

**Sunday – March 19, 2017**

## **Preparation**

This week begins the Book of Judges, the 7th Book of our Bible. It contains 21 chapters, 618 verses, and 18,966 words. Judges covers a period in history of around 300 years. The writer(s) of the Book of Judges is unknown for certain. However, what we'll see throughout the Book of Judges is the principle we learn from Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Israel's slide begins with "slight" disobedience and ends with complete anarchy by the end of the Book. This reiterates the fact that there is no room for "darkness" in the presence of an Almighty God who "only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:16)

As we prepare to enter into this Book, today would be a great day for each of us to examine our commitment to God and His word. Through the accounts we'll read, of the different judges throughout the history of Israel, we'll see the rise and fall of many different people. The results of each account are always in direct relation to each one's commitment and obedience to God's word, or lack thereof. There is no way we can ever highlight enough the importance of our relationship with the Bible. Without the word of God, we literally have nothing, and are nothing. Without the bible we truly are, as Paul penned, "of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19). We could go to the Book of Acts (Acts 17:24-28) and check out Paul's message to the Athenians at Mar's Hill, and learn just how helpless and hopeless we truly are without god or His word. In entering this Book of Judges and learning of the downward spiral of the nation of Israel, let's be reminded, that were it not for God and His word, it could very easily be us. If nothing else, the fact that God preserved His word (Psalm 12:6-7) should be reason enough for us to give God glory, honour, and praise.

Furthermore, the fact that, in His preserved word, He gave to us passages to remind us that these were written for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4) is truly amazing. That being said, as we enter the Book of Judges, we have the opportunity to read through these historical facts with the intent of learning what to do (or not to do), and therefore, perhaps avoid much trouble or anguish in our lives.

**TODAY'S READING: JUDGES 1-4**

**OVERVIEW:**

Early victories and incomplete possession of the land by Israel; the forsaking of God to serve Baal and Ashtaroth; God raises up Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak as judges to deliver Israel from the oppression of their enemies four different times.

**HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:**

To understand the Book of Judges, you must understand the last sentence in the entire Book: *"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."* Mark those words! They are the key, not only to this Book, but to human nature as well. Notice that every man did that which was RIGHT in his own eyes, not that which was wrong. The tragedy is that man's idea of what is right is often the exact opposite of what God says is right (Prov. 14:12). This will become evident as we read the Book of Judges and find the following recurring expression: *"And the children of Israel did EVIL in the sight of the Lord."*

We find that when Israel was strong, they put their enemies to tribute and did not utterly drive them out as the Lord had commanded (Jud. 1:28). First, they became complacent, which led to incomplete obedience (chapters 1-3). Then, they compromised, which led to disobedience (chapters 3-16). Then finally, they fell to complete corruption, which led to rebellion and depravity (chapters 17-21). Keep in mind, that the nation of Israel is a picture of an individual N.T. believer. We must avoid this deadly cycle that spirals downward, away from God and His Word! It is interesting to note that the Book of Joshua starts with an exhortation to meditate in God's Book day and night (Josh. 1:8). While in the Book of Judges, the words "book", "law", or "commandments" do not appear even once. This downward spiral of complacency, compromise, and corruption is clearly linked to neglecting God's Word, and the refusal of His people to obey it.

In chapter 1, the house of Joseph makes a deal with the enemy (Jud. 1:24). "Deals" were not in God's plan for "dealing" with the enemy! They were to utterly drive them out of the land. This enemy eventually became a snare to them (Jud. 2:3). We, too, have a tendency to make deals with the enemy of our flesh. Instead of destroying it (I Cor. 15:31), we keep the so called, "good flesh" alive. We attempt to spiritualize it, instead of killing it. For instance, what the Bible calls

“self-will,” we now call “determination.” What the Bible calls being a “busy-body,” we now call “ministering.” What the Bible calls “pride,” we now call “self-confidence.” Those who used to be referred to as “workaholics,” we now call “dedicated.” If we don’t choose to die daily (II Cor. 15:31), our “good flesh” will ultimately lead to our own personal corruption.

In chapter 3, we find a great picture of what happens when we come to church for the sole purpose of being fed. Eglon is a very fat man who was the King of Moab. He oppressed Israel for 18 years. We, too, become very fat spiritually when we come to church to be fed and never feed others through the personal investment of the Word of God through discipleship. Philippians 3:18-19 teaches us that one of the ways to identify those who are enemies of the cross of Christ is the fact that their God is their BELLY! God sent Ehud to deliver Israel from Eglon and the Moabites. The way he overcame this very fat man was with a dagger that had two edges (Jud. 3:16-17). He thrust it into Eglon’s belly and the passage says that the dirt came out (Jud. 3:21-22). In dealing with the self-consumption of our flesh, we must hide the two-edged sword (the Word of God) on our right side, and thrust it into the belly of the problem to get the dirt out! This is how we become clean vessels that God can use to teach others His truth (II Tim. 2:2).

In chapter 4 God used a woman named Jael to defeat a man named Sisera who was an oppressor of Israel. Jael was initially aligned with Sisera against Israel. But God changed her heart. She got some milk (I Pet. 2:2), took a hammer (Jer. 23:29), and killed Sisera while he was sleeping by putting a nail through his temple. If we let the milk and hammer of the Word of God change our heart, we, too, can defeat our enemies and live changed lives!

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

The ANGEL OF THE LORD – Judges 2:1-4

Through OTHNIEL – Judges 3:1-11; His name means “Lion from the Tribe of Judah”. He delivered Israel from an oppressive enemy.

Through EHUD – Judges 3:15-16 – The Judge with a two-edged sword. (Heb. 4:12; Rev. 2:12)

## TODAY'S READING: JUDGES 5-8

### OVERVIEW:

Deborah's song to the Lord; Gideon's call and deliverance of Israel from the oppression of the Midianites.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Deborah's song is really a prophecy of a song that the redeemed will sing when the true King (the Lord Jesus Christ) takes His rightful throne, and the ultimate king of evil (Satan) is destroyed (see Rev. 5:9; 14:3). At the conclusion of the song (Jud. 5:31), the Sun goes forth to reign in His might with those He loves, and then there was rest in the land. That is exactly what Malachi 4:2 and Rev. 19:14 says will happen in the very near future!

Chapters 6-8 deal with one of the most well known heroes in the Book of Judges, Gideon. He is called by God to be the deliverer of Israel from the Midianites. Midian means "strife," or "contention". Proverbs 13:10 teaches us that "only by pride cometh contention". The root of strife and contention is carnality (I Cor. 1:10-11, 3:1-3). If Satan can get us to focus on ourselves, rather than on God and others, he wins. He knows that we cannot be used by God if we are focused on self.

Notice what the Midianites did to Israel. They destroyed the fruit in the land of Israel, and left them with nothing to eat (Jud. 6:4). How incredibly ironic...Israel was starving in the midst of a land flowing with milk and honey! Midian's (or strife's) ultimate target is the harvest! Are you starving, and struggling to be fruitful because of the selfish and contentious attitude of your heart? If so, pay close attention to what Gideon did to defeat the Midianites so you can employ the same principles to your life.

Hebrews 11:32 puts Gideon at the head of the list of judges. Though he often wavered in doubt, he was still a "man of faith" who dared to trust the Word of God. When you realize that he was a farmer (Jud. 6:11), not a trained warrior, you can see how wonderful his faith actually was! When you read this story and see how God chose to defeat this enemy, it emphasizes the truth we learn in I Corinthians 1:27-29... *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...that no flesh should glory in his presence"*. God used 300 men armed with nothing more than pitchers, lamps, and trumpets to defeat a

much larger and better equipped enemy, so that He would get the glory for the victory (Jud. 7:2). The battle plan was simple: shatter your pitcher, blow your trumpet, shine your lamp, and stand fast in your place while God defeats the enemy (Jud. 7:19-21). This is the only way Midian (pride, strife, contention) can be defeated in our lives as well. We must be clean, broken vessels (or pitchers) for God to use (II Tim. 2:21); we must let our lights shine (Mt. 5:16); we must use our mouths as a trumpet to proclaim the gospel to the world; and finally, we must stand and watch God defeat the enemy with the sword (three times God commands us to “stand” in Eph. 6:10- 14).

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As THE ANGEL OF THE LORD – Judges 6:12-21

Through BARAK, the son of Abinoam – Judges 5:12; His name means “Glittering Sword” (John 1:1, 14). Abinoam means “beautiful father”. Barak, the glittering sword, was the son of a beautiful Father!

Through GIDEON – Judges 6-8; The deliverer who leads Israel to a most improbable victory.

**TODAY'S READING: JUDGES 9-12**

**OVERVIEW:**

Abimelech's rise to power and his subsequent death; the oppression of the Ammonites; Jephthah's deliverance of Israel and vow to God.

**HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:**

Although Gideon's fame as a courageous judge of Israel is secured in biblical history as the story of his life comes to an end in chapter 8, the seed of sin he sowed (Jud. 8:27-31) bore some awfully bad fruit in chapter 9. In this chapter, God details for us the consequences of the "house of the proud" (Prov. 15:25) in the life of Abimelech, the son of Gideon by his concubine. Abimelech's whole motive and purpose in life was power! He wanted to be King at any cost (vs. 1-4). Do others see you in this same pursuit of prestige, power, and/or position? Take an honest look at the motive behind your service for Christ to determine whether it is really for Him, or for you. Prior to coming to Christ, the Bible says we were all driven by our pride, and our pursuit of power and/or prestige. Many have simply changed the arena from which they seek to exalt self. Whereas it used to be the world, now it is the church. God forbid!

Abimelech is also a warning to all parents...for whatever we do in moderation; our children will do in excess. Abimelech ended up murdering all his siblings except one (Jotham) to get the position he so greatly desired. But God always pays his debts and no sin goes unnoticed. Abimelech was killed by a wise woman (Prov. 1:20-33) who fled to a strong tower (Ps. 61:3) by a rock (I Cor. 10:4) that she dropped on his big head! Note that Jotham, whose name means "Jehovah is perfect", escaped being murdered by running to Beer (which means "the well"; a place where you can go to get water – Eph. 5:26).

Once again, in chapters 10-12, we find Israel in one of their repeated cycles of sin. The real issue is that they were willing to serve any god who would make them happy. They wanted their own way, their desires fulfilled, and their ego boosted. It is a collision course for disaster! The choice to serve self is sin, and sin always leads to sorrow and death (James 1:15). It becomes increasingly difficult to understand, much less to tolerate, the blatant foolishness and rebellion of God's people Israel. How could they possibly experience all of His blessings, and repeatedly turn their backs on Him? And yet, how can we, who likewise, have been overly blessed by God, and have even seen the consequences of Israel's

choices, do less than make a final end to our own flirting with the world, the flesh and the devil? We must, once and for all, make the decision, “That it is ENOUGH! I am not my own, I have been bought by the blood of God’s dear Son, and sin will not control me any longer!” When we cry out to God, broken by our sin, we can be sure that He will hear us, and deliver us from its dominion. (Rom. 6:12-14).

In keeping with their pattern, Israel cried out to God once again (Jud. 10:10), and once again, God sent them a deliverer. This time it was Jephthah, another incredible picture of Jesus Christ. Jephthah was a mighty man of valor who was the son of an harlot (Jud. 11:1). He was rejected by his brethren (Jud. 11:2-3), and went away to live in the land of Tob (which means “blessing, joy, beautiful, and righteous”). While he was in Tob, he gathered vain (or “empty”) men unto himself. He was later called home by Israel during a time of tribulation to deliver them from their oppressors. He then came back as the captain of their salvation (Jud. 11:6). Likewise, Jesus was a mighty man of valor who was accused of being an illegitimate child (John 8:41). He was rejected by His brethren (Luke 19:14), and went away to a place like Tob...a beautiful place of blessing, joy, and righteousness (Ps. 48:2). While He is there, He continues to gather empty men and women to Himself as worshippers. He will come back during the Great Tribulation to deliver Israel, and to be the Captain of their Salvation (see Heb. 2:10 and Rev. 19)!

Though to this point, Jephthah was a beautiful type of Christ, he made a horrendous mistake by vowing a vow to God that resulted in him foolishly and sinfully burning his own daughter as a sacrifice, supposedly to God (Jud. 11:34-40)! Jephthah’s mistake was in thinking that there is something that we do to earn the blessing and/or favor of God. He thought that by vowing his vow, he could get God on his side. The irony was, God was already on his side! No human work can earn God’s graciously given favor (Eph. 2:8-9), or make you the recipient of more of His power (Acts 1:8). He gives it all to us freely (I Cor. 2:12). Though this is an incredibly sad chapter in Jephthah’s life, and an incredibly sad chapter in the Bible, it is also a blessing in the fact that God has set His Book apart from all others because of His honesty regarding its heroes. Other examples include Noah, David, Solomon, and Elijah! In the end, Jephthah was faithful to a God he just didn’t understand.

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As THE STRONG TOWER – Judges 9:51 (Psalm 18:2, 61:3) Through JEPHTHAH – Judges 11-12 (see Highlights and Insights)

**TODAY'S READING: JUDGES 13-17**

**OVERVIEW:**

The birth of Samson; the life of Samson; the death of Samson; Micah and his mother's idolatrous religion.

**HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:**

Samson was born into the home of godly parents who prayed (Judges 13:8, 12). He was God's special gift to them and the nation of Israel. His parents brought offerings to God and dared to believe His wonderful promises (Judges 13:15:21). God gave Samson the power of His Spirit that made him strong and called him to be a Nazarite, one who is wholly surrendered to the Lord. According to Numbers 6, a Nazarite was never to drink strong drink or touch a dead body; and the mark of his dedication would be his uncut hair. All of this wonderful heritage Samson despised by the choices he made in his life. Instead of putting himself in God's hands to accomplish his God-given task, he chose to live to please himself. What a tragedy it is to waste a life that was supposed to be set apart for God's service. Let Samson be a warning to each of us who name the name of Christ, so that we don't repeat his sad mistakes! For we, too, have been called by God and set apart (sanctified) for His use just as Samson (II Tim. 2:21). Hebrews 11:32 names Samson for his faith in God's Word, but apart from this, little else can be said on his behalf.

One evidence of spiritual decline is in the way we submit to the authorities God has placed in our lives (in Samson's case – his parents). In Judges 14:1 God says, "*Samson went down*". This is true both spiritually and geographically. Instead of staying within the borders of Israel, Samson went into enemy territory and fell in love with a heathen woman (II Cor. 6:14). He knew the laws of separation that God had given to His people, but he chose to ignore them. Note that he "TOLD" his father, (he did not ask him), to "get her for me" (Jud. 14:2-3) because she pleased him well. Not exactly what you would call a selfless desire. It did not even bother Samson that his parents were displeased with this idea of his (Jud. 14:3). This is just the beginning of Samson's demise because of the poor and selfish choices he made in his life. We must understand that God has placed into His creation certain principles and laws that are non-negotiable. Whether or not we believe them is irrelevant. They will affect our lives just the same. The law of gravity is one such universal principle. Regardless of what you believe about gravity, it still holds you to the ground and can kill you if you violate

it. One of the very basic principles of God's creation is that of authority. God has designed that all the world, and every individual life, be governed by authorities (Rom. 13:1-6; I Pet. 2:13-18). For this reason, God made it abundantly clear in His Law that rebellion must be substituted for honor in those that take His name. This attitude of respect and honor was to be learned very early in life, in the way we respond to our first authorities...our parents (Ex. 20:12, Eph. 6:1-4). Note that there are no qualifying statements or exceptions given (i.e. the same goes for children with good parents as it does for those with bad parents). If you honor your parents you will be blessed, and if you don't...consider the Bible's warnings to you (see Ex. 21:15; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16; Prov. 20:20; 30:11-17). We must let the tragic life of Samson be a fearful reminder to us all of the high price to pay for disregarding God's principle of authority.

The rest of Samson's life (Judges 15-16) is an illustration of a man who had power to conquer others, but could not conquer himself. He set the Philistine fields on fire, but would not control the fires of his own lust. He killed a lion, but would not put to death the passions of his own flesh. He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, but the shackles of sin gradually grew stronger on his soul. Instead of leading the nation, he preferred to work independently; and as a result, left no permanent victory behind. He was remembered for what he destroyed, not for what he built up. He failed to check the impulses that began to dominate early in his life, and twenty years later, they killed him. It remained for Samuel and David in later years to finally defeat the Philistines. Samuel, by one prayer, accomplished more than Samson did in twenty years with his great physical strength (see I Sam. 7:9- 14).

In chapter 17 we have an incredible picture of a false religious system that has black-robed priests (see vs. 4; an ephod = a priestly garment) called "fathers" (vs. 10) who use idols (vs. 4, 5, 10) as aides in worship in their house of gods. Note that Micah calls a man younger than himself "father" (vs. 7, 10). This happens to be the exact same false religious system still existing today...it is called the Roman Catholic Church. Note in verse 13, Micah thought he was doing the right thing and that the Lord would be pleased (compare this with vs. 6). The sad truth is, that Satan has always found a way to concoct some false religious system to put God's name on, in order to give people a false sense of security, so he can damn their souls to Hell. And the whole reason this happened was because Micah neglected to consult God's Word on this matter! This is the same reason why the Roman Catholic Church still deceives so many into thinking they are okay with God...they neglect to consult God's Word on the matter! Pray for them! One billion of the world's six billion people are Roman Catholic.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through SAMSON – Judges 13-16; the son of promise who was born to be set-apart for God in order to deliver Israel from her enemies.

**TODAY'S READING: JUDGES 18-21**

**OVERVIEW:**

The corruption of the Tribe of Dan; the wickedness of the Gibeonites; the division between the Tribe of Benjamin and the rest of Israel; the destruction of the Tribe of Benjamin.

**HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:**

As we finish the Book of Judges today, it's vital that we recall where we are in this point of Israel's history. After several years of COMPLACENCY, summarized in chapters one and two, Israel entered into a long period of COMPROMISE, found in chapters three through sixteen. During that time, God's people endured seven major cycles of oppression at the hands of those over whom the Lord had previously given victory. The final five chapters of the Book of Judges sadly describes for us the CORRUPTION that ultimately takes place when they forgot God and His Word! Some of the most bizarre stories in all of scripture appear in this final part of the Book of Judges. Remember, the key to understanding this whole book is found in the last verse of the final chapter... *"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

In chapter 18, the Tribe of Dan convinces Micah's own personal priest whom he called "father" (see Jud. 17:10) to leave with them to be the whole Tribe's priest (Jud. 18:19). This, of course, was appealing to the priest because he was getting a promotion, so to speak. He was so excited about this "promotion" that he stole Micah's ephod ("priestly garment"), teraphim ("household idol"), and graven image (Jud. 18:20) so he could perform his priestly duties for the Tribe of Dan. Micah was, of course, devastated by this, because they stole his religion and he had nothing left to live for (see his own words in Jud. 18:24). Watch out for any religion or "faith" that can be stolen! It cannot resist the weapons of warfare (vs. 11, 16-17), its' priest will not stand by you (vs. 18-20), its' congregation can only cry out in despair with you (vs. 22-23), and its' final end is heartache and loss (vs. 24-26). You can't steal the "religion" of someone who has been truly born again and trusted Christ for their salvation, because it's not a "religion", it's an eternal "relationship" with the Creator as your Father!

In chapter 19, a Levite sets out on a long journey to recover his unfaithful concubine, who, consequently is abused all night long until the dawning of the day, at which time she is divided by the sword. Although this isn't a perfect

picture by any means, it still typifies for us that Jehovah God will come back in the morning to look for His unfaithful wife, the Nation of Israel, who is spiritually dead to Him. This just happens to be the book of Judges; at this point there is no king and Israel is dead to God. But in the Book of Ruth, a Jewish kinsman redeemer takes a gentile bride to himself, then the Son of David (Solomon) will come back to give Israel life again.

Chapters 20 and 21 teach us the story of how Israel decides to deal with this despicable sin that happened within their borders (the abusing of the concubine by the men of Gibeah). There is a division between the men of Israel and the Tribe of Benjamin over this issue though. Benjamin takes the side of the Gibeonites and decides to fight against Israel. Isn't it amazing, the depths that sin will take you! The Benjamites actually wanted to defend the wickedness of the Gibeonites! What does that tell you about the moral state of this tribe at this time? The Tribe of Benjamin was defeated by Israel in the war and it appeared that the sin at Gibeah had been dealt with. The only problem is that history teaches us they never truly repented, because once again, they returned to their sinful ways. All of chapter 21 is a counterfeit repentance that does nothing more than make them feel good about themselves for "dealing with the sin". When you "deal with the sin in your life," do you truly repent and turn from your sin? Or, do you go right back to doing that which you supposedly "repented" of?

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through THE HOUSE OF GOD – Judges 20:18; God's dwelling place among His people Israel. Unfortunately, this corrupt time in Israel is much like the Laodicean church period (Rev. 3:14-22), where God is on the outside looking in, while the people think He's in their midst!

As the LEVITE – Judges 19:1 – see Highlights and Insights

**Saturday – March 25, 2017**

## **Reflection**

What can be said of the Book of Judges? Wow. Looking back over the 21 chapters we covered, it provided a roller coaster ride to say the least. Judges ends with 21:25, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” As it’s already been proven, our Bible was designed so incredibly and meticulously that only God could have written it. It flows so well and provides us so much more than we’ll ever be able to wrap our minds around in this life. As we reflect on the Book of Judges and look into the last verse this book records, it’s so very clear as to why there was such a downward spiral for the nation of Israel. A wise man once said “No Bible, No Brains!” This could not be a more true statement, considering the record of the nation of Israel throughout the Book of Judges. God raised up some incredible leaders, throughout Israel, in the form of “judges”. However, the moment the various judges were out of the picture, almost instantaneously, the nation of Israel fell right back into apostasy, doing what was “right in his own eyes”.

Romans 15:4 reminds us “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” There is much for us to learn throughout the Book of Judges. We could never emphasize enough just how important it is for us to maintain a relationship with God and His word, and furthermore, placing ourselves under Godly leadership who have a proven relationship with the word of God themselves. As we’ve mentioned a few times in different devotionals this week, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). Each of us needs men in our life to lead us into the ways of God, holding us accountable for keeping His words (otherwise known as discipleship). For the very reasons we find in the Book of Judges with the nation, God, through Paul, preserves a pattern for all of us to follow. In 1 Corinthians 4:16, Paul writes, “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.” In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he goes one step further and tells the church at Corinth, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” Then in Ephesians 5:1, Paul brings us to the culmination of the process when he pens, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;” This is the process God has placed in the Bible for all of us to follow to keep us in His ways, obeying His words, teaching us to walk as He walked (1 Peter 2:21). If followed, this process will not allow any room for us to fall in the trap that Israel did, by doing what’s right in our own eyes.

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:**

**Judges 3:5** “And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:”

**Judges 8:34** “And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:”

Judges 10:10 “And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.”

**Judges 13:12** “And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?”

**Judges 21:25** “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”