). When the marriage didn't work out, he slept with both a prostitute (16:1) and a treacherous woman named Delilah (16:4).
- *Greed.* Samson tried to use an unfair bet to force his fiancée's Philistine friends to enrich him with expensive clothing (14:11-14).
- *Anger.* Samson frequently reacted to bad news by flying into a rage (14:19; 15:3-5).
- *Revenge.* Samson lived—and died—for revenge. He loved to say things like "I won't rest until I take my revenge on you!" (15:7, 11; 16:28).

Samson's lack of self-control eventually prompted him to tell Delilah the secret of his strength. She gave him over to his enemies for a bribe, and he wound up blind and in a Philistine prison (16:17-21). The saddest line in his whole story is this: "But he didn't realize the LORD had left him" (16:20).

In the end Samson died along with thousands of his taunting captors in a final act of revenge (16:28-30). He led Israel for 20 years (16:31). Imagine the winning record he could have amassed had he learned to control his appetites. What sort of greatness could he have achieved if only he had self-control?

We'll never know. But we do know that he proved true the statement of one ancient Greek philosopher: "No man is free who is not master of himself."

THE POINT: No man wins without controlling his own passions

A Treacherous Woman

Judges 16:4-22

SAMSON AND DELILAH certainly qualify as one of history's all-time dysfunctional couples.

Samson had already "been around" before meeting Delilah. An earlier marriage of his had crashed in a week (see Judges 14:8-20), and thereafter, he had been known to visit prostitutes (see 16:1-3). But he really lost all control when he fell in love with Delilah. His emotions swept away all caution. After some prodding and manipulation, he told Delilah the secret of his amazing strength. Soon she pulled off a sting operation that left him powerless.

Scripture warns us not to trust our emotions, but we often ignore that instruction when it comes to matters of the romantic heart. We just can't believe that the gorgeous object of our affection would ever succumb to selfishness. Surely good intentions and good sense will prevail!

Lust is a powerful force, and believe it or not, many women—and men, too—are skilled in the art of manipulation. Humans are sinful beings, and without guidance from above, the dance of romance tends to lead toward sin.

We tell ourselves that God is the giver of our emotions and sexual desire. While this is true, God didn't intend love between a man and a woman to result in blindness, either literally or figuratively. We are to bring all relationships, romantic and otherwise, under the guidance and will of God. Meanwhile, be cautious. Never forget that romantic love can be fertile ground for sin.

their hands. ¹⁹Delilah lulled Samson to sleep with his head in her lap, and then she called in a man to shave off the seven locks of his hair. In this way she began to bring him down,* and his strength left him.

²⁰Then she cried out, "Samson! The Philistines have come to capture you!"

When he woke up, he thought, "I will do as before and shake myself free." But he didn't realize the LORD had left him.

²¹So the Philistines captured him and gouged out his eyes. They took him to Gaza, where he was bound with bronze chains and forced to grind grain in the prison.

²²But before long, his hair began to grow back.

Samson's Final Victory

²³The Philistine rulers held a great festival, offering sacrifices and praising their god,

16:19 Or she began to torment him. Greek version reads He began to grow weak.

16:22-31 It took a lack of physical sight for Samson to gain personal and spiritual insight. But that was not the end of the story. In his prayer, Samson finally surrendered to God. Notice that Samson accomplished more in his God-appointed death than in his entire self-centered life. And despite Samson's serious flaws, he is remembered as a man of faith (see Hebrews 11:32). We can only imagine how Samson would have altered history had he sought God and surrendered to him sooner. We need to make certain that we are not missing opportunities to serve God throughout our lives.

A Woman Shall Lead Them

Judges 4-5

MALES LEAD MOST of the world's major corporations, governments, and religious organizations. Many people think that's the way it should be.

But the fourth and fifth chapters of Judges show that women can be powerful leaders, too, particularly if God calls and empowers them.

In Deborah's time, people voluntarily came to her to settle their disputes (Judges 4:5). They trusted her wisdom to cut through the arguing and settle on a fair judgment. They listened to her prophecies and accepted them as the true word of the Lord. When the time came for someone to step up and confront the Canaanite oppressors, God spoke through Deborah and instructed a man named Barak to gather an army. Barak agreed—but only on the condition that Deborah stay close by, even on the battlefield. (There seems not to have been much debate in Deborah's day about whether women should fight in the military!)

The Lord honored this arrangement and gave Israel a dramatic victory.

Interestingly, Deborah wasn't the only woman turning the tide of history that day. Jael, wife of a nomadic herdsman, hospitably welcomed the enemy leader Sisera into her tent, only to drive a nail through his temple while he dozed, making the Israelite victory complete.

What should we take away from this account? God wants us to see that some qualities are more important than gender. Both men and women can be used by God. Both can relate to him and discern his will. Both can help resolve a conflict or make a tough decision.

And both can acknowledge that God is the supreme leader of all.

drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died.

²²When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, "Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for." So he followed her into the tent and found Sisera lying there dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

²³So on that day Israel saw God defeat Jabin the Canaanite king. ²⁴And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin until they finally destroyed him.

5 The Song of Deborah

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

² "Israel's leaders took charge, and the people gladly followed. Praise the LORD!

³ "Listen, you kings! Pay attention, you mighty rulers! For I will sing to the LORD. I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁴ "LORD, when you set out from Seir and marched across the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, and the cloudy skies poured down rain. ⁵ The mountains quaked in the presence of the LORD, the God of Mount Sinai—in the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁶ "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, and in the days of Jael, people avoided the main roads, and travelers stayed on winding pathways.

⁷ There were few people left in the villages of Israel*—until Deborah arose as a mother for Israel.

5:7 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

5:7, 12, 15 In this song of victory, the role of Deborah is emphasized. Women in ancient Israel rarely rose to positions of leadership. But Deborah's courage and faith in God made her an ideal prophet. Then she was called to lead the forces of Israel against the oppressive Canaanites. What tremendous faith it must have taken for Deborah to assume this unlikely position! Victory can come even when God puts us in positions in which we are uncomfortable. We must trust God's promises to us. "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14).

Spirit-empowered Judges
Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6

The most recognized of the Old Testament charismatic leaders are the judges. While not judicial officials in the modern sense, they ruled as magistrates, keeping law and order in peacetime and achieving "justice" for the various tribes by vindicating their cause in battle against enemies. They were Spirit-empowered chieftains whom Yahweh raised up to deliver Israel "from the hands of those who plundered them" (Judg. 2:16).

Most of the people of this period were indulging in Canaanite idolatrous practices and acting selfishly—"everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). Few individuals designated as prophets were heard from in this period, but there were exceptions: the prophetess Deborah (4:4) and a nameless prophet (6:8-10). Prophetic visions were infrequent until the Lord revealed Himself to young Samuel (1 Sam. 3:1, 19-21). Some of the judges, however, did exercise a degree of prophetic authority whenever they spoke forth the Lord's rebuke to the nation for transgressing His covenant (Judg. 2:20).

Four of the judges are specifically mentioned as being empowered by the divine Spirit—Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. (This is not to suggest that the other judges operated only in their natural wisdom and strength.) The Spirit's activity is described in several different ways in the original text.

Othniel, the first of the judges, sets a pattern for those who follow. Of him it is said: "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim . . . into his hand, so that he prevailed over [him]" (3:10).

The beginning Hebrew words here are *watēhî 'ālāw rūaḥ YHWH*. The verb and preposition combination (*hāyāh* plus *'al*) means "be actively present upon." The same expression occurs in connection with Balaam (Num. 24:2), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), Saul and his messengers (1 Sam. 19:20, 23), a prophet named Azariah (2 Chr. 15:1), and a Levite Jahaziel (2 Chr. 20:14). In every instance, whether providing ability or inspiring a message, the Spirit's sovereignty is apparent, and the unannounced suddenness of His coming is usually implicit.

Gideon is the next judge specified as having had the Spirit take possession of him: "So the Spirit of the LORD came upon (*lābēšā*, literally "clothed") Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezerites were called together to follow him" (Judg. 6:34). The Hebrew verb *lābaš* (put on, wear, clothe, be clothed;

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BIBLE

Judges

2:16	2:20
3:10	3:10; 6:34; 11:29;
4:4	14:6
6:8-10	6:34
8:3	8:3
8:23	8:23
9:24	9:24
11:29	11:29
13:2-23	13:2-23
13:3-7	13:3-7
13:25	13:25
14:6	14:6
14:6, 19; 15:14	14:6, 19; 15:14
15:19	15:19
17:6	17:6
21:25	21:25

see also 1 Chr. 12:18; 2 Chr. 24:20) suggests either that the Spirit clothed Gideon or that He clothed Himself with Gideon.

The figure of the Spirit clothing Gideon and being upon him is more in harmony with His coming upon Othniel and Jephthah (see above) and the usage of the verb in Job 29:14, "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me." In Judges 6:34 the Greek Septuagint translates *lābaš* by *enduō*, "to endue" or "to invest." This same Greek verb is used in Luke 24:49: "I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Two expressions describe the Spirit's actions with Samson. Judges 13:25 says, "The Spirit of the LORD began to stir (*pā'am*) him in Mahaneh-dan." The verb means to trouble or agitate the human spirit (Gen. 41:8; Ps. 77:4; Dan. 2:1) and hence to impel or thrust a person into action.

The other expression occurs three times (Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14): "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily." The Hebrew verb and preposition here are *šālah* plus *'al*, literally "rush upon." The verb is used for running or dashing to the Jordan in 2 Samuel 19:18 and for breaking forth or sweeping through like a fire in Amos 5:6.

The verb *šālah* is used several times for God's Spirit coming on King Saul (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6) as well as for an evil spirit coming on him (1 Sam. 18:10). This verb is used once regarding David: "The Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Only in David's case is the Spirit's enabling said to be continuous (see the comment on 1 Sam. 16:13).

Michael Green has likened the action of God's Spirit upon the judges and Saul to the violent force of an uncontrollable desert wind. He added that throughout the Old Testament the writers continue to emphasize "God's violent invasion from outside our experience, disturbing and mysterious like the wind."¹¹ Jesus Himself compared the sovereign renewing work of the Spirit to the unpredictable wind (John 3:8). But the purpose of the Spirit in the judges was always to act redemptively, "sometimes to chastise, on other occasions to console, and to deliver when the time was ripe."¹² Their activity provides valuable insights into the work of the Holy Spirit in the modern renewal movement.