

JUDGES OVERVIEW –

The last verse in the Book of Judges provides a familiar summary of the cycles of apostasy during this period of Israel's history:

Judges 21:25 *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* -- Moral relativism with no strong central leader – Some R rated stories – graphic violence, prostitution, driving tent pegs through heads, dismembering bodies – pretty ugly stuff

Judges covers the *time period* from the death of Joshua until the birth of Samuel who would end up anointing Saul as the first king over Israel.

Timeline Slide – Judges covers about a 325 year period from 1375 B.C. until 1043 B.C.

Authorship: Traditionally Samuel has been considered the author.

Title: **Judges – referencing the special heroes that provide the story line for the book --**

Why are these special heroes called “*Judges*” – not what we think of when we use that term = someone sitting in a courtroom in majestic flowing robes making decisions about various cases. These men and women are special deliverers or saviors sovereignly raised up by God to deliver His people from oppression from foreign conquerors because of their own apostasy and disobedience to God's covenant.

- Their primary role was as a military leader and
- the Spirit of God came upon them to empower them for miraculous heroic actions.
- But they also subsequently functioned as civil administrators.
- They did not rule in a centralized fashion but over local regions or tribes. So some of their administrations could overlap.
- They also did not pass their rulership down to their children as was customary in the subsequent monarchy. Once they died, they had no ongoing impact on the nation's behavior or status before God.

There are 12 judges recorded in the book. [I don't consider Abimelech in chaps. 8-9 to be one of the judges] 6 of these are featured with longer treatment that flesh out the repetitive cycle of apostasy while the others are passed over with just a brief mention.

The Theme of the book is **Apostasy** = a compound word in the Greek meaning “stand away from or turn away from the truth.” So a church or denomination can only be apostate if it formerly held to the truth.

Contrasts between Book of Joshua and Book of Judges:

God's covenant promise to Abraham looks solid at the end of Joshua – God had promised to make them a great nation; to give them a land to possess; with the goal being that they would represent God to the world by the way they lived in the land – bringing blessing to the world. But not so fast. Judges shows a huge reversal. Still God will remain faithful to His covenant promise – but the nation demonstrates a pattern of unfaithfulness.

1. Leadership Structure

- **Joshua**: Centralized leadership under **Joshua**, a strong, divinely-appointed leader who succeeded Moses.

- **Judges:** Decentralized, tribal leadership. No king or central figure; instead, **various judges** rise sporadically to lead in times of crisis.
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2. Military Outcome -- Military Success vs. Struggle

- **Joshua:** Emphasizes **military victories** and the conquest of Canaan as largely successful and divinely sanctioned.
 - **Judges:** Shows **incomplete conquest**; many Canaanite groups remain, leading to ongoing struggles and oppression.
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3. Spiritual Condition -- Faithfulness vs. Apostasy

- **Joshua:** The Israelites are portrayed as largely **faithful to God** under Joshua's leadership.
 - **Judges:** Repeated **cycles of apostasy**, where Israel turns away from God, suffers oppression, repents, and is delivered.
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4. Tone and Theological Message

- **Joshua:** Optimistic and victorious; underscores **obedience brings blessing**.
 - **Judges:** Darker, more pessimistic; illustrates **disobedience brings chaos**.
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5. Land and Settlement

- **Joshua:** Focuses on the **conquest and allotment** of the land to the twelve tribes.
 - **Judges:** Focuses on the **struggles of living in the land**, including conflicts with neighbors and among tribes.
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7. Literary Structure

- **Joshua:** Linear narrative (entry → conquest → settlement).
 - **Judges:** Cyclical narrative structure: **sin** → **oppression** → **repentance** → **deliverance**.
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6. Tribal Unity -- Unity vs. Fragmentation

- **Joshua:** Israel is portrayed as **united** under a single leader and mission.
 - **Judges:** Israel is depicted as **fragmented**, with each tribe acting independently, often at odds with each other.
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8. God's Role -- Divine Presence

- **Joshua:** God is consistently **present and guiding**, often directly communicating with Joshua.
 - **Judges:** God's presence is more **sporadic**, sometimes seeming distant, with periods of silence.
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9. Genre and Style

- **Joshua:** **Historical epic**, structured around fulfillment of divine promise.
 - **Judges:** More **moralistic and tragic**, highlighting human failure and divine mercy.
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Structure of the Book:

- I. (1:1 – 3:6) Reasons for Israel's Apostasy – Introduction
- II. (3:7 – 16:31) Record of Israel's Apostasy – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy
- III. (17-21) Results of Israel's Apostasy – Appendix

BIG IDEA:

Deteriorating cycles of idolatry and apostasy
(despite the Lord's patient faithfulness and gracious deliverance)
end up in the depths of religious and moral depravity.

Descriptions of the Cycle of Sin and Apostasy:

- Sin / Servitude / Supplication / Salvation / Silence (Rest)
- Apathy / Apostasy / Affliction / Answered Prayer
- Disobedience / Desperation / Deliverance
- Rebellion / Retribution / Repentance / Rescue / Rest

These cycles **spiral downward** – Decline / Deliverance / then **deeper Decline**

I came up with a few other pithy sayings that summarize the contents of the Book of Judges:

- Pockets of sin breed pervasive depravity
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump
- A nation without effective leadership goes off the rails (down the tubes)
- The “freedom” of Moral Relativism is the seedbed for the “bondage” of national oppression

Expanded Summary:

“*I did it my way*” is the defining song of our culture today. The Book of Judges shows us all what tends to go horribly wrong when we become too casual about seeking God's will and God's ways. It is the bridge between the entrance into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua and the establishment of the first kings over the nation Israel. God was still ruling the nation as a theocracy and the land was very fragmented. There was very little national cohesiveness.

We witness the repeating cycles of sin and deliverance as God raises up a variety of different champions to meet the desperate needs of the moment. The opening verses accurately describe the situation: the compromise of subtle sin sows seeds of spiritual decay that lead to future catastrophic failures. A little bit of leaven then leavens the entire lump. These historical examples are recorded for our benefit that we might put a premium on obeying God and not allowing our present prosperity to divert our focus from dependence upon the Lord.

Purpose of the Book:

Gary Inrig: The Purpose of the Book

The book of Judges is filled with people very much like us – people with God-given potential for

greatness and unfailing capacity for catastrophe. When they dared to trust God and depend upon Him, they were indeed people with hearts of iron, who made a positive, godly impact on their times. But when even the greatest heroes depended upon the flesh, they were revealed as people with feet of clay, who not only experienced but caused spiritual catastrophe.

J. Sidlow Baxter: The Purpose of the Book

Its intent is to expose the cause and course of Israel's ruining downgrade in such a way as to sting the national conscience into repentant return to Jehovah. . . Incomplete mastery of an evil at the outset always means constant trouble from it afterwards, and often defeat by it in the end.

Daniel Block: The Purpose of the Book

Judges was written to reveal the Canaanization of Israel in the pre-monarchic period of Israel's history.

Key Enemy Nations:

Judges 3:5-6

“And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶ and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.”

- **Philistines:** Occupied the southwestern coastal plain, including cities like Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.
- **Moabites:** Located east of the Jordan River, in the region south of the Ammonites.
- **Ammonites:** Positioned east of the Jordan River, north of the Moabites.
- **Midianites:** Came from the east, likely from the Arabian desert, and invaded Israel during Gideon's time.
- **Canaanites:** Inhabited the central and northern regions, including cities like Hazor and Megiddo.
- **Amalekites:** Lived in the Negev desert and frequently raided Israelite territories.

Territorial Map of Israelite Tribes, the 12 Regional Judges and the Key Enemy Nations:



I. (1:1 – 3:6) Reasons for Israel's Apostasy – Introduction

Subtle Roots of Decay Lead to Moral, Religious and Political Ruin:

Illustration: Decay – rust around base of pole holding up basketball hoop at the end of our driveway; integrity of the system did not give way all at once; it was gradually decaying over time; I sprayed black paint on the exterior so it still looked fine; but over time it continued decaying on the inside of the pole – when Julie had some high school boys over for a party – one strong dunk broke the pole off at the base

- **A. Incomplete Obedience** – not exterminating the inhabitants of Canaan

Judges 1:1-19 – Judah was more aggressive and successful than the other tribes in defeating the pagans – but still they had problems as well – **vs. 19** --

“Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots.”

- **B. Ignorance in Knowing God -- Generational Disconnect**

Judges. 2:6-10

“When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. ⁷ And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸ Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. ⁹ And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.”

- **C. Idolatry in Pursuing False Gods**

Judges 2:1-5

*“Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you, ² and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? ³ Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and **their gods shall be a snare to you.** ⁴ And it came about when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. ⁵ So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.”*

Judges 2:11-13

“Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. ¹³ So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.”

- **D. Intermarriage with Pagans**

Judges 3:4-6

“And they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. ⁵ And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶ and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.”

Remember: **Subtle Roots of Decay Lead to Moral, Religious and Political Ruin:**

Illustration: Tree in our backyard looked fine; one bright sunny day, I hear this loud crack and boom; My young granddaughters call out: “Pop, why did you turn off our electricity?” I look out the back window and our huge oak tree has broken off about 3 feet up from the base and has taken down the power lines to the neighborhood and is lying across our back fence on the neighbor’s deck and backyard. It had rotted out on the inside and was now hollow.

Cf. how Christ castigated the Pharisees for their internal root – despite all of their self righteous efforts to look good on the outside – calling them whitewashed tombs

First couple of chapters document these roots of decay within the nation of Israel.

Compromise leads to conflict and then to chaos

Instead of removing the moral decay represented by the Canaanites, they contracted the disease

II. The record of Israel's apostasy (3:7 - 16:31) – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy

Introduction to Cycles of Apostasy – **Judges 2:**

- **2:13** *“So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth”*
- **2:14** *“The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them”*
- **2:16** *“Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them.”*
- **2:19** *“But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers”*

I don’t think it is a coincidence that we are looking at 6 repeating cycles of apostasy. According to Bible scholars, just as the number 7 typically signifies completion or perfection especially of God, the number 6 is one shy of that, which means it signifies **imperfection**. You cannot find a historical account of the nation of Israel that highlights more of their imperfection than the book of Judges.

A. The first cycle of apostasy (3:7-11) **Othniel (Mesopotamia)**

Stripped down model of how a judge should function – nothing special or fancy – just highlights

each of the steps along the cycle of apostasy.

1. (:7) Sin

“And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.”

2. (:8) Servitude – King Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia – 8 years

“Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim [nicknamed King Cush] king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushanrishathaim eight years.”

Rishathaim means “double-wickedness” which suggests that he was a cruel and powerful man. Probably a pejorative term ascribed to him by his enemies – if you can’t defeat him, at least you can call him names behind his back. He was the most powerful of all the enemies of Israel named in the book of Judges. Large territory of the Arameans.

3. (:9a) Supplication

“And when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD,”

Emphasis on the suffering and misery experienced by the Israelites that caused them to turn back to God for deliverance.

4. (:9b-10) Salvation

“the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.”

We were introduced to Othniel -- this heroic figure from the family of Caleb back in **1:12-13**

“And Caleb said, ‘The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.’”¹³ And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife.”

Importance of the role of **the Spirit of the Lord**

5. Silence / Rest – 40 Years

“Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.”

That’s the story of Judges in microcosm – but the nation continues to spiral downward.

B. The second cycle of apostasy (3:12-30) **Ehud**

(Moabites)

Remember that Moab and Ammon were descendants of Lot by incestuous breeding with his daughters. The daughters learned such morality from their lives in Sodom and Gomorrah, and Moab and Ammon are, in Scripture, seen as historical extensions of Sodom and Gomorrah. So it

is no surprise to see them allied together along with the Amalekites to oppress Israel for 18 years.

Distinctives of Ehud:

- Left-handed – probably some of you are left-handed; seen as a defect in ancient times

Gary Inrig: An ironic situation in a man from the tribe of Benjamin, which means “*son of my right hand*.” A man who is awkward is called *gauche*, a French word meaning left-handed. Something that is wicked or evil we call *sinister*, the Latin word for the left hand. But someone with skill and ability is *dexterous*, which means right-handed in Latin.

Cf. all the positive references in Scripture to the Lord’s right hand -- *At his right hand are pleasures for ever more*, and there his Chosen One sits. It is the hand of power, glory, and blessing.

- Opportunistic Warrior and Hero for the Israelites

Look at how the story makes fun of the overly obese king Eglon – Ehud comes to supposedly bring him tribute but instead schemes to assassinate him with a concealed sword that he buries in the king’s folds of fat. This proud leader of Moab is reduced to a pile of excrement. How ironic!

(:30b) Rest now for 80 years – 2 generations instead of just one
“*And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.*”

C. The third cycle of apostasy (chs. 4-5) Deborah and Barak (Canaanites)

GOD USES UNCONVENTIONAL MEANS -- INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF WOMEN -- TO ENSURE THAT THE GLORY FOR SALVATION BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO HIM ALONE

She is the only woman in biblical history who has a major, God-given leadership role. That immediately marks her out as a uniquely gifted individual, a leader of distinction from whom we can learn a great deal.

Look at the monotony of the cycles of apostasy – no creativity – just the same pattern of failure over and over – receiving the same disastrous results – very depressing picture of the human condition – Sin might seem exciting and enticing ... but in reality it is boring and miserable
4:1 “*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.*”

Formidable enemy: King Jabin of Canaan and his military commander Sisera (**4:1**)

Israel was at a severe military disadvantage in terms of weaponry:

4:3 “*And the sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.*”

Ps. 20:7 “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God.”

5:8 – they didn’t even have shields or spears

Introduction to prominent leadership role of Deborah – **(4:4-5)**

“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.”

Name Deborah means “HoneyBee” -- dispensing sweet nuggets of wisdom, but packing a sting when necessary – Mohammad Ali – “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee”

Partnership with Barak:

(:6-9a) *“Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, ‘Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon; and I will give him into your hand.’ Then Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.’ And she said, ‘I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.’”*

Providential Rout described in **vs. 9b-16** – God turned the river Kishon which at this time of year was dried up into a muddy quagmire by means of a mighty storm (**5:21** “*the torrent of Kishon*” -- Caused the chariots to bog down and become a liability instead of an advantage

Warren Wiersbe: The word translated “*routed*” (**4:15**) means “confused, thrown into panic” . . . When you remember that the Canaanite god Baal was the **god of storms**, you can see how the sudden change of weather could have affected the superstitious Canaanites. Had their own god Baal turned against them? Was the God of Israel stronger than Baal? If so, then the battle was already lost, and the wisest thing the soldiers could do was flee.

The victory was capped off when another heroic woman Jael drove a tent peg through the temple of Sisera

5:31 “*And the land was undisturbed for forty years.*”

D. The fourth cycle of apostasy (6:1 - 10:5) **Gideon** (Midianites)

Midianites would let the Israelites do all the hard work of planting and cultivating their crops and then they would swoop in and plunder all of their produce and livestock. Left the nation impoverished and suffering.

6:4 “*So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth, as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey.*”

6:7-8 “Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian,⁸ that the LORD **sent a prophet** to the sons of Israel,”

Illustration: At Johnson and Towers, we repair trucks and buses that break down. Our special expertise has been in Detroit engines and Allison transmissions; but we have expanded our services to work on everything on the truck. Imagine the reaction of a customer – say MTA or Greyhound – who has a bus broken down on the Baltimore Beltway. They call for our road service and we send out a philosopher to lecture them on proper preventive maintenance practices. They would not be too pleased. They want a mechanic dispatched to fix their bus and want it fixed NOW!

8 Aspects of the Divine Calling of Gideon:

1. (6:11) The Circumstances of the Calling -- Called by the Angel of the Lord while in Hiding

“Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.”

2. (6:12) The Celebration of the Calling to be a Valiant Warrior because of God’s Presence and Favor

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.’”

Not mocking Gideon – but viewing him in light of the possibilities due to God’s transforming power and enablement – just like the Savior came to Simon and noted *“You are Simon, the son of Jonah. You shall be called a Rock – Peter.”*

3. (6:13) The Climate of Discouragement and Defeat Despite the Calling

“Then Gideon said to him, ‘O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’”

4. (6:14) The Commissioning of the Calling -- Called by the Power of God to Deliver Israel

“And the LORD looked at him and said, ‘Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?’”

5. (6:15) The Criticism of the Calling -- Excuses and Objections

“And he said to Him, ‘O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house.’”

Important Principle: God’s Power is best seen through accomplishing the impossible through the transformed weakness of men

6. (6:16) The Comforting Words of Reassurance to Support the Calling

“But the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man.’”

7. (6:17-21) The Confirmation of the Calling by a Miraculous Sign Gideon’s Famous Fleece

Not trying to determine God’s will but to confirm it and be reassured.

Not the pattern today for trying to determine God’s will. Doesn’t mean that God won’t sovereignly sometimes give us a sign that provides some confirmation or assurance. But don’t demand one.

8. (6:22-24) The Conclusion of the Calling – Mindset of Peace and Confidence Rather Than Fear

*“When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, ‘Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face And the LORD said to him, ‘Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.’ Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it **The LORD is Peace**. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.”*

Strength Through Weakness – Cutting Gideon’s army down to the Lord’s size (**Chap. 7**)

7:2 *“And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’”*

Initial 32,000 cut down to only 300! Tremendous victory achieved by the Lord

E. The fifth cycle of apostasy (10:6 - 12:15) **Jephthah** (Ammonites)

Our sin can exhaust the patience and forbearance of God:

(10:11-14) Pattern of Unfaithfulness That Puts Mercy At Risk

“And the LORD said to the sons of Israel, ‘Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.’”

11:1-3 – Jephthah was a valiant warrior but the son of a harlot

From a dysfunctional family; looks like he will amount to nothing; living like **Swamp Fox**

DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRANSFORMING
HUMAN OUTCASTS INTO CONQUERING HEROES

The elders of Gilead went to recruit Jephthah from the land of Tob (**11:4-6**)

Rash Vow of Jephthah: 11:30-31

“And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If Thou wilt indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand,³¹ then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.””

2 main views:

1) Jephthah's vow involved sacrificing whoever first came out of his door to greet him and he actually carried through and put his only daughter to death

2) Jephthah's vow resulted in dedicating his daughter to perpetual virginity as she served the Lord at the tabernacle (similar to Hannah's later dedication of Samuel)

Don't have time to wrestle with all of the arguments on either side here – it seems to me like he goes ahead and sacrifices his daughter – that seems like the obvious reading of the text – it is only controversial because it is so shocking and so against God's law – but these her

F. The sixth cycle of apostasy (chs. 13-16) Samson (Philistines)

Every time Israel passes through this cycle, the deliverer God raises up becomes more and more flawed. By the time you get to Samson, you can see that he is a mess in many ways.

7 Key Lessons:

1. God Can Use Imperfect People

- Despite Samson's flaws—anger, lust, vengeance—God used him to fulfill divine purposes (**Judges 14:3-4**). God at work in strange and unexpected ways.
- Lesson: God's plans are not thwarted by human imperfection. He often works through flawed individuals to accomplish His will.

2. Strength Comes from God, Not Ourselves

- Samson's physical strength was not innate; it was a gift from God tied to his Nazirite vow (Judges 16:17).
- Lesson: True strength—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—comes from dependence on God, not from self-reliance.

3. Compromise Leads to Downfall

- Samson repeatedly compromised his calling: he broke his Nazirite vows (drinking wine, touching a dead body, and ultimately cutting his hair).
- Lesson: Small compromises in integrity or faith can lead to larger failures and spiritual decline.

4. Lust and Poor Relationships Can Lead to Destruction

- Samson's attraction to Philistine women (especially Delilah) led to betrayal and loss (Judges 16).
- Lesson: Unwise relationships and giving in to temptation can derail a person's calling

and bring painful consequences.

5. Pride Precedes a Fall

- Samson assumed his strength would always be with him, even after breaking his vow.
- Lesson: Pride and taking God's gifts for granted can blind us to the consequences of sin.

6. Sin Has Consequences

- After Delilah betrayed him, Samson was captured, blinded, and enslaved (Judges 16:21).
- Lesson: God's forgiveness is real, but sin often carries real-world consequences.

7. Repentance Can Lead to Redemption

- In the end, Samson repented and prayed for strength to defeat the Philistines one last time (**Judges 16:28–30**).
- Lesson: It's never too late to turn back to God. Even in failure, sincere repentance can lead to redemption.

III. The results of Israel's apostasy (ch. 17—21) -- Appendix

A. Religious Depravity -- Idolatry of Micah and the Danites (ch. 17—18)

17:1-6 The Man-Made establishment of a counterfeit worship sanctuary

Established a personal worship shrine; at the center was a graven image out of silver

17:7-13 The Man-Made establishment of a counterfeit priesthood

Vs. 13 – essence of the prosperity gospel – treating his priest like a good luck charm

“Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.”

COUNTERFEIT, MAN-MADE SPIRITUALITY REINFORCES ITS OWN CYCLE OF SELF DECEPTION (AND OFFENDS GOD BY REPLACING OBJECTIVE DIVINE STANDARDS WITH ANARCHY AND MORAL RELATIVISM)

Four Deceptions of the Prosperity Gospel:

- 1) **(18:1-6) Its Attractiveness** – 5 spies from the tribe of Dan who are seeking to acquire a more attractive land as their inheritance – they come to the religious shrine of Micah – the tribe had failed to drive out the Amorites – Judges 1:34 indicates that Dan was forced into the hills – not a good situation
- 2) **(18:7-10) Its Mission** – Not pursuing God's agenda, but personal gain – coveting power and possessions
- 3) **(18:11-26) Its Treachery** – 600 Danites mobilized to attack the country of Laish – stole Micah's gods (the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image) and his counterfeit priest
- 4) **(18:27-31) Its Results** – Danites conquer Lish, settle there and establish their own

worship center and priest – Achieve short term results that look impressive but are at odds with God’s kingdom program

What happened to the tribe of Dan? In the book of 1 Chronicles, when the list of the tribes and families in Israel is given, Dan is the only tribe which is **totally ignored**. They had vanished into obscurity, probably because of intermarriage with the Philistines. Dan did not take what God had given to them, and they took what God had not given them. In the process, they lost all that they had.

B. Moral Depravity -- Immorality of Gibeah and the Benjamites (**chs. 19—21**)

Shocking story – a Levite hooks up with a concubine from Bethlehem; ends up in a depraved city of Gibeah. They were shown hospitality by an old man who took them into his home so they would not be vulnerable to sexual attack by sleeping in the open square. Still the wicked men of the city demanded sexual relations with the Levite guest but ended up instead seizing the concubine by force and raping her until she died. The Levite dismembered her body into 12 pieces and sent the pieces to the 12 tribes of Israel to galvanize military support for seeking vengeance against the tribe of Benjamin. Look how bad things are – Civil War.

Sacrificed his concubine to save his own skin. Jesus sacrifices Himself to save His chosen bride.

WHY STUDY THIS BOOK? 6 Key Reasons:

- To warn ourselves of the inherent dangers of times of prosperity and rest when it is so easy to lose sight of our need for dependence upon God
- To learn the lessons of history of how compromise with sin can lead to such catastrophic failures and judgmental oppression
- To appreciate the patience and faithfulness of our covenant-keeping God who never gives up on His elect people (**Judges 2:1-2**)
- To observe Satan’s tactics in raising up such formidable enemies in opposition to God’s kingdom agenda
- To see how God can use individuals (both men and women) to accomplish His purposes despite their warts and flaws – provides insights into the grace of God
- To value Christ our Savior as we see how God raised up a variety of limited human champions to provide temporary deliverance in the moment – the cycle of failure demonstrates that ultimate salvation must come through divine intervention = the coming Messiah-King

Outline:

- I. **The reasons** for Israel's apostasy (1:1 - 3:6) – Introduction
 - A. Incomplete Obedience – not exterminating the inhabitants of Canaan
 - B. Ignorance in Knowing God -- Generational Disconnect
 - C. Idolatry in Pursuing False Gods
 - D. Inter-marriage with Pagans
- II. **The record** of Israel's apostasy (3:7 - 16:31) – 6 Repeating Cycles of Apostasy
 - A. The first cycle of apostasy (3:7-11) **Othniel** (Mesopotamia)
 - B. The second cycle of apostasy (3:12-30) **Ehud** (Moabites)
 - C. The third cycle of apostasy (chs. 4-5) **Deborah and Barak** (Canaanites)
 - D. The fourth cycle of apostasy (6:1 - 10:5) **Gideon** (Midianites)
 - E. The fifth cycle of apostasy (10:6 - 12:15) **Jephthah** (Ammonites)
 - F. The sixth cycle of apostasy (chs. 13-16) **Samson** (Philistines)
- III. **The results** of Israel's apostasy (ch. 17—21) -- Appendix
 - A. Religious Depravity -- Idolatry of Micah and the Danites (ch. 17—18)
 - B. Moral Depravity -- Immorality of Gibeah and the Benjamites (chs. 19—21)