

June 28, 2009 by Steve Brandon



Twelve Stages in the Bible - Judges

Judges

1. The Cycle of the Judges

2. The Judges

The "dark ages" is a term used to describe the decline of culture in Europe from the collapse of Rome to the days of the Renaissance. For roughly a thousand years, Europe made little progress in developing their culture. Wars were frequent. Literature was scarce. Art was stiff and superstitious. The day of the city was gone in its place was the castle and local king and his peasants.

Today in our study of the Scriptures, we are coming to the dark ages of the Bible. As most all of you know, we are in a series of sermons overviewing the entire Bible. We are surveying the message of the Bible in twelve messages, looking at twelve of the major historical eras of the Bible, which I have identified as "stages." [\[1\]](#) My aim in these messages is to give you a good overview of the Bible, so that when you read it, you might know where the part fits into the overall story.

The twelve stages we have used as a framework are the following: Creation, Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest, Judges, Kingdom, Exile, Return, Silence, Gospel, Church, and Missions. So far, we have already looked at the first four stages: The creation, the patriarchs, the exodus, and the conquest. Today, our attention is turned to the judges.

The story of the Judges is told in the book of Judges, which comes right after Joshua. It extends from the point of Joshua (1380 B.C.) until Samuel (1045 B.C.), a period of approximately 300 years. It forms a bridge from the time of the conquest until the time of the kings.

The book of Judges is, perhaps, the strangest book in the Bible. Joshua dies twice in the book (1:1; 2:8). The heroes of this book are often weak men. Samson had a weakness for women. Gideon had a weakness in courage. In one case, the hero is a woman (Deborah), who led Israel in battle.

Events that took place in the book are just plain bizarre. When Adonibezek, the king, was captured, they cut off his thumbs and big toes, because he had done this to 70 other kings in his day (1:6-7). On two occasions, this book mentions left-handed people (3:15; 20:16). Nowhere else in the Bible are left-handed people mentioned or singled out. Gideon tested the Lord by asking him to direct the dew in the morning (6:36-40). Shamgar struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad, a stick with a bronze end that's usually used to prod the animals along (3:31). Samson killed a lion barehanded (14:6) and killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:16). Samson tied two foxes together by their tail and put a torch in the middle of their tails to burn the crops of the Philistines (15:4). Micah placed a shrine in his house and hired a Levite to be his own personal priest (17:5, 10). Later, this priest was captured by the tribe of Dan to be a priest for them (18:27-31). One of the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, was almost eliminated in a civil war. They were down to 600 men. The men of Benjamin hid in the vineyards until the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance, at which point, those hidden each of them took for themselves a wife and carried them away (21:19-23). Their actions were reminiscent of the caricature we see of cave men, dragging away their conquered women.

God seemingly acted in a very strange way as well. God kept saving the people from their sin, time and time and time again. On one occasion, God reduced the size of Gideon's army from 30,000 to 300 to fight a war, based upon the manner in which they drank water from the stream (7:4-6). When they went out to make war, they won the battle by blowing trumpets and breaking pitchers and causing confusion in the camp (7:19). The secret of Samson's strength was in the length of his hair. When his hair was long, he was strong, because God was with him. When his hair was short, he was weak, because God was not with him. The mere fact that God continued for so many years rescuing Israel out of their troubles is simply amazing! At some point, you would think that God would give up, but he doesn't.

A common fairy tale that's told in our day is "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." The little boy was on the outskirts of town and cried "wolf" and the entire town came out to his rescue, but there was no wolf. The boy thought that it was pretty neat. So, he did it again. "Wolf," he cried. And the entire town came running to see him. Once again, the boy was entertained by the sight. But, there came a day when the boy was in desperate need as he really encountered a wolf. He cried, "wolf!" but no one came, because they figured that the boy was teasing them again. And so, the wolf had a lunch of the little boy that day. The town had given up on the little boy after two false alarms.

As you read the book of Judges, you are surprised that God doesn't give up on Israel after rescuing them time after time after time. The two themes that run through the book of Judges is this: Israel sins and God saves. Israel sins and God saves. Israel sins and God saves.

The sins of Israel at this time are many. The sins of Israel at this time are strange. Strange crimes happen in the world today. It seems as if a week doesn't pass away, but that some strange crime is committed in our country, whose news is syndicated across all of our news wires. But, the crimes committed in Israel during this time rival any of the strange things that we hear of happening today. Eglon was so fat, that when Ehud stabbed him with the knife, the knife disappeared into the folds of his belly (3:22). Jael took a hammer and a tent peg and drove it through Sisera's head into the ground to kill him (4:21). Abimelech murdered seventy of his brothers (9:5). Jephthah sacrificed his daughter because of an oath that he made (11:29-40). A man's concubine was cut up into twelve pieces "limb by limb, and sent ... throughout the

territory of Israel" (Judges 19:29). Can you imagine Fed Ex coming to the door with a package, and it's a woman's bloody leg?

All in all, Judges is a very strange book. In reality, the last verse of the book of Judges says it very well, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). And so, they murdered. They deceived. They married multiple wives and were adulterous. They betrayed their family. They were seduced. I'm talking about the leaders. So go the leaders, so go the people.

With all of this, I hope that you realize that we ought not to look at the book of Judges for examples to imitate. For instance, don't say, "Hey, Deborah, a woman, was leading the people of God, surely it's OK for women to lead the church today." Now, I have no fault of Deborah and the way she acted. In fact, I believe that she was a godly woman who God raised up because there were no other men taking the lead. But, in light of the bizarre nature of the book of Judges, her example shouldn't be used as normative today (as some do).

Another example often used as a model of behavior is the behavior of Gideon. They say, "Gideon put out a fleece, so might we to discern the Lord's will with some other sort of test." But, the Scripture also says, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," which is exactly what Gideon was doing (Deut. 6:16).

See, you don't look to the book of Judges for models of how to live. Instead, you look at Judges and say, "Wow, there are some really screwed up people, but God was gracious to them!" Israel sins, and God saves.

The book of Judges comes from a dark period in the history of the people of Israel. You might even say that it was a low point in Israel's history. Whereas Joshua is a book filled with conquest and progress and success, the book of Judges is a book filled with defeat and decline and failure. In fact, this is what the entire first chapter is about. It's about all of the land that Israel failed to conquer. Consider the following verses, ...

Judges 1:19-21, 28-33

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. Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. But the sons of Benjamin **did not drive out** the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

It came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they **did not drive them out** completely. Ephraim **did not drive out** the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. Zebulun **did not drive out** the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor. Asher **did not drive out** the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they **did not drive them out**. Naphtali **did not drive out** the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them.

Joshua had instructed the people of Israel to take the land and conquer it--All of it! But, as we see here in the beginning of the book of Judges, this simply didn't happen. In fact, this is the point. Israel failed in taking all of the land. Beginning in chapter 2, we read of the LORD addressing this situation.

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, 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? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'" When the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD.

The people wept when they understood their failures. Indeed, Judges is a very sad book. It's a book of sin. It's a book of defeat. It's a book of failure. See, the history of Israel isn't one of great smashing success. Rather, it's a story of a sinful and disobedient nation. It's a story of a nation toward whom God is faithful to preserve, even in the middle of their sin. And it all goes back to a promise that God had made to Abraham to be faithful to him and his descendents. God will never break His covenant. As Israel sins, God saves.

What a great picture this is of the gospel of Christ. Just as Israel was never able to obtain victory on their own, so also do we not gain a victory on our own. We need the Lord! Israel sinned, but God saved them. We, as sinners, need a savior, and Jesus Christ is that savior. Throughout the book of Judges, we will see Israel crying out and God being willing and ready to save. Jesus Christ is ready to save you. You merely need to cry out to Him.

My message this morning has two points. The first is this, ...

1. The Cycle of the Judges

This is how the book is structured. When Israel was distressed, they cried out to the LORD, and he sent a judge to deliver the people. And they were delivered and began to reform their ways. But, when the judge died, Israel acted sinfully once again. Eventually, they reached a point where things were so desperate that they cried out to the LORD. And again, the LORD would send a judge to deliver Israel out of their distress. The people of Israel would be delivered and reform their ways for a bit. But, when the judge died, they would again plunge into sin.

One commentator gave five words to this cycle, "sin, slavery, supplication, salvation, and silence." [\[2\]](#) This cycle, when once completed, would start all over again. The people would **sin**. This would lead them to **slavery**. In their difficulty, they would make **supplication** to the LORD. The Lord would bring a judge and **salvation** to them. Then, there would be a period of **silence** to test the people.

These cycles aren't perfect cycles. By this, I mean, after a cycle is completed, Israel isn't quite where it was before. Instead, each time Israel cycled through these phases, things were worse than they were before. So, you might call the book of Judges a "downward cycle."

The cycles are explained for us in the second half of chapter 2. (For my first point, I want to work through these verses, as they give us a good grid through which to filter the book.). Beginning in verse 11, we read, "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals." This phrase, "the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD" appears six times throughout the book of the Judges (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). The repetition of this phrase shows how deeply the book of Judges is a book of sin. Every time this phrase appears, it is soon afterwards followed by their crying out to the LORD for deliverance, and God's provision of a judge to save them from their affliction.

In verses 12 and 13, we see an elaboration of the various sorts of sins in which the people were engaged.

Judges 2:12-13

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. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

Twice in these verses, we see the author saying how they "forsook the LORD." That is, they turned away from Him. They abandoned Him. They left Him. And they didn't leave him to nothing. No, they left Him to serve other gods. In other words, they replaced the LORD with other gods. Such things stir deep into the heart of God, who is a jealous God. As far back as the Ten Commandments, the LORD had identified Himself as a "jealous" God (Ex. 20:5), who will be enraged should you be unfaithful. Just as a man is stirred to anger when his wife is unfaithful to him, so also is God stirred to anger when His people forsake Him for other gods. Israel knew this, but it didn't prevent their spiritual adultery.

Two such gods are mentioned in verse 13, Baal and Ashtaroth. Baal was the name of a common Canaanite god. As the Canaanites had a pantheon of gods, it's not like they had formed an articulate, coherent theology of Baal. But, in general, "Baal" was the god of the weather. He controlled the rain, and thus, the agriculture. And so, for the people of day, Baal was important. It was important to pacify him, that you might receive the crops.

Ashtaroth was the name of a female deity in Canaan. She was most certainly the goddess of fertility. The statues of this goddess are very explicit, highlighting the female sex organs. The worship of Ashtaroth was sinful and immoral. And yet, Israel followed after these gods, provoking the jealousy of the LORD (v. 14).

The result is found in verses 14 and 15, ...

Judges 2:14-15

The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

Here we see the chastening hand of the LORD upon those who followed ever the other gods. Not only was God angry with them. Not only did God give them to be plundered. Not only did God give them into slavery. But, "the hand of the LORD was against them for evil" (verse 15). See, it's one thing to be left alone in your sin to go your wayward ways and face the trials that come with that. You might be able to dodge the bullets that come. But, it's another thing to have God's hand actively upon your life for evil! It's like being honed down by a guided missal. You aren't going to escape!

But, God didn't leave these people who had forsaken him. Instead, almost incredibly, he delivered them. "Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them" (2:16).

At this point, it would be good to point out that exactly what these judges were. When we think of the word, "Judge," we think of a man with a gown, who sits behind a bench and makes decisions between two warring parties, striking his gavel upon the bench. But, this isn't the case of the judges in this book. Rather, the judges here in this book are saviors, who come to help. They are military leaders who strike down the enemy. They are rulers, who come and guide the people. They are spiritual deliverers, who lead people back to the LORD to serve Him.

In many ways, this book prepares us for the true Savior, Jesus Christ. If anything the book of Judges teaches us, it teaches us of our sin. In our sin, we need saving. And Jesus Christ has come into the world to save us from our sin. "[Jesus Christ] gave Himself for our sins so that He might deliver us from the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). In Christ Jesus, God has "delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13).

When we do what is right in our own eyes, we will get into trouble. We need the Lord's guidance. We need the LORD's help. We need the LORD's saving. So, come to Him! "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). You can't save yourself. So, call upon Him. He is your true Savior. He is your true judge. If you are an unbeliever, you must call on Him to save you. If you are a believer in Christ, you still need to call upon Him for help in every area of

your life.

Getting back to Judges, we see the cycle continue with the judges. After being delivered by the judge, things would eventually turn worse, "Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers" (Judges 2:17).

Such is the pattern in the book of Judges. After their deliverance, they may have followed the LORD for a little bit. But soon, they turned back again to their old ways. Any reform in their lives was always short lived. The same story continues in verse 18, ...

Judges 2:18-19

When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

Here (in verse 19) we see the downward spiral that I was talking about earlier. The people "would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers" (verse 19). The people of Israel were not getting better, they were getting worse. You could easily argue that the sinful behavior in the book of Judges gets worse and worse and worse. The result for Israel was tragic.

Judges 2:20-23

So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

The very thing that God had commanded the people, to wipe out the people in the land, was the very thing that God was going to prohibit the people from fulfilling. Their sin was so bad, that God didn't even permit their obedience any longer. Their time had run out. Rather than victory, God gave them testing. He gave them testing in the form of pagan nations who would dwell in the land with them.

Chapter 3 begins with a list of those nations that the LORD left in Israel to test them (see 3:4). Such is the tragedy of the sin of Israel. But, it didn't come overnight. The length of time that it took to reach this point ought to be encouraging to you. It took God hundreds of years. Hundreds of years of His people acting unfaithfully. Hundreds of years of His people pursuing sin and idolatry and immorality. Such is a picture of the patience of God.

Aren't you thankful that the Lord is patient with you? He gives you opportunity after opportunity. He gives you time to repent. He is patient with us when we sin. But, you ought not to presume upon his patience, because His patience may run out. Such is the message of the book of Judges.

We have looked at (1) The Cycle of the Judges. Let's turn now to our second point, ...

2. The Judges

There are twelve Judges identified in the book: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson.

Concerning four of these judges, we know quite a bit. Their story encompasses a chapter (or more). But, concerning the other eight of the judges, we know very little. There are times in which their story is told in a verse or two. You might call them major judges and minor judges. This morning, I want to zip through these judges to see what it is that they might teach us. The first judge is ...

1. Othniel

His story is told in the following verses, ...

Judges 3:9-11

When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 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. Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

This is all that we know about this man. We might well call him a minor judge. Israel was in trouble and God raised up Othniel to deliver them. He was filled with the Spirit of the LORD, empowered by God to accomplish His will.

2. Ehud

His story begins with these words, "But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab."

To make a long story short, this man killed Eglon, the king of Moab, who was oppressing them. His story is weird. In verse 17, we find him coming to Eglon, who is described here as "a very fat man." Today, jokes would be made about this man. "Eglon is so fat, he shows up on radar. Eglon is so fat, he has his own area code. Eglon is so fat, they used his belt to measure the earth's equator. Eglon is so fat, if he wore a GoodYear hat, he'd look like a blimp."

Anyway, Ehud told him that he had a "secret message" (verse 19), just for the king. So, when everyone left, he came close to tell the king his "secret message" and he pulled out a concealed sword and stabbed him in his fat belly. The king was so fat that, according to verse 22, "the handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out." He then escaped through the roof chamber (verse 23). "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years" (verse 30).

This is a typical judge. He comes and delivers Israel out of their oppression. But, know that Ehud didn't merely act upon his own strength. It was the LORD who raised up this man. Verse 15 says, "the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite."

Yes, Ehud delivered Israel. But, in fact, it was the LORD who raised him up. Ultimately, it was the LORD who delivered Israel from their bondage.

3. Shamgar

His story is told in verse 31, "After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel." That's all we know about the guy. He killed a bunch of Philistines with an oxgoad, and he saved Israel.

4. Deborah

Her story is told in chapters 4 and 5. Now, we don't have time to read the whole account. But, again, we see the sin of Israel in verse 1, "the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD." Again, we see Israel crying to the Lord (in verse 3), "The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for [Sisera] had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years." God spoke through Deborah, the prophetess, who gave them military orders to go up and defeat Sisera.

Judges 4:14-15

Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you." ... The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.

Eventually Sisera came to the tent of Jael and hid under a rug. But, he met his end in verse 21, "But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died."

Chapter 5 contains a song of victory, written by Debora and Barak. After the song, we see the little phrase, "and the land was undisturbed for forty years."

The story of Deborah is the story of all of the judges. Israel was sinning, but God was saving. This is the message of the Judges. Israel was sinning, but God was saving. In 4:14, it was the LORD who went out before them. In 4:15, it was the LORD who routed Sisera.

5. Gideon

Gideon's story is told in chapter 6, 7, and 8. Again, the story starts like all others, "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years" (6:1). It's the same story. Israel sins and so, God gives them into the hands of others. They need saving, which is precisely what God does.

Judges 6:7-8

Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel.

This prophet delivers a message to Israel that they have been unfaithful to Him (verses 8-10). But, in His grace, God still saves the people.

Judges 6:12-16

The angel of the LORD appeared to [Gideon] and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." 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."

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?"

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."

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

Yes, Gideon would be the judge to deliver the Israelites from the hands of Midian, but God is the strength behind the man. The secret to Gideon's success (as is the secret of the success of all judges) is that his strength was from the LORD. You can see it there in verse 34, "So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon" (Judges 6:34).

Gideon's story is encouraging and inspiring. It's especially encouraging, because Gideon was a weak man, who lacked courage, and yet, God still used him. When God originally called Gideon for this task, Gideon was doubtful, He said to the LORD, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me" (Judges 6:17).

God showed him a sign of spontaneous combustion. When he poured out the meat and the bread upon the rock, then the angel of the LORD burned it up in his sight (6:21). With such assurance, God told him, ...

Judges 6:25-26

Now on the same night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down."

You would think that Gideon might be emboldened to follow the LORD without fear. But, such was not the case.

Judges 6:27

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, he did it by night.

You can see Gideon's lack of courage. Rather than going alone to tear down the altar, he took ten men with him. Additionally, he went under the cover of night.

Before he went to fight against Midian, again, he demanded another sign from the Lord. He put a fleece out and said, "If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken ... [then make the fleece wet in the morning]" (6:36-37). When it was wet, Gideon asked for another test, "Let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on the ground" (6:39). When it was so, Gideon was encouraged, at least a little bit.

In chapter 7, we read of how God decreased his army from 30,000 down to 300 because, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me'" (7:3). And then, I love verses 9-11, ...

Judges 7:9-11

Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.

Did you catch it? God told Gideon to continue to the camp, because He had delivered them into his hands. However, God gave him an out if he was too fearful. He could bring Purah with him (perhaps as moral support). As the story goes on, Gideon brought Purah, which was a sign of his timidity. Gideon was a fearful man. But, God used him to defeat the Midianites with 300 men.

The conclusion of the story comes with these words, "So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon" (Judges 8:28). God saved Israel through Gideon. The next judge comes in chapter 10. [3](#) His name is ...

6. Tola

Here's Tola's story, ...

Judges 10:1-2

Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

That's all we know of Tola. He saved Israel in his role as a judge. The next judge is ...

7. Jair

Again, Jair's story is short.

Judges 10:3-5

After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

That's all we know of Jair. After these men, the cycle continues, ...

Judges 10:6-7

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.

It's the same old, same old. Israel sins and God saves.

Judges 10:10-16

Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals."

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 no longer deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress."

The sons of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day."

So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.

And so, God raised up another judge, ...

8. Jephthah

According to chapter 11, verse 1, Jephthah was "a valiant warrior." He fought against Ammon, who was oppressing Israel at the time. Again, the source of his strength wasn't himself. It was the LORD. "Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah" (Judges 11:29). Jephthah's strength wasn't in himself. It was in the LORD. But, Jephthah made a tragic mistake.

Judges 11:30-31

Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 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."

Such a vow seems fine, until the first one out of his house was his daughter.

Judges 11:34-35

When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very

low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back."

There is much discussion as to whether or not Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering. I believe that he did. His tragic mistake was that he kept his vow that he never should have made. Better to break your vow than to do a wrong thing. But this is the book of Judges. It's filled with strange events.

At the end of chapter 12 we meet three more judges.

9. Ibzan

Judges 12:8-10

Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage outside the family, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

That's all we know about Ibzan. Thus, there is little to comment on these verses.

10. Elon

Judges 12:11-12

Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years. Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

That's all we know about Ibzan. Again, I pass on without comment.

11. Abdon

Judges 12:13-15

Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

Again, that's all we know about Ibzan. Though we do know that he was certainly polygamous (having so many children). Though we know so little about each of these last three judges, I'm sure that each of them had a unique story (should it be told). But, God has chosen not to reveal their story to us.

So, now, we come to the last and most famous of all judges, ...

12. Samson

His story is told in four chapters (chapters 13-16).

His story starts off like everyone else's. "Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years" (13:1). The story continues of how the LORD appeared to Manoah and his wife, telling them that they would have a son. "Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death" (13:7).

According to Numbers 6, a Nazarite was to abstain from any drink from the vine (i.e. wine). He was also to abstain from any razor cutting his hair. And, a Nazarite was to keep his distance and not touch any corpse. This is why Samson's hair was so long. He was a Nazarite. Anyway, verse 24 tells of the fact of his birth and continues with these words, "The child grew up and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him" (13:24-25).

Soon after these things, we see Samson being driven by his lust, demanding that he obtain a certain woman as his wife. He said, "I want what I want and I want it now!" (just like Veruca Salt).

Judges 14:1-2

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

Indeed, he obtained a wife, but she wasn't a very good one. She turned on her husband, manipulating her husband and then revealing his secrets (14:16-17). Then, in a bizarre rage, Samson kills thirty men from Ashkelon (14:19). While away,

Samson's wife was given away to his companion (14:20). And so, Samson took vengeance on the Philistines by setting hundreds of foxes loose with their tails tied together and torches attached to their tails. Thus, the burning of the fields brought vengeance upon the Philistines (15:1-5).

But, through all of this, the Spirit of the LORD was upon him. It shows that God uses unrighteous people to accomplish His purposes. Obviously, Samson isn't the most righteous person to walk the planet. If God can use Samson, then certainly, God can use us. Sure, Samson was a beast of a man, but he was also a sinful beast.

Samson's sin become evident for all of us to see. He killed a thousand men with a donkey's jawbone (15:15). He was also womanizing (16:1-3). He went to Gaza, found a woman he desired and went into her (16:1). He was carousing with the harlots of Gaza.

Eventually, he came to love Delilah, yet another woman (16:4). Perhaps you know the story of how she also deceived him and betrayed Samson by telling the Philistines the secret of his strength (i.e. in his hair). The great manipulation comes.

Judges 16:15-16

She said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is." It came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.

Here was a deceiver working on Samson's heart, claiming that he was the true deceiver. Anyway, this information was crucial to Philistines were able to capture Samson. Once his hair was cut off (16:19) and the Philistines came, he was no match for them, because "the LORD had departed from him" (16:20). So, the Philistines were able to seize him. Then they gouged out his eyes and brought him to Gaza and bound him with chains (16:21).

As the story continued on, he regained his hair grew back and thus, restored his strength (16:22). With his renewed strength, Samson was able to fell the pillars in the hall that held 3,000 Philistines, thereby killing more in his death than he did in his life (16:30).

The life of Samson was certainly not a great life, but it was a life that God used to deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Philistines.

At this point we will stop our study of the book of Judges. We could continue on with chapter 17-21 looking at the strange escapades of a personal priest.

However, we will focus our attention on one last verse that will help to put the book of Judges in perspective. It's found in Hebrews 11, where many, many of God's saints are listed and their faith described. It starts with Able and continues to Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. Then, the writer says, "And what more shall I say? for time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah." Who are these men? They are judges! I wish the preacher of the Hebrews would have spent 10 more minutes telling us about these men! We would have been able to hear more of what he thought about these judges.

It is amazing that the book of Judges is filled with men who are weak in their faith. They are timid like Gideon. They are wimps like Barak. They are womanizers like Samson and they are foolish like Jephthah. And yet, they had faith. Somehow, in some way God sees their small, little faith and uses these people to deliver His people. And I trust that their example this morning comes as a great encouragement to you. Yes, Israel sins and God saves. But God uses people of little faith to accomplish His purposes. This ought to comfort all of our hearts this morning.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 28, 2009 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] These stages are from the book, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, by Max Anders. It's an excellent book to help you grasp the main storyline of the Bible.

[2] Herbert Wolf, *Expositors Bible Commentary*, volume 3, p. 394.

[3] There are those who would maintain that Abimelech (whose story is told in chapter 9) is one of the judges. However, there is no explicit mention of him being a judge in the text. So, we will pass over him.