



# JUDGES

disgrace & deliverance

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PARENTAL ADVISORY



**CHINO VALLEY**  
COMMUNITY CHURCH



# **JUDGES**

## **Disgrace and Deliverance**

Chino Valley Community Church  
Spring 2022

This study guide can be used for individual Bible Study, small group curriculum, or family studies.

**Small Group Leaders Note:**

The purpose of this study guide is to draw you and your group into conversation and discussion of God’s Word and its application to our lives. The questions are posed in a specific order and each of the questions has a specific purpose. As you are familiar with the purpose of each question, this will help guide the flow of the discussion.

**A high-level view of the five basic questions and their functions:**

1. Introduction (*lean in*). The goal of this first question is to get everyone in the group to “lean in” and get involved. It is normally easy to answer, fun and creates a sense of energy—so much so that you’ll see group members sometimes physically lean in as they engage in the discussion.

2. Observation (*look down*). This is an observation question. It is designed to help group members “look down” and see the relevant details and facts in the Bible passage being studied. This question establishes a solid foundation for the rest of the study. Regardless how much time someone has spent studying God’s word in their lives, everyone in the group can get involved simply by taking an observant look at what the passage says.

3. Evaluation (*look up*). What do we learn about God from this passage? This is the ultimate goal of every Bible study—to get a clearer picture of the God we worship, so that we can serve and love Him better.

4. Understanding (*look out*). This question helps group members “look out” and see the principles of the Bible passage through the lens of the world today. It builds a bridge between the facts of the passage and our understanding of it as it relates to our lives and culture.

5. Application (*look in*). Here is where group members begin to “look in” and see what God might be nudging them to change in their lives. During this part of the study, group members move from “knowing” to “doing” what God’s word says. It’s the final step of all Bible study: life change—of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Adapted from the Liquid Curriculum series

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## The Judges of Israel

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<u>Judge</u>	<u>Length of Judgeship</u>	<u>Opponent</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
1. Othniel	40 years	Mesopotamia	Judges 3:7-11
2. Ehud	80 years	Moab	Judges 3:15-31
3. Shamgar		Philistines	Judges 3:31
4. Barak (Deborah)	40 years	Canaanites	Judges 4-5
5. Gideon	40 years	Midianites	Judges 6-8
6. Abimelech	3 years		Judges 9
7. Tola	23 years		Judges 10:1-2
8. Jair	22 years		Judges 10:3-5
9. Jephthah	6 years	Ammonites	Judges 10:6-12:7
10. Ibzan	7 years		Judges 12:8-10
11. Elon	10 years		Judges 12:11-12
12. Abdon	8 years		Judges 12:13-15
13. Samson	20 years	Philistines	Judges 13-16
14. Eli		Philistines	I Samuel 1:1-4:22
15. Samuel		Philistines	I Samuel 5-12

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## **Introduction:**

The truth is, we are leaky vessels. We hear a message one day and often forget it the next. We can see God's provision for us so clearly in one moment, yet almost immediately, the worries of the world regain control of our mind and heart.

In the book of Judges, we see how the people of God had fallen into a horrible pattern of forgetting. They had forgotten God's law. They had forgotten to pass along His words to their children. They had also forgotten to take time to rest, remember, and celebrate God's goodness.

A bit of history might be in order as we begin the book of Judges. The time span covered in Judges runs approximately from the end of the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua to the beginning of the monarchy under King Saul—a period of nearly 500 years.

The book of Judges serves as a transition between the birth and deliverance of the nation under Moses and the time when Israel becomes a full-fledged kingdom. The book also stands as a sad contrast to the book of Joshua. In Joshua, we see the newly liberated people of Israel, having grown into a nation, finally fulfilling their mandate of occupying the Promised Land. We see God fighting their battles for them with the people learning to put their trust in God.

However, the further we get from the leadership of Moses and Joshua, the more the people begin to stray from following God. We also see the consequences of not trusting and obeying God fully during the conquest become manifest during the time of the Judges. God had commanded Joshua to drive out or destroy all the idol-worshipping pagan inhabitants of the land. In Judges, we see clearly the result of failing to honor God's command. As God had warned, the people were indeed drawn away into idol worship by their pagan neighbors. The cycle of sin and rebellion begins here.

When God raises up military champions to help lead Israel in throwing off their oppressors, this book calls them judges, but we can think of them more like deliverers. After each military success, there is a period of peace that lasts for a while—typically while that judge is alive. Then the Israelites invariably fall prey to the pressure from the nations around and among them and they enter back into idolatry.

The two questions we want to be asking ourselves as we travel through the increasingly disturbing stories in Judges are: "What's wrong with this picture?" and "Where is God in this story?" These two questions help bring to light the message that is being communicated by the Holy Spirit throughout this dark journey.

One helpful note by commentator Kenneth Way is that by seeing the unfaithfulness of Israel, we see all the more clearly the faithfulness of God. This is an important theme running all through the book. In this, we see that these judges are far from the heroes we were taught they were in Sunday school. Rather, the only true hero in this book is God. He is the ultimate deliverer.

# Disgrace and Deliverance

## Judges 1-2

January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The book of Judges is one portion of the Bible many people avoid. It undoubtedly contains some of the most sordid, detailed accounts of wickedness we see in scripture. It relates what happens when God's people forget about Him, forsake Him, and do what is right in their own eyes.

As we begin with the first two chapters of Judges, we see that scripture describes "judges" as leaders whom God raised up to help make decisions for His people and to lead them in battle. While there are exceptions, these judges typically inspired Israel to go to war against their oppressors, and God then won the battles for them. The judges also usually inspired the people to follow God while they were alive. After they died, the people went back to their sinful ways.

Much has been made of the recurring cycle we see the twelve tribes of Israel experience during this time. The people move from apostasy to oppression to deliverance and then back to apostasy—again and again. After the people fall into sin, God allows them to be oppressed by their pagan neighbors. Then after their repentance, God once again delivers His people—only to have this cycle repeat itself over and over and over.

The frequent cycle of sin evident throughout Judges is actually more than just a cycle. It's a repeating pattern that spirals down to deeper and deeper levels of depravity. The quality and character of each subsequent judge noticeably declines. In addition to the repeating cycle of sin, there's a spiraling descent throughout the period into more and deeper levels of sin. The first major judge, Othniel, is presented in a positive light, whereas the last judge, Samson, is morally repugnant—every major judge in between typically gets progressively worse.

The purpose of the book is to highlight that when people forsake their God, the situation will inevitably go from bad to worse. The people of Israel became more and more like the nations around them. They became "Canaanized." The question that Judges forces us to ask is whether we identify more with the world than with Christ.

In the first two chapters, we see both Israel's military failures and their religious failures. The repeating refrain throughout the book that aptly encapsulates the cause for the moral morass we witness in these pages is the phrase, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Chapter two, then, is a snapshot of the book as a whole. Here we see the transition from a godly generation to an ungodly one. We see the cycles introduced. We also get a glimpse of why God allowed the pagan nations to remain.

Discussion questions:

1. Describe a time when you were beginning a new adventure or a new season in your life. Were you nervous, excited, hesitant, etc.? What were your prayers like during this time?
2. What difference do you notice between the first half of Judges chapter one (1:1-18) vs. the second half (1:19-36)? What changes in the second half? How does Judges 2:1-3 summarize the second half of chapter one?
3. What do we learn about the heart of God in Judges 2:1-3 and 2:20-23? After reading through chapter two, what do you notice about the forgiveness and patience of God? How does God's patience play out in your life?
4. What specific things do you suppose the people of Israel did in their rebellion against God (2:11-13)? What did their idol worship entail? Why was idol worship even a temptation for them? What sorts of things would God say about our current culture in this regard? What sorts of activities or practices would God identify that Christians do today that are influenced by the culture around us? What sort of report card would we receive in this area?
5. Take a moment to reflect on how your life fits into the cycles we see in Judges. Do you see the same patterns? How would you describe the way God has dealt with you—in terms of correction, discipline, patience, and forgiveness?

Going deeper:

1. Read Deuteronomy chapter 6. In light of what you read, what glaring failure stands out in Judges 2:10? What was the responsibility of the previous generation? What are you doing to pass along the testimonies of the Lord to the next generation?
2. How are you like or unlike your parents? How are your kids like or unlike you? What specific factors or influences do you think account for these differences?



# The Days of Ehud

## Judges 3:1-31

January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022

When we see the wickedness and sin displayed in the book of Judges, by a nation upon whom God had heaped such abundant blessings and whom He delivered so powerfully, we have to ask why. How, in such a short amount of time, did the people of Israel fall so far? There is one small clue in Judges chapter 3 that points us to an answer.

The book of Judges can be seen as a testimony to what happens when you do not follow God's injunction to pass along His Word to the next generation.

When Jesus was describing the greatest commandment in the Law, He pointed to Deuteronomy 6, where God instructs His people to teach His commandments to their children. We should talk about them all day long. We ought to bind them to our hands and foreheads. We are to write them on our doorframes. God goes to great lengths to describe how crucial it is to pass along His Word to the next generation.

When Israel reaches the Promised Land, upon crossing the Jordan River the first thing God tells Joshua to do is to set up a monument of 12 stones taken from the middle of the riverbed. Why did God want this memorial erected? In Joshua 4:21-24, God says, *"...In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground...so that you might always fear the Lord your God.'"*

This monument of 12 stones was set up at Gilgal, which was the place where Israel gathered after crossing the Jordan. It was the gateway to Jericho and the Promised Land.

In Judges 3:19 there is a passing reference to a sacred spot, which Ehud and his people had to pass twice to get to and from the king's palace. This spot was Gilgal. This place was where Israel was supposed to remember and recite God's works to their children. It was now a place where heathen idols had been set up instead. The mention of Gilgal here serves as an indictment upon Israel for failing to do what God commanded in Deuteronomy 6 and with the 12 stones of remembrance in Joshua 4. It is no accident that Gilgal is mentioned here. It is precisely because Israel did not pass along the fear of the Lord to the next generation that wickedness overtook them.

The book of Judges powerfully reminds us of that same important message: to pass along God's truth to our children.

Discussion questions:

1. In the beginning of chapter 3, we see God setting Israel up for a test. What was the biggest test you have ever taken/faced (academic, professional, or spiritual)?
2. What do you notice about Ehud's tactics? What do you think about the ethics of his method of deliverance for Israel? Is it justified?
3. What do we learn about God from Judges 3:1-9? Compare Judges 3:1-2, 3:4 with 2:20-23. What are the various ways God uses the pagan nations as thorns in the side of Israel?
4. In what ways do we tend to take God and His blessings for granted? What are the dangers of doing so? What is it about human nature that makes it so easy to fall prey to this?
5. How does God use the circumstances in our lives to test and/or train us? What is an example in your life of God testing you? What is the difference between testing and tempting (James 1:13-14)?

Going deeper:

1. Why did God not want Israel to intermarry with the nations around them? Why would it be tempting for them? What advantage would it bring them? What advantage would it bring the neighboring nations? What was the danger of intermarrying (Read Deut 7:1-5)? How well did Israel obey this command throughout their history?
2. Read 1 John 2:15-17. In this passage, what does "the world" refer to? How is it tempting for us to be "of this world?" What might be a modern day parallel for us intermarrying with the nations around us? What does it look like practically to be in the world but not of the world?

# The Days of Deborah

## Judges 4

January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

God always prepares us for what is to come. This is an important truth interwoven all throughout scripture. God prepares individuals, nations, kings, and even you and me for what He has planned. In the book of Judges, we see a time in Israel's history when idolatry and sin had taken hold of the people; as well as the horrible consequences that followed. However, this should not have been a surprise. Before they even arrived in the Promised Land, God had prepared His people and told them this was going to happen.

Back during the exodus, when Moses was leading the people, our warrior God told Israel that if they would obey His voice, He would be an enemy to their enemies and drive out the nations before them (Ex 33:1-2).

In Numbers 33:55 God warns His people: *"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live."*

That is precisely how the book of Judges begins. Chapter one details all the peoples that Israel failed to drive out from the land. God Himself then shows up in the beginning of chapter two and asks the people why they had not obeyed, and then reaffirms what He told them back in the wilderness: *"...I will not drive them out before you; they will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you"* (Judges 2:3). The book of Judges simply describes the consequences of their disobedience throughout the book of Joshua.

As we come to chapter four, we see that Israel is once again facing the Canaanites, an enemy they were supposed to have driven out earlier. Yet the tribe of Judah had given up, and did not trust God to defeat the chariots of Canaan (Judges 1:19).

The book of Judges serves as a bridge between the book of Joshua—which details the conquest of the Promised Land—and the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, which describe the time of the monarchy. God is preparing His people for the time when He will provide for them a king. He is showing them—through this time of wickedness and depravity in Judges—what happens when they do what is right in their own eyes. He is showing them their need for a king—the ultimate king, Messiah.

Discussion questions:

1. Describe a time when someone else got the credit for something you did. How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
2. Read Judges 4:4-10, 14. What made Deborah a good leader? How was she courageous? How did she display wisdom, knowledge, and insight? What do we learn about Barak in this story?
3. Where do you see the sovereign hand of God at work in this battle (4:17-22; 5:20-21)? What was unusual or unexpected about the deliverance God provided in this story?
4. What do we learn about operating according to fear vs. operating according to faith in this story? Where do you see Christians operating according to fear today? What would operating according to faith look like today?
5. All throughout the book of Judges, the pendulum seems to be swinging between discipline and deliverance. Where have you experienced God's discipline? Where have you experienced God's deliverance?

Going deeper:

1. Why do you think God involves people in His plan of deliverance instead of just doing it Himself? Do you find it easy or hard to ask God for deliverance when you need it the most? When was the last time you asked God to show up in a big way in your life?
2. Do you find it difficult or easy to follow a woman who is in charge? Why do you think this is? How has our culture shaped our view of women in leadership? How has the Bible shaped our view of this?



# The Days of Gideon (part 1)

## Judges 6-7

January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The book of Judges is a literary masterpiece. The organization, the complex chiasmic structure, thematic parallelism—all of these storytelling techniques majestically fill out the picture and message the author is painting for us. The structure forms a ring which starts and ends in the same place—Israel’s military and religious failures. As we travel around this ring, we are moving in a series of smaller rings—essentially telling the same story over and over again—apostasy, oppression, and deliverance. Yet as we move further into the book, the immorality grows decidedly more pronounced. So we are not just moving in a circle, but also travelling downward in a spiral.

The stories of the major judges in the first half of the book are relatively positive. Then we see a turn in the story of Gideon. The stories of the “deliverers” in the second half are distinctly negative. In the first half of Judges, after each judge is successful, we read that the land rested for a certain number of years. However, after Gideon, scripture simply says that the leaders ruled for a certain number of years. The implication is that the land no longer enjoyed rest.

Structurally, the book of Judges revolves around the centerpiece: the story of Gideon. Here, in a microcosm, Gideon serves as a synopsis of the entire book of Judges. Gideon also reflects the story of the entire Bible as well. A few examples of these parallels:

First, when Gideon is approached by the Angel of the Lord to commission him for service, what does he do? He questions God (6:13) by saying, *“If God is with us, how can all these things be?”* This reflects what happens in the larger biblical narrative. In the Garden of Eden, we see that sin enters the world with God also being questioned: *“Did God really say...?”*

Second, when God calls Gideon, Gideon comes up with excuses why he’s not right for the job (6:15). So, too, Moses tried to squirm away from God’s calling by also using excuses. Many such parallels exist.

The story of Gideon reminds us that Gideon is not the main character after all. The story is about God. Every one of the so-called heroes that God uses in Judges is not a hero at all. They are simply “bit players” that God uses to remind us that He is the only true hero. The story is about God and how we need Him—and how we repeatedly forget that. The entire story of scripture is a constant reaffirmation, through various economies and political and religious situations, that we need God. He is our only hero and our savior.

### Discussion questions:

1. In this story, a dream plays a significant role in the unfolding plot. What sort of recurring dreams do you have? What is the most memorable dream you have had? Do you believe God has ever spoken to you in a dream?
2. What do you notice is different about this story from the others we have seen so far? Why do you think God sent a prophet this time rather than immediately sending a deliverer? Who is the Angel of the Lord and why is He sent?
3. How many confirmations does Gideon require before he finally acts? Why do you think God was so patient with Gideon's request for signs and fleeces? What does this teach us about God? Where has God been patient with you?
4. Why do you think Gideon put out fleeces? What does this say about his faith and trust? Where do you see people testing God today?
5. In what areas of your life do you typically do well at trusting? In what areas does your faith struggle? How has this changed over time? Where is God challenging you today to trust Him?

### Going deeper:

1. Where else in the Bible does God speak to someone in a dream? How are these messages from God received? Do you think God still speaks to people in dreams? Why or why not?
2. What lessons can we learn from the life of Gideon? How can these situations apply to us:
  - Gideon living in fear threshing wheat in a winepress
  - The need of the people to rid themselves of idolatry
  - God reducing the number of warriors

How can we better trust God when He gives us a task or mission? What would it look like to trust God's call on our lives? What is holding us back from trusting, rather than testing God with fleeces? What does God desire from us more than anything else?

# The Days of Gideon (part 2)

## Judges 8

February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

As we reach the thematic center of the book, we may be growing a bit emotionally fatigued, and perhaps a bit frustrated. We have seen this all-too-familiar cycle play itself out over and over again. Will these people never learn? They repeatedly repay God's goodness, provision, and patience with disloyalty, sin, and betrayal. Yet perhaps after this repetitive refrain we may finally begin to get the point God has for us. Namely, that this is not the story of Israel alone. This is our story as well. No sooner do we condemn them for their obstinance and weak wills, than we recognize that we are pointing the finger back at ourselves. We live out that same cycle over and over and over again in our own lives.

The lesson we hope the Israelites will eventually learn—and the lesson God has for us—is that we cannot save ourselves. We seem to think that it is the Judges who provide deliverance for the people. However, the consistent message we see here is that God provides the victory. God is the only hero of the story.

What do we see in the story of Gideon? We see God highlight for the people that their issue was not military subjugation; it was spiritual treason. The first thing God does in the story of Gideon is not to send them a military deliverance, but rather a prophet—to point them to the cause of their situation. In Judges 6:1, the people cried out to the Lord because of the oppression of Midian, and God sends them a prophet, not a military general. This prophet proclaims the cause of their problem—disobedience.

God then shows up in person (as the Angel of the Lord) to dedicate and commission Gideon for the work that lay ahead. The first work He has Gideon undertake was still not military deliverance, but rather, the tearing down of idols. This is a stark reminder that our felt needs are often not our real needs. God knew what the people really needed was to address was their spiritual adultery. Israel was the unfaithful wife of Jehovah as we see in the book of Hosea—and they continued to play the harlot.

Then we see as Gideon grapples with his role as deliverer, he challenges God to verify His commands—through the episode of the fleeces. How often have you heard someone use this story as an example of faith and seeking the will of God by “putting out a fleece.” Unfortunately, this is exactly opposite of what fleeces truly represent. He does not exhibit faith, but rather doubt and a lack of trust in the promises of God. Putting out a fleece is an exercise in distrust and disbelief. God had already commanded Gideon to deliver Israel from Midian. And Gideon did not believe God. Gideon displays his lack of mettle by doing this not only once, but twice.

The military victory God does eventually accomplish through Gideon is almost secondary to the point of the story. We need God. We need to look to Him and not ourselves. We need to deal with the idolatry in our lives. God reduces the number of warriors on

Gideon's side to a ridiculously low number to declare in the loudest possible terms that it is God who fights our battles. God chooses Gideon, the smallest guy from the smallest family to illustrate this point. Only when we begin to learn to look to Him and lean on Him, will we ultimately have success.



Discussion questions:

1. How do you typically handle criticism when it comes? As an opportunity to learn/grow? As a personal attack on your character or worth? As a betrayal? As a loving nudge towards introspection?
2. What is different about Gideon in this chapter? How is he handling the challenges before him? What do you think of his choice to punish the towns that were not hospitable? Of his choice to make an ephod?
3. Where do we see God in chapter 8? Why is this the case? How does this attitude toward God play into the flow of the narrative of the book of Judges? In other words, how does the story of Gideon serve as a turning point in the book?
4. Where do you see people outside the church "doing what is right in their own eyes?" Where do you see people inside the church doing the same thing? What do think are the causes for this?
5. Where in your life do you struggle with the need for revenge or justice? What lessons have you learned about this struggle? What does God teach us about vengeance and justice? Why do you think it is so difficult for us to leave it in His hands?

Going deeper:

1. How does God use difficult times to get our attention? Why is this so effective? What does it mean to be self-sufficient? What does it look like to be dependent upon God?
2. Some people have observed, "Private faithfulness is a prerequisite to public usefulness." Where do you see this in the life of Gideon? Where have you seen this in your own life?

# The Days of Abimelech

## Judges 9

February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

As mentioned earlier, the two most important questions to ask when reading the book of Judges are: "What's wrong with this picture?" and "Where is God in this story?" We must ask the first question because that is precisely the point of the book of Judges. Something is wrong with this picture. God gives us snapshot after snapshot of the horrible effects of rejecting Him and becoming like the world. Something is wrong with the wanton idolatry of God's people, who have been miraculously delivered from slavery and have been cared for and provided for in spectacular and unbelievable ways. Something is wrong with those who have been given a land to dwell in—a land whose cities they did not have to build and crops they did not need to plant—a land flowing with milk and honey. There is something significantly wrong with this picture: that they have so quickly forsaken their God after His miraculous care for them.

As we traverse the pages of this book, we see time and again examples of things not being as they should. We see judges who are fearful, even though God has promised them success. We see judges who are focused on themselves, rather than on God. We see the people continually returning to pagan idols, when the result of doing so has always been disastrous. Every picture we get of life in Israel during this time is horribly bleak.

In the story of Abimelech, the picture is way beyond bleak. In fact, this story paints quite the contrast to most other stories in the book. What's wrong with this picture is that rather than God calling a judge to deliver His people from the hands of their oppressors, Abimelech sets himself up as a leader and actually wants to be made king. What's wrong is that Abimelech goes on a murderous bloodthirsty rampage, killing 70 of his brothers, and still the inhabitants of the city of Shechem make him their king. This story stands out for its sheer unadulterated evil.

The next question to closely track throughout Judges is, "Where is God (or where is God not) in this story?" In most of the stories leading up to this event, God is clearly an active and obvious part of the story. But here, all throughout the events of Abimelech's reign of terror, God is not visibly present. God is not really seen until the last two verses, which speak of how God repaid the wickedness of both Abimelech and the people of Shechem. Even though He was not visible, God was still moving and sovereign behind the scenes. This apparent absence of God speaks volumes about the message of the story of Abimelech.

Discussion questions:

1. What do you think about “touchdown dances” done by NFL players—or NBA players beating their chests after making a dunk?
2. Read Judges 8:30-35; 9:1-6. What do we learn about Abimelech? What’s wrong with this picture? How is this story different from the ones we have encountered thus far in the book of Judges? What issue does Abimelech seem to be dealing with?
3. Read James 4:6. How does this truth fit into the story unfolding in Judges 9? How does Abimelech’s attitude and self-image compare with that of Gideon or even Moses’? Why do you think humility is a trait that God desires in us?
4. Where do you see pride rear its ugly head in the world around you? What does the world think of pride? Where do you see pride often appear among Christ followers?
5. How has God dealt with the pride in your own heart? What lessons has He taught you? What has been most helpful to you in dealing with pride?

Going deeper:

1. Where do you see yourself in the story of Abimelech? How have you removed God from the throne and replaced Him with yourself? What are some practical ways to train ourselves to take our eyes off ourselves and place them on God?
2. Read Daniel 4:28-33. What do we learn about the cause of Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliating situation? Then read Daniel 4:34-37; 4:1-3. Describe the difference you see in Nebuchadnezzar. What important lessons can we take from the life of Nebuchadnezzar?

# The Days of Jephthah

## Judges 11-12

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022

So many questions arise from the story of Jephthah. What do we do when it feels like God is not there? What is normally the result when we take things into our own hands? Have you ever made a promise you later regretted making?

When we read books like Judges, we need to understand that although they appear to be presented as history, the actual purpose is much more theological than merely the reporting of historical events. More precisely, these books can rightly be seen as “history with a message.” The particular ideas chosen are presented to advance a theological or pedagogical agenda. This is why we look for the Holy Spirit-inspired lessons that are present in these kinds of stories. Simple histories do not give us that kind of benefit. If we read historical accounts of the Civil War, for example, our typical goal is not the gleaning of messages or learnings the Battle of Gettysburg has for us.

As we continue to ask “What’s wrong with this picture?” we notice in the story of Jephthah that rather than God raising up a champion to deliver Israel, the people look to enlist their own deliverer. They stand in the place of God, and the (expected) disastrous results follow. Jephthah and the elders do make few and passing references to God, but it is clear they are not seeking Him.

Ironically enough, even in this story, which is full of theological misunderstanding of the role and purposes of God, it is stated (for the only time in the book of Judges) that God is indeed the one true Judge (Judges 11:27). This accidental declaration of truth may even serve to explain why God begins to work through Jephthah immediately after this.

Two powerful truths that emerge from this story are highlighted by commentator Kenneth Way. The first is that while God may, for a time, feel absent, He never truly is. This sense of absence is a powerful tool that God can use to help us “topple our idols” and make us hungry for His presence when all we feel is His absence. When we feel alone, we can either rely on ourselves, or we can lean into the God we know is there—even though we may not be able to feel Him. God’s tough love may be the rude awakening we need as motivation to look back to Him in dependence.

The second truth is that it is God who will bring justice. When we take things into our own hands, we can make foolish decisions (with sometimes catastrophic consequences), or we can run ahead of where God wants us to go. Justice falls within the purview of God alone. We need to entrust ourselves to “Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet 2:23).



Discussion questions:

1. Outside of your marriage vows (if married), what promise or vow have you made that sticks out in your mind?
2. In the story of Jephthah, where do we see the people moving ahead of God's leading? What does God do in response? Why do you think God still used Jephthah, even though He had not chosen him or raised him up? What did Jephthah do right, and what did he do wrong?
3. From what we know of God, how do you think He would view the oath Jephthah made and kept (since God's reaction is not recorded for us in scripture)? What do we learn about God from the request He made of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?
4. What is most important in most people's minds today when it comes to choosing their leaders? How important is honesty and character? How has this changed in your lifetime?
5. For what will Jephthah be remembered? For what would you like to be remembered? What are you doing about it?

Going deeper:

1. Compare Judges 12:1-3 with 8:1-3. How do the reactions of Jephthah and Gideon differ when dealing with the complaints of Ephraim? Why the difference?
2. When is it ever acceptable to lie or break a promise?

# The Days of Samson (part 1)

## Judges 13-14

February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

While growing up, if you were asked who the biggest heroes in the Bible were, who would make your top three? Perhaps David, because he slew the giant? Maybe Moses, because he led Israel out of slavery to the Promised Land? Undoubtedly, Samson would make many of our lists because of his mighty feats of strength. Yet how does the Bible actually portray the idea of a hero? Is Samson really a hero? Is that what the Holy Spirit through the book of Judges is trying to communicate?

Part of our difficulty with understanding what makes a hero in the Bible is how we have been taught the message of Hebrews 11. So often, these characters mentioned are described as the "heroes of the faith." This is understandable. We naturally want to admire how much faith these "heroes" had—so we can emulate them.

However, a more careful reading of the chapter reveals that it is not the characters themselves who are in focus. It is "faith" that is being put on display. It is "by faith" that Abraham offered up Isaac. "By faith" Moses led the people. Notice how many times the phrase "by faith" is used. The pronounced emphasis when reading this passage should be on the words "by faith," not on the characters themselves. Therefore, we miss the point when we set these characters up as heroes.

Samson is also listed among those included in Hebrews 11. But if we look at the way Samson is portrayed in Judges, there is very little, if anything, for which to commend him. He is revealed to be a self-centered leech, only interested in his own needs, wants, and desires. Even his repentance and "faith" at the end of the story is self-serving. So if Samson is not a hero, what is he?

This gets back to the question of how we should be reading Judges in the first place. Just as the goal of Hebrews 11 is to point us toward the positive message of the necessity of faith, the goal of Judges is to point us toward the negative message of the results of forsaking God and the idolatry that follows. The point of Judges is how much we need God. God is the main point. God is the main character. God is the only true hero in the book of Judges. If we see any of the judges as heroes, we are missing the point.

Discussion questions:

1. Who is the strongest person you know physically? Who is the strongest person you know emotionally? Who is the strongest person you know spiritually?
2. What stands out to you about the announcement and birth of Samson? Who is the Angel of the Lord? Why do you think God chose to set Samson apart from before birth? What parallels do you see with the births of Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist?
3. What do we learn about God in Judges 13-14? Is there anything surprising?
4. What do you think most Christians believe it means to be set apart from the world? How would you evaluate these ideas? What are some extreme examples of people seeking to obey this command? What might a biblical model of being set apart look like?
5. In what areas of your life can you relate to Samson (lack of self-control, rebellious, self-willed, impulsive, easily influenced, prone to anger)? How has this changed over time?

Going deeper:

1. What is the purpose of a Nazirite vow (Num 6:1-21)? Why do you think God would ask them to abstain from any alcohol? How does the Nazirite vow parallel our own mandate to keep ourselves separate from the world?
2. Read Judges 14:1-4. What does verse 4 mean? What are the implications of this—since God had forbade the Jews from intermarrying?

# The Days of Samson (part 2)

## Judges 15-16

March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

In contrast to Gideon, the smallest guy from the smallest family, here God actually chooses the biggest and strongest to make His point and teach His lesson. One of the saddest aspects of the story of Samson has to be the tale of wasted potential. We see Samson as the one who had it all. God gifted Him with all the gifts he would ever need. Not only that, but God called him from the very womb to be His champion. And what does Samson do with what he had been given?

Even though we do not see Samson engaging in the idol worship so characteristic of this period, his decision to marry a Philistine woman reveals a heart that is far from God. God had expressly forbade the marrying of foreign women for the very reason we see here. It would draw the people's hearts away from worshipping the one true God. This, indeed, proved to be Samson's downfall. Yet once again, the consistent faithlessness of God's people highlights for us the unrelenting faithfulness of God.

Through some of the more bizarre stories in scripture—including the jawbone of a donkey used as a weapon, the tails of foxes tied together to set a field ablaze, and a hoard of honey hidden inside a lion's carcass—we see God relentlessly pursuing Samson, despite his many failings.

It is not until his God-given strength is gone does Samson turns his thoughts back to God. Once again, it becomes clear that this is our own story. How often do we take for granted the blessings of God? We can cruise through life with our eyes fixed squarely on ourselves. Often it is only when trials and challenges arise, and we, too, reach the end of our rope, that we acknowledge God and His working in our lives.

So many lessons present themselves through the pages of Samson's journeys. We see how power corrupts (and absolute power corrupts absolutely). The allure of power nearly always proves to be too much for fallen, frail creatures to handle. We also see that God is sovereign. God had promised to deliver Israel through Samson—and nothing Samson could selfishly do would prevent that from happening.

This begs the question: what indeed could have been accomplished in the life of Israel if Samson had set his heart on God, rather than on himself and his own lusts? Again, the mirror of scripture forces us to ask that self-same question of ourselves.

Will we ignore the blessings and giftings of God? Will we follow the dictates of our own will, or seek after God's best for our lives? Will God accomplish His desires in our life through our joyful cooperation and because of us, or in spite of us?

Discussion questions:

1. What do you believe is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?
2. From what we have read of Samson, how would you describe him? What would you say was the most tragic aspect of Samson's life? Despite his physical strength, what strength was Samson lacking?
3. Why do you think God would choose to use a man like Samson? What picture of God do we get in the stories of Samson?
4. Which of Samson's traits would those in the world consider laudable? How would scripture rate these same traits? What have you thought of Samson in the past? How has your view of him changed?
5. Share a time in your life when God used you in His plan despite your sin, selfishness, or stubbornness. If you got to choose, how would you like for God to use you now?

Going deeper:

1. What do we know about the Philistines? (Look up 1 Sam 17:1-4; Ex 23:27-33; 1 Sam 13:19-21). Why were they such a thorn in the side of Israel?
2. The story of Samson brings up many theological issues. Discuss these ideas put forth by commentator Kenneth Way: 1) God's good ends do not excuse wicked human means. 2) God shows grace to whom He wishes, when He wishes.

# Disgraced Religion

## Judges 17-18

March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

In these two chapters of Judges, the beginning of the end has arrived. The stories of the judges have concluded and we are seeing the results in Israel of doing what is right in one's own eyes.

The issue in these chapters is not the worship of false gods, but rather the worship of the true God in wrong ways. This kind of error can be even more insidious than idol worship, because it is clear that Canaanite practices have infiltrated Yahweh worship. This is a common strategy of Satan, even in the church today. He takes what is right and good, and twists it just enough that our eyes are taken off God, or are focused on wrong conceptions of God.

A.W. Tozer has said, "The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true." God has clearly revealed who He is and how He desires to be worshipped. Worshipping on our own terms is not true worship. This is yet another form of "doing what is right in one's own eyes." Kenneth Way summarizes this well when he says, "We end up worshipping a convenient but counterfeit god who arises from our own predilections and passions, but who bears no resemblance to the Lord."

We see the result of this acceptance of practical idolatry in the tribe of Dan. Judges chapter 18 focuses on some of the tribe of Dan trying to find a new home for themselves. God had given the tribe of Dan an allotment of land under the leadership of Joshua. Yet Dan was unwilling to obey God in driving out the inhabitants of the land. They rejected God's provision and did not rely on Him for help.

Both the Amorites and the Philistines made life difficult for the tribe of Dan, and so many of them sought out a new home. They had been given land west of Jerusalem, all the way to the sea (Philistine territory), but they travelled all the way to the northern end of Israel to find a place they liked more—a place that was much easier to conquer.

In Judges 18:30, we see the idolatrous practices that were established in Dan during this time by Jonathan (the grandson of Moses) were carried on by his descendants. The city eventually became a center of idolatry under Jeroboam I. Many believe this is one of the reasons that Dan is not mentioned in Revelation when 12,000 are set apart by God from each tribe as witnesses during the tribulation. The tribe of Dan is conspicuously missing from this list. Dan will apparently be judged for their role in perpetuating idolatry in Israel. Which is interesting, because the word "Dan" means "judge."

### Discussion questions:

1. As a child, were you more content or more complaining? What about your own children? Describe a time when you were not satisfied with what God provided for you. What did you learn through this?
2. Read Judges 18:1-2. Why were the Danites not settled in the land yet (see Judges 1:34; Joshua 19:40-48)? What was preventing them from settling (see Deut 7:1-2; 16-24)?
3. Where is God in this passage? In the summary of this section (Judges 18:29-31) what do we learn about who and how the Danites were worshipping? What do we learn about how true Yahweh worship had been compromised and distorted? Who were their priests (were they sons of Aaron as directed by God)? How long did this priest arrangement last? What had the Danites inherited from the nations around them in terms of worship practices?
4. How has the culture around us affected (and perhaps infected) how we worship today? How does our worship more reflect the world than what God asks of us?
5. These stories effectively describe what happens when God is not honored as King. Where, in your life, do you honor God as King, and where are you still on the throne? In what areas is it difficult to give up control?

### Going deeper:

1. By this time in the history of the period of the Judges, the god that Israel was worshipping bore little resemblance to the true God. They had been so influenced by the practices and theology of the nations around them that what we read in these chapters should shock us. In what ways do we create God in our own image today? What do you think many Christians get wrong about who God is?
2. Read 2 Peter 3:9. By this point in our study, one overwhelming truth stands out clearly—the patience of God. Describe how you have seen the patience of God on display in the book of Judges. Describe how you have seen the patience of God on display in your own life.

# Disgraced Morality

## Judges 19

March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022

At first glance, when we approach the study of the book of Judges, we might be tempted to describe it as an action-packed story of villains, victors, and great acts of courage and faith. We may see it filled with the epic tales of champions like Ehud, Barak, Gideon, and Samson—ancient men renowned for deliverance and victories so great that we still know their names and stories today. Yet, now, as we approach the end of our study, we see the book of Judges is not really about any of these feeble and unlikely characters. It's about God, the one true hero, and how He used ordinary people to display His extraordinary power.

Throughout the book of Judges, we saw the faithless people of Israel embark on a downward spiral of idolatry, repentance, deliverance, and return to idolatry. With each revolution, the sin and wickedness got increasingly worse, and the corresponding judgment more severe.

Yet God continued to rescue His people through unlikely deliverers. He used a small, left-handed warrior named Ehud. In a male-dominated culture, He brought deliverance through two women: Deborah and Jael.

God also used a nervous man named Gideon, who repeatedly tested God before he would obey. God brought judgment down upon a wicked man, Abimelech, who tried to lead without God's approval. God even used a selfish, mighty man, Samson, who thought only of himself.

However, lest we think that Judges is only a history book, we must remember that the story of Judges is also our story. We, too, are prone to forget God's goodness and run to worship our own idols. We are feeble and nervous and selfish and hesitant to obey God's calling on our lives. But thankfully, just as Judges isn't ultimately about any of those men, so our stories aren't only about us, but about God. God is our hero, too. God is always faithful. He can and will use us in His plan no matter how ordinary we are. But we must come to the realization that we are not the main character on our own stage.

With that in mind, we come to a chapter that is so sordid, it might perhaps be best to allow scripture itself to detail the horrors. There no longer seems to be any attempted pretense at being a separate, distinct, holy people. The people of Israel are acting exactly like the pagan nations around them. They have lost their identity as the people of God. They have been fully "Canaanized." Surely, this story is meant to disturb us and put on full display the results of a world without the knowledge of God. The flip side of this lesson is undoubtedly how much we need God.



Discussion questions:

1. What significant world event took your breath away? What event so shocked you that your reaction took you by surprise?
2. In a chapter that depicts such utter depravity, what stands out to you? What surprises you when reading this chapter? Why is it significant that the main character is a Levite? Why do you think the Holy Spirit inspired this chapter to be included in scripture?
3. What does this chapter highlight about the nature of mankind—especially in a world that does not acknowledge God? Read Romans 1:18-32, 3:9-18. Discuss what is known as “total depravity.” This is the doctrine that every part of fallen mankind (every aspect of our being) has been affected by sin. Despite what you may have heard, mankind is not basically good. No, fallen mankind has a bent toward evil that requires a work of God to rectify. Both Calvinists and Arminians affirm this doctrine. What are the ramifications of this doctrine—for what we see in the world today, and for the work of salvation?
4. How does the world react to public wickedness today? How did it react to the same thing 25 years ago? What are some examples? Why the difference?
5. How is the church today called to deal with sin in its own ranks? Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. How is this different than what is commonly practiced today? How is Paul’s comment on judging in verse 12 different from what many believe today. It seems we are called to judge—but to judge righteously. Discuss why it is important to examine the whole counsel of God on such topics, rather than cherry-pick individual verses to support one’s view.

Going deeper:

1. Compare and contrast what happens here in Judges 19 with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Why do you think the Ancient Near East custom of hospitality was so powerful that a man would give up his virgin daughter to protect a guest?
2. This is the third chapter in a row that declares that there was no king in Israel. What is the point being made here? How would a king be an influencer of actions for the nation? How does Israel act later in their history when there is a king?

# Disgraced State

## Judges 20-21

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022

At the end of every series it's important to take time to rest, reflect, and remember all the wonderful things God has done for us and in us throughout this journey. This is a rhythm that God established for His people in setting aside the 7th day for rest, as well as seven times a year for Israel to celebrate and worship Him for His provision in the Levitical Feasts. The reason God did this is that we are leaky vessels. We tend to forget unless conscious effort is put into remembering and celebrating.

This impact of this truth is nowhere more evident than it is in the book of Judges. The great mystery in Judges is how God's people could have so quickly fallen from the mountaintop experience of rescue from Egypt and entering the Promised Land. This is the most magnificent story of deliverance and salvation in history. Yet the people so quickly forgot God that, in just a few generations, they spiraled down into a pattern of sin, rebellion, idolatry, and wickedness that is unparalleled in scripture.

The answer to this mystery is that the people did not take time to remember. They did not honor the command in Deuteronomy 6, which lays out the importance of passing along the word of God to one's children. They did not honor the command of God to remember the 12 stones set up after they crossed the Jordan. This book reveals the tragedy of disregarding our most sacred stewardship—namely, teaching the next generation the things of God. This was not a mere suggestion by God. This is absolutely imperative. Judges vividly describes the consequences of that failure.

The consequences Israel experienced in Judges resulted in a downward spiral, deeper and deeper into sin and idolatry. They fell further and further away from God; until by the end of the book such a sordid account of evil takes place, it is difficult even to read. The decline of Israel in Judges perfectly foreshadows the trajectory and pattern the nation of Israel will take throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. They allow idolatry into the land early on in the period of the kings, and they progressively fall further from God—until judgment finally comes, and they lose their land and are taken captive to Babylon.

The message of Judges comes through loud and clear. We must be people who remember—and we must teach our children to do likewise.

### Discussion questions:

1. In chapters 20 & 21, we see the result of the absence of unity. Describe a time when a group you were a part of was especially unified. What was the result?
2. Other than just overwhelming sadness, what reaction do you have when reading these chapters? What stands out to you?
3. After having journeyed through the book of Judges, what is your impression of the primary message the Holy Spirit is conveying? How has your view of this message (or of the book in general) changed at all? What have you learned about God through this journey?
4. How do people act when they have no accountability? Why do you think this is the case?
5. One of the powerful realities we have seen in our journey through Judges is that it serves as a mirror to reveal to us that we are not all that different from the stubborn, willful, rebellious people we read about in its pages. In what ways do you feel convicted by some of these stories? In what ways do you feel encouraged?

### Going deeper:

1. We read the shocking statement in Judges 20:35 that "...the Lord struck Benjamin before Israel." The God of Israel is striking down one of His own beloved tribes. That is a devastating comment on the reality of what has happened in this book. How has God's role changed as we have gone throughout the book? How does God act in chapters 1-7? How is this different in chapters 8-16? How do you see God as withdrawn in chapters 17-19? Yet how does God return here in the final two chapters?
2. It is easy for us to view God as a God of love and mercy. What does it mean that God is a God of justice? Those who oppose God and who reject His authority are His enemies. Read Psalm 145:20; Hebrews 10:26-31. How is God described here? Why is it difficult for us to view God as a wrathful God coming in fury to destroy the usurpers of His Kingdom? How is it a disservice to God to emphasize one of His attributes over another?

# The Days of Samuel

## 1 Samuel 7:15-8:22

April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

When we read the story in 1 Samuel 8 about the people of Israel demanding a king, we often get the idea that God was opposed to the idea of the people having an earthly king. But when we dig deeper, a different picture comes into focus. What we see in 1 Samuel 8:1-9 is that the people want to be like all the nations around them. They want to be like the world. The same is true all throughout the story of salvation history—the pull or draw to become like the world. Yet, what is the call of God on our lives? It is to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. It is to be different, and to consistently remember that this world is not our home.

So what does Israel do? They reject God and His rule over them and ask Samuel for an earthly king. Samuel then warns them what a king will do to them: he will take their sons and daughters. He will tax them. He will take their lands.

But then, notice what Israel says in response in 1 Sam 8:19-22. The people again declare that they want to be like the world, but they also say that they want someone who will go out and fight their battles for them—namely, the king. We should gasp when we read that. Who has always fought Israel's battles? That has been the role of God Himself—a role He often reminds them of. What happened throughout their history when Israel forgot that promise and tried to fight their battles on their own? They were invariably defeated. Here, in this declaration, we see that Israel is fully rejecting God and revealing that He is of no consequence to them anymore.

But there's something else going on here. Is it true that God did not want them to have an earthly king? Or was it God's plan all along for there to be a king in Israel? Way back in Genesis 49 we learn some important background information. This is where Jacob, on his deathbed, is giving the patriarchal blessing to his children. His blessings are, in essence, prophecies about the future of each of the tribes. So when it comes time for Jacob to bless Judah, what does he say? In Gen 49:8-10 we read, "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes.*" What is a scepter? It is a royal staff. It is the staff and symbol of a king. It is the right to rule and reign over a people.

When Jacob says the scepter shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh (or Messiah) comes, he is saying that Israel is someday going to have a king. And that king will come from the line of Judah. That uninterrupted kingly line will last all the way until the ultimate King Messiah comes. The rabbis all throughout history very clearly explained that this meant that Judah would be the royal line. All the way back in Genesis, while Israel was still in Egypt, we see that it was God's plan for there to someday be a king in Israel. This kingly line would eventually lead to the ultimate king—Messiah!

To be clear, it was not God's desire that the people would reject Him and demand an earthly king. But understanding the hearts of man, God knew this would happen. Just as it

was not God's desire that mankind rebel against Him in the Garden, His plan of salvation all along was based on that foreseen rebellion. Thus God's plan all throughout scripture revolves around Messiah being a king—and that kingly line coming from the tribe of Judah.

Discussion questions:

1. In this story, we see that Israel wanted to be like all the nations around them. What “fad” did you participate in back in your younger days? How did you typically react to “peer pressure”—did you go along with the peer pressure, or rebel against it?
2. What do you notice in 1 Samuel 8:1? Who appointed judges here in this situation? All throughout the book of Judges, whose job was it to appoint judges? What was the result when this procedure was not followed? What then, was one of the primary causes we see for this rebellion against God (1 Samuel 8:5)? Even though we might see Samuel as perhaps a good judge, has anything really changed from what we saw in the book of Judges? Who was displeased by the people’s request (8:6)? Why was he upset (8:7)? What else stands out in this passage?
3. What do we learn about God from this story? How does God answer our prayers? Does God sometimes give us what we want rather than what we need? Does God sometimes give us what we need rather than what we want? Why do you think God does these things?
4. What stories of answered prayer in the Bible are most meaningful to you?
5. What has been your experience with answered prayer? When have you seen God answer “yes,” “no,” or “wait”?

Going deeper:

1. What are some of the ways God provided for the people of Israel—from the time of Moses until Samuel came onto the scene? Try to list out as many as you can. How is it possible that the people of Israel continued to doubt and rebel against God with all this powerful testimony before them? What are some of the ways God has provided for you over the years? How do you do in the area of doubt and worry?
2. Discuss how doubt intersects with prayer (read Mark 9:14-24; James 1:5-8; Genesis 3:1-3; Luke 1:18-20; Psalm 77:1-15). How does God deal with our doubts (John 20:25-28)?

# The Coming of Deliverance

**Luke 19:28-44**

April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

At the end of a study of the book of Judges we can feel exhausted. The never-ending cycle of sin takes a toll on us. It's painful to read and difficult to understand how Israel could have so quickly forgotten the God who delivered them from Egypt, and the God who provided a Promised Land for them. But then, we remember that this is our story as well. We live out that same cycle in our own lives.

However, the story of the Bible is not one of despair. It is one of hope. God does not leave us at the end of Judges. We saw last week that He does provide a king for His people. In fact, He provides a king in David who serves as a preview for the ultimate King that God will provide for His people in Messiah.

We have also seen how the story arc in Judges is a preview for the rest of Israel's history. From the high point of the monarchy under King David, it is a slow descent further and further into sin and idolatry—until eventually the nation is destroyed and taken captive. Following the Babylonian Captivity, after the regathering in the land under Ezra and Nehemiah, the flow of prophecy from God ceases and the people simply wait.

For the Jews at that time who read and understood the prophecy and teachings of Daniel, the timing of Messiah's coming was clear. In Daniel 9:24-27, the angel Gabriel relayed a message to the people of Israel through Daniel that detailed precisely when Messiah would appear.

Gabriel reveals to Daniel that once Israel sees a command go forth to allow them to rebuild their city (Dan 9:25), they will know precisely when Messiah will arrive. So Daniel organizes the Magi to watch and wait and prepare for the coming of Messiah—so that when He does arrive, they can come and present Him with some gifts, anoint Him as King, and welcome Him into the world.

In the passage we are looking at today, we see that very day arrive (Luke 19:28-44). We know this as the "Triumphal Entry." Yet what we see is not so triumphal.

Jesus goes out of His way to set up the circumstances of this event. This makes it clear that this is the appointed time. He pre-arranges for a donkey to be provided so He can enter Jerusalem as prophecy foretold (Zech 9:9). The fact that this is the exact day Gabriel revealed to Daniel is also confirmed by the reaction Jesus has.

When Jesus approaches the city, He weeps over it. He says that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. This happened nearly 40 years later in 70 A.D., when the Roman army under Titus Vespasian laid siege to the city and destroyed it, killing over a million inhabitants.

But why was Jerusalem destroyed? Jesus gives us the answer in Luke 19:44, when He says, "*...because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.*" Jesus held Israel accountable to know this prophecy from Daniel. God not only told them hundreds of years earlier Messiah was coming, He told them the very day—and they still rejected Him.

This remarkable day was the very day all of creation had been waiting for since the beginning. It was the day God had set apart to make all things right again—the day He would send His Son to be King. So the message of Judges doesn't have to end in despair. It can simply be the prologue to the realization and coming of hope.



Discussion questions:

1. What does Palm Sunday mean to you? What are some memories you have of Palm Sunday from Sunday school?
2. Read Luke 19:28-44. What stands out to you about this event? Why do you think the people reacted the way they did? Why did the Pharisees say what they said? What was Jesus' response in 19:40? Why do you think He said what He said?
3. What do we learn about the heart of God in Luke 19:41-44?
4. What kind of reception would Jesus get if He rode into your town today (for His first coming)? What would the press coverage look like?
5. After journeying through the book of Judges, amidst all the despair and hopelessness that living according to our own desires inevitably brings, what does reliving the coming of Messiah in Luke 19 do to your heart? How does it make you feel to know that God kept His promise and finally sent the Messiah? Then, try to put yourself in the place of a God-fearing Jew in that day. How would they have experienced the coming of Messiah? What would be going on in their hearts? Now, relate that to your present state of awaiting the second coming of Messiah. What are your thoughts about the second coming? How do those thoughts make you feel?

Going deeper:

1. In addition to this being the very day that Gabriel told Daniel Messiah would arrive, why was this particular day significant for Jesus to arrive and present Himself as Messiah? Read Exodus 12:3-6. What happens on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of that month (Nisan)? What happens on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of that month? As Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the Triumphal entry, it was the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, otherwise known as lamb selection day—the day on which the entire nation of Israel was selecting their lamb that was to be slaughtered on Passover. Read 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:19; John 1:29; Revelation 5:12. What picture is the Holy Spirit painting for us?
2. Read the verses that immediately follow this story (Luke 19:45-46). What do you think Jesus was feeling as He entered the temple? What is the connection between the events of the triumphal entry and Him driving out the moneychangers?

These resources were very helpful in the creation of this study guide: "Judges and Ruth" by Kenneth Way and "Serendipity Bible for Groups." For helpful answers to many of your Bible questions, the website GotQuestions.org has often proven to be useful.