

## Toward Understanding Judges

### Introduction:

- This book is part of the historical books within the Former Prophets.
- It is a sort of sequel to the book of Joshua.

### Title:

- Hebrew—*Shophetim*
  - Verb (substantive participle) *shaphat* is used 19x—2:16-19; 3:10; 4:4; 10:2-3; 12:7-9, 11, 13-14; 15:20; 16:31
  - Yahweh is the Judge—11:27
  - These people are elsewhere referred to as judges: Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam. 7:11
- Greek—*Kritai*
- Latin—*Liber Judicum*

### Background:

- The author is unknown, but some claim Samuel the prophet.
- Judges were a blend of civil and military duties, with occasional legal duties.

### Timeframe:

- The book takes place over 300-350 years (Judg. 11:26), roughly 1400-1050 BC, from the death of Joshua up to the time of King Saul. Apparently, some of the judgeships overlap.
- While the original writing was early in David's era (cf. 1:21), the final editing seems to have occurred after the Exile of the northern tribes. (cf. 18:30)

### Characteristics: (illustrating Deut. 28:15-68)

- Progresses from Israel as a fragile unity to increasing disintegration.
- Increasing violent cruelty
- Discouraging (disobedience) and encouraging (obedience)
- Few books portray so complete a picture of human depravity as does Judges. (Herbert Wolf, EBC)
- Demonstrates the need for competent, godly leadership, while paving the way for the next part of the story in Samuel-Kings. (Robert Chisolm)

### Overall outline: [Dale R. Davis]

- Prologue: describes and evaluates [the failure of the second generation]—1:1-3:6
- Main body: the twelve judges [the salvation of a long-suffering God]—3:7-16:31
- Epilogue: Israel's depravity [the confusion of a depraved people]—17:1-21:25



(Adapted from the *New Moody Atlas of the Bible*)

Possible Timeline of the Judges (based on Robert Chisolm)  
 (other conservative timelines differ slightly)

<b>Cycle #</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Years BC</b>
1	3:8	<i>Cushan-Rishathaim</i> oppresses Israel	1336-1328
	3:11	Land rests after deliverance through <b>Othniel</b>	1328-1288
2	3:14	<i>Moab</i> oppresses Israel	1288-1270
	3:30	Land rests after deliverance through <b>Ehud &amp; Shamgar</b>	1270-1190
3	4:3	<i>Sisera</i> oppresses Israel	1190-1170
	5:31	Land rests after deliverance through <b>Deborah the prophetess &amp; Jael</b>	1170-1130
4	6:1	<i>Midian</i> oppresses Israel	1334-1327
	8:28	Land rests after deliverance through <b>Gideon</b>	1327-1287
	9:22	<b>Abimelech</b> rules after Jotham's curse	1287-1284
	10:2	<b>Tola</b> leads Israel	1284-1261
	10:3	<b>Jair</b> leads Israel	1261-1239
5	10:7-8	<i>Philistines and Ammon</i> oppress Israel	1239-1221
	12:7	<b>Jephthah</b> leads Israel	1221-1215
	12:9	<b>Ibzan</b> leads Israel	1215-1208
	12:11	<b>Elon</b> leads Israel	1208-1198
	12:14	<b>Abdon</b> leads Israel	1198-1190
6	13:1	<i>Philistines</i> oppress Israel	1190-1150
	15:20	<b>Samson</b> leads Israel	1150-1130
	1 Sam. 4:18	<b>Eli's</b> 40 years of leadership	1130-1090
	1 Sam. 4:11	<i>Philistines</i> capture ark	1090
	1 Sam. 7:2	Ark at Kiriath-Jearim	1090-1070
	1 Sam. 7:3-12	Samuel's victory over <i>Philistines</i>	1070
	1 Sam. 7:13-14	<i>Philistines</i> oppress Israel	1070-1050
	1 Sam. 10	Samuel anoints Saul	1050

**Three-fold purpose of the book (Robert Chisolm)**

- 1) Defend Yahweh's reputation.
  - a) Yahweh (LORD) occurs 178x; Elohim (God) occurs 62x.
- 2) Warn Israel of the dangers of assimilation to their environment.
- 3) Demonstrate Israel's need for competent, godly leadership.

## Prologue: incomplete obedience—1:1-3:6

- 1) Israel's **MILITARY** failures—1:1-2:5
  - a) Setting—1:1
    - i) The miracles are done, and the strong leadership is gone.  
(1) Joshua's death is noted 3x: Josh. 24:29-31; Judg. 1:1; 2:8
  - b) Faithful Judah and Simeon (southern tribes)—1:2-20
    - They had a common *inheritance* (Josh. 19:1-9), a common *ancestor* (Leah; Gen. 29:33-35), and a common *enemy* (the Canaanites).
    - By this time Simeon was the smallest tribe. (cf. Num. 2:23; 26:14)
  - i) Incomplete obedience [generally in the hill country] (1:2-7) (cf. Deut. 7:24)
    - (1) The time has come to punish the Canaanites. (cf. Gen. 15:16)
    - (2) Note how they interpret Judah as "Judah and Simeon." (1:3)
    - (3) How quickly they adopt Canaanite moral principles (ethics).
  - ii) More success against the Canaanites [generally in the lowlands] (1:8-18)
    - (1) Capture of three important cities, from north to south (1:8-15)
    - (2) Capture of lesser cities and territories (1:16-18)
      - (a) The Kenites were distant relatives to Moses. (cf. 4:11)
  - iii) Summary (1:19-20)
  - c) Failure of seven northern tribes, especially Benjamin—1:21-36
    - This hints toward King Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin.
    - This hints toward the Exile of the northern tribes in 722 BC.
  - i) Moves progressively from positive to negative, and from south to north: Benjamin (1:21), Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim (1:22-29), Zebulun (1:30), Asher (1:31-32), Naphtali (1:33), and Dan (1:34-36).
  - ii) "Forced labor" (1:28, 30, 33, 35) was disobedience. (Cf. Exod. 23:33)
    - (1) How easy it is to tolerate evil, only to pay for it later.
    - (2) How dangerous it is to edit God's commands to make it easier for us.
  - d) Israel mourns their difficult circumstances—2:1-5
    - The superior military technology (iron chariots) of the Canaanites was not the biggest problem Israel faced.
  - i) God the Son (cf. Exod. 14:19; 23:20; Judg. 6:22; 13:21-22) takes the initiative to communicate with Israel (2:1), reports His past work (2:1-2a), condemns Israel (2:2b), and warns them (2:3).
  - ii) The people respond with remorse (not repentance) and sacrifice. (2:4-5)

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It is to be noted that ancient Israel failed to settle three important areas. Curiously, modern Israel now occupies all three areas.

- The northern and southern coastal plains and the Jezreel Valley.
- Part of Golan (east of the Sea of Galilee) and the Huleh Valley (north of the Sea of Galilee).
- The main corridor from the Coastal Plain to Jerusalem.

- 2) Israel's **SPIRITUAL AND THEOLOGICAL** failures—2:6-3:6 (based on Dorsey's outline) [illustrated as spiritual adultery]
- a) **A positive beginning:** during lifetime of Joshua and elders, Israelites set out to take their inheritances and they *serve* Yahweh. (2:6–9)
    - i) Cf. Josh. 24:28-31, thus linking the two books.
    - ii) Joshua died without naming a successor.
    - iii) Joshua is honored with the title “the servant of Yahweh” reserved for devoted men of God such as Moses (18x), and David (2x).
  - b) **The sin of next generation.** (2:10–13)
    - i) Contrasted with their *fathers*
    - ii) Did “the evil” (namely, serve the Baals); *worshipped* other gods  
(1) Cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)
    - iii) *Forsook Yahweh, went after other gods*
    - iv) Occurred once; and they had an excuse (“they did not know”)
  - c) **Judgment:** military defeat from surrounding nations (2:14–15)
    - i) Begins: *Yahweh was angry with Israel*
  - d) **CENTER: Yahweh's gracious intervention.** (2:16)
    - i) Yahweh's gracious help has little moral effect on Israel. (Dorsey)
  - e) **Even worse sins of each successive generation.** (2:17–19)
    - i) Contrasted with their *fathers*
    - ii) *Served* the Baals; *worshipped* other gods
    - iii) *Went after other gods*
    - iv) Not just once, but repeatedly; and no excuse given
  - f) **Even worse judgment:** Yahweh will no longer enable Israel to take their own land. (2:20–3:4)
    - i) Begins: *Yahweh was angry with Israel*
    - ii) The purpose of learning holy war (3:2) walks with the purpose of testing (2:22; 3:4).
  - g) **A disheartening conclusion:** Israelites, having failed to take their land, settle among the Canaanites, intermarry, and *serve* their gods. (3:5–6)

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- This section helps the reader to interpret the remainder of the book correctly.
  - This section seems to be summarized in Ps. 106:34-40.
  - God may be the Father, but He is no one's Grandfather.

## The main body of the book—Judges 3:7-16:31

(Dorsey's basic outline)

- 1) **Othniel** of Judah (3:7–11; 1:11–15) [against Cushan-Rishathaim (“doubly evil” or “of double wickedness”)]
  - **evaluation:** positive
  - procures a *good Israelite wife* by obeying Yahweh
  - drives Canaanites from the land and settles there
  - *wife presses him* for a good thing: to extend their territory
  - *good judge*, leading a *united* Israel
  - blessed by his brave *Israelite father-in-law*
  - Israel's “crying out to Yahweh” (3:9) is not a cry of repentance, but a cry of pain. (cf. 3:15; 4:3; 6:6-7)
  - “The Spirit of Yahweh came upon him” (3:10) is not salvation but God's enablement for a specific task at a specific time (cf. 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)
  
- 2) **Ehud** (the left-handed, or ambidextrous; cf. 20:16; 1 Chron. 12:2) of Benjamin (“son of the right hand”) (3:12–30) [against Eglon (the fattened calf) of Moab, Ammon, and Amalek]
  - **evaluation:** positive
  - *Transjordanian king* oppresses Israel *eighteen years*; occurs in *Benjamin*
  - Ehud has a secret *message* and *message* from God for enemy king
  - *captures fords of Jordan* and with help of *Ephraimites* kills thousands of enemies attempting to cross
  - Israelites united
  - This is a story that makes many people uncomfortable.
  - The “city of palm trees” (3:13) was destroyed and cursed @ 100 years ago by God through Joshua (cf. Josh. 6).
  - His unique sword/dagger was made for this situation. (3:16)
  - A “message from God” (generic use of Elohim, not Israel-specific Yahweh) (3:20)
  - Note “behold” used 3x (3:24-25)
  - The “fords (shallow crossing) of the Jordan” (3:28). Remember the Narnian *Fords of Beruna*.

- 3) **Deborah** of Ephraim and **Barak** of Naphtali (4:1–5:31) [against General Sisera of Hazor, Canaan]
- **evaluation:** positive
  - *woman crushes Sisera's skull* in a careless moment
  - Israelites united
  - Prose (4:1-24) and poetry (5:1-31)
- a) The beginning of oppression (4:1-3)
- i) Israel sins and is *oppressed by King Jabin* (a title?) of Canaan
    - (1) Did “the evil” (namely, serve the Baals)
      - (a) Cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1
    - (2) Hazor is the most important northern Canaanite fortress. It is @ 9 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.
  - ii) **Negative chronological note:** oppression lasts 20 years.
  - iii) Israel has been out of Egypt for a little more than 200 years by this time.
- b) Deborah's prediction about a woman killing Sisera (4:4-9a)
- i) Interaction between a brave woman (Deborah) and a weak military man (Barak)
  - ii) Other prophetesses: Miriam (Ex. 15:20); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Anna (Luke 2:36)
  - iii) Qualified male leadership is lacking in Israel at this time.
- c) Troops gather (4:9b-13)
- i) Barak *goes up*, with his troops *at his feet*
  - ii) Sisera gathers his troops for battle
  - iii) Note how Heber's tent is introduced. (4:11, 17; cf. 5:24-26)
  - iv) The land near the river Kishon is swampy, unsuited for chariots. (4:13)
- d) **TURNING POINT:** Yahweh gives victory (4:14-15a)
- e) Troops disperse (4:15b-16)
- i) The word “routed/threw into confusion” is also used of Yahweh's work against Egypt in Ex. 14:24.
    - (1) Perhaps an unseasonal storm is involved. (cf. 5:20-21)
  - ii) Sisera *goes down* from his chariot and flees *on foot*
  - iii) Barak pursues fleeing enemy troops
- f) Deborah's predication comes true: Jael kills Sisera (4:17-22)
- i) Interaction between a brave woman (Jael) and a weak military man (Sisera)
  - ii) This fulfills 4:9.
  - iii) Being a woman, Jael was well-experienced in driving tent pegs.
  - iv) Jael violates several social customs: she invited a man into her tent, she used hospitality as a cloak for murder, she violated a peace agreement.

- v) But remember Sisera's own mother's assumption of her son's immoral activity with women in war. (cf. 5:30)
  - (1) Jael stops a murdering rapist from repeating his violent sin.
  
- g) End of the oppression (4:23-24)
  - i) God ends the oppression of *King Jabin of Canaan*, and Israel *oppresses* and finally destroys Jabin
  - ii) ***Positive chronological note***: land rests 40 years
  
- h) The song of Deborah (5:1-31)
  - i) One of the earlier Hebrew songs. Similar in purpose to Exod. 15.



- 4) **TURNING POINT: Gideon** of West Manasseh (6:1–8:32) [against Midian]
- **evaluation:** positive/negative
  - Gideon’s account covers 100 verses in three chapters. Samson’s account will cover 96 verses in four chapters.
  - Gideon will fight three battles: Baal (6), Midian (7), and Israel (8)
  - Gideon’s stand *against idolatry* at Ophrah (6:1–32)
    - Gideon’s battle against Midianites (6:33–7:25)
    - Gideon’s battle against Israelites (8:1–21)
  - Gideon’s lapse *into idolatry* at Ophrah (8:22–32)
- a) The **beginning** of the seasonal oppression by Midianites (6:1–10)
- A **negative** chronological note
  - A partial fulfillment of Deut. 28:29, 31
- i) The seemingly hopeless situation. (6:1-6)
- (1) Did “the evil” (namely, serve the Baals) (6:1)
    - (a) Cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1
    - (2) The Midianites were descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:2) who dwelt in the northern Sinai Peninsula and western Arabia.
      - (a) Tied in with the account of Joseph. (Gen. 37)
      - (b) Tied in with the account of Moses. (Ex. 2:15-25)
    - (3) The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. (Gen. 36:12)
    - (4) With few fortified cities, they can only “run for the hills.”
- ii) Part **one** of Yahweh’s response: an anonymous prophet. (6:7-10)
- (1) He recounts Yahweh’s previous grace. (6:7-9)
  - (2) He reminds and rebukes them concerning exclusive loyalty. (6:10)
- b) **Positive:** Gideon’s divine call; his destruction of idolatry at Ophrah (6:11–40)
- Gideon’s family’s good involvement
  - Gideon’s fleece laid on the ground to collect dew (which encourages Gideon to lead Israel to victory)
  - Gideon pleases Yahweh, opposes the people
  - good results: Yahweh in control
- i) Part **two** of Yahweh’s response: the Angel of Yahweh (6:11-24)
- (1) Our interpretation of our circumstances is not always right. (6:11-16)
  - (2) Yahweh’s gracious response to Gideon’s lack of faith. (6:17-24)
- ii) Part **three** of Yahweh’s response: the destruction of Baal’s altar (6:25-32)
- (1) Gideon’s own family has been worshiping Baal and Asherah! (6:25)
- iii) Part **four** of Yahweh’s response: the Spirit’s enablement of Gideon (6:33-40)
- (1) Baal was the god of the rain and the dew. Is Yahweh sovereign over the dew?
  - (2) Note the title *God*, and not the name *Yahweh*. (6:36) (cf. 6:20-21)
- c) **Positive:** Israel’s troops **gather** for the battle at En-Harod (7:1–14)
- army is made smaller, “that Israel may not *boast*”

- intertribal cooperation assumed
- good results: Yahweh in control
- i) The importance of weakness: whittling down self-confidence (7:1-8)
  - (1) The armies are separated north-south by the Jezreel valley.
  - (2) It is curious that the tribe Issachar is not mentioned since this event takes place on their soil at the foot of Mt. Gilboa. (cf. 6:35)
  - (3) Perhaps the name of the spring is ironic, “spring of trembling.”
  - (4) The selection of the 300 appears to be arbitrary. They are outnumbered 120,000+ (cf. 8:10) to 300, over 400 Midianite soldiers for every Jewish soldier.
- ii) A supernatural dream of despair (7:9-14)
  - (1) Gideon admits he is afraid. (7:10-11)
  - (2) Barley was the staple diet of the very poor. (7:13)
- d) **TURNING POINT: Yahweh gives victory (7:15–22)**
  - i) Worship (7:15) is a good thing, even if delayed until this time.
  - ii) Grasp the distinction between Gideon’s *Yahweh* (7:15) and the Midianite’s *God* (7:14).
  - iii) Normally, only a few leaders blew trumpets and held torches. (7:18)
    - (1) Three hundred trumpets and torches would give the impression of a huge army.
  - iv) This battle begins @ 10 pm. (7:19)
  - v) Ironically, Israel has no swords. (7:20)
    - (1) Yahweh used the Midianite swords against themselves. (7:22)
    - (2) Gideon’s skepticism has turned into swagger. (Abraham Kuruvilla)
  - vi) General description (7:21)
  - vii) Specific description of the surviving Midianites as they flee to the east-southeast toward the Jordan River. (7:22)
    - (1) Yahweh disappears from the rest of the story.
- e) **Negative: Israel’s troops disperse after the battle (7:23–8:21)**
  - the pursuit; attempt to enlarge the army; *boasting*
  - intertribal bickering
  - tragic results: Yahweh not in control, Yahweh is not praised
  - i) Parenthesis about two Midianite captains (Oreb and Zeeb) killed and strife with Ephraimites (7:23–8:3)
    - a) Perhaps these reinforcements are part of the original 32,000? Does this violate 7:2?
    - b) Gideon spends time pacifying the men of Ephraim.
    - c) This is remembered centuries later in Ps. 83:11 and Is. 10:26.
  - ii) Return to the theme of 7:22: Succoth refuses to help Gideon (8:4–7)
  - iii) Penuel refuses to help Gideon (8:8–9)
  - iv) **CENTER:** Gideon’s victory (8:10–12)
  - v) Succoth punished by Gideon (8:13–16)

- vi) Penuel punished by Gideon (8:17)
- vii) Two Midianite kings (Zebah and Zalmunna) killed (8:18–21)
  - a) Gideon appears to be more lenient with these Gentile kings than with his own countrymen in Succoth and Penuel.
  
- f) **Negative:** Gideon's call by Israelites and his lapse into idolatry at Ophrah (8:22–27)
  - Gideon's family's bad involvement
  - Gideon's garment spread out (on the ground) to collect spoils (which leads to idolatry)
  - Gideon cooperates with the people, displeases Yahweh
  - tragic results: Yahweh not in control
  - i) Gideon refuses the offer to establish a dynasty, but ... (8:22-23)
    - (1) He had a princely appearance. (cf. 8:18)
    - (2) He accumulated wealth. (8:26)
      - (a) This amounted to @ 43 lbs. of gold. If one pound is @ \$22,220, this is just under \$1 million dollars.
    - (3) He accumulated royal robes. (8:26)
    - (4) He named one of his 70 sons Abimelech ("my father is king"). (cf. 8:31)
      - (a) In Gideon's defense, he may have meant My Father, i.e. Yahweh. (cf. 8:23)
    - (5) He accumulated a harem. (8:30)
  - ii) Gideon unwisely lays a trap for the people to worship false gods. (8:24-27)
    - (1) This gold ephod (sacred garment) is like the silver ephod in Judg. 17-18.
    - (2) This is anti-Yahweh worship in the same place where Gideon had destroyed the anti-Yahweh worship earlier. (cf. 6:25-32) (Kuruvilla)
    - (3) This may have been a desire to be an additional vehicle of revelation from Yahweh.
    - (4) This also was a distraction from the Tabernacle in Shiloh.
  
- g) The **end** of oppression by Midianites (8:28–32)
  - A **positive** chronological note
  - i) Positive: A summary of 40 years of quiet. (8:28) (cf. "the good" 8:35)
    - (1) This is the last period of peace in Judges. (cf. 3:11, 30; 5:31)
  - ii) Negative: A summary of Gideon's family. (8:29-32)
    - (1) He returns home.
    - (2) He has many sons by many wives.
      - (a) He is the first Israelite leader to have a large harem.
      - (b) Infers political alliances with surrounding leaders.
    - (3) He names one of his sons Abimelech.
    - (4) He dies at a good old age. (cf. Gen. 15:15; 25:8; 1 Chron. 29:28)

In spite of all we see here, read Heb. 11:32.

5) **Abimelech** of West Manasseh (8:33–9:57)

- **evaluation:** negative
  - Israel's oppressor is one of Israel's "judges"!
  - *woman crushes Abimelech's skull* in careless moment.
  - Israelites fragmented; civil war.
- a) **Introduction:** How quickly Israel returns to Baal worship. (8:33-35)
    - i) The replacement of Yahweh.
    - ii) The disloyalty toward Yahweh's deliverer.
  - b) **Gideon's sons killed** (public execution) by Gideon's son, Abimelech. (9:1-6)
    - i) Abimelech is not a judge, nor is he raised up by Yahweh. He insinuates himself into leadership.
  - c) **Jotham's curse** upon Shechem and Abimelech. (9:7-21)
    - i) Mt. Gerizim was once a place of blessing. (Deut. 11:20; 27:12; Josh. 8:33)
    - ii) Shechem was the place Israel had covenanted to never worship the false gods of the Canaanites. (Josh. 24:16-28)
    - iii) Jotham's parable/fable (9:7-15)
      - (1) From valuable and productive to worthless and dangerous: Olive tree, fig tree, vine, bramble/thorn bush
      - (2) His theme is the foolishness and peril of accepting clearly unqualified leadership. (D. R. Davis)
    - iv) Jotham's interpretation and curse (9:16-21)
      - (1) If ... , then ....
  - d) **TURNING POINT:** God intervenes to help. (9:22-25)
    - i) Three years later.
    - ii) God determines this division to bring about justice for Gideon's sons.
      - (1) "Evil spirit" (cf. Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14, 15; 18:10; 19:9; 1 Kings 22:19-23) is not necessarily a demonic spirit. It is likely a holy angel who brings about what is perceived as disastrous or unpleasant.
  - e) **Jotham's curse** upon Shechem fulfilled. (9:26-49)
    - i) Gaal (a Gentile?) stirs up an insurrection (9:26-29)
    - ii) Zebul, ruling officer of Shechem, responds angrily and deceitfully. (9:30-33)
    - iii) Gaal is chased away from Shechem (9:34-41)
      - (1) The rising sun would cast deep shadows. (9:36)
    - iv) Abimelech partially destroys Shechem (9:42-45)
    - v) Abimelech destroys the leaders of Shechem (9:46-49)
  - f) **Gideon's son**, Abimelech, is **killed**. (9:50-55)
    - i) This takes place at Thebez, @ 10-12 miles northeast of Shechem.
    - ii) Abimelech is incapacitated by a woman dropping an upper millstone (25-30 lbs.) and then selfishly commits suicide by the hand of his armor bearer. (cf. 2 Sam. 11:21)
  - g) **Conclusion:** God fulfills Jotham's curse. (9:56-57; cf. 9:20)
    - i) God's providential justice (retribution) is accomplished. Evil destroys evil.

- 6) **Jephthah** of East Manasseh (10:6–12:7) [against the Philistines and Ammon]
- **evaluation:** negative
  - *Transjordanian king* oppresses Israel *eighteen years*; occurs in *Benjamin*
  - Jephthah sends *messages* twice to enemy king
  - *captures fords of Jordan* and kills thousands of *Ephraimites* who cross
  - Israelites fragmented; civil war
  - The author passes over two minor/secondary judges, Tola and Jair (10:1-5)
    - **Tola** judges in Ephraim, though he is of the tribe of Issachar.
      - Apparently used by Yahweh to restore what Abimelech had damaged.
        - Yahweh’s punishment of some does not mean the absence of Yahweh’s grace to others.
      - He is the only judge whose father and grandfather are named.
    - **Jair** judges in East Manasseh.
      - A wordplay on “Jair” [*ya’ir*], “donkeys” [*ayir*]. and “cities” [*ayir*].
      - Apparently wealthy, keeps a harem, has multiple sons who are considered royalty (ride a donkey).
- a) Introduction: 10:6-16
- This is the longest of all the condemnatory introductions in Judges.
- i) Did “the evil” (namely, serve the Baals)—10:6
- (1) Cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1
  - (2) Seven different foreign gods and goddesses are mentioned. (10:6)
  - (3) The Israelites were quick learners when it came to sin. (McMath, MBC)
- ii) Note the use of “forsake” 3x (10:6, 10, 13).
- iii) Yahweh’s seemingly skeptical unwillingness to help. (10:10-14)
- (1) He reminds them of seven previous deliverances. (10:11-12)
  - (2) He conditionally refuses to help them and sarcastically tells them to get help from the gods they serve. (10:13-14)
- iv) This may be genuine repentance (10:15-16). (cf. 3:9, 15; 4:3)
- (1) Yahweh’s compassionate response is to their misery, not to their repentance. (10:16)
  - (2) Our hope does not rest in the sincerity of our repentance but in the intensity of Yahweh’s compassion. (D. R. Davis)
- b) Diplomacy in response to the Ammonite threat (10:17-11:28)
- i) Jephthah’s selection as Gilead’s ruler (10:17-11:11)
- Israel was not to invade Ammon’s territory. (Deut. 2:19-21, 37)
    - But see Josh. 13:24-25; Judg. 11:13.
  - (1) Gilead’s offer. (10:17-18)
  - (2) Jephthah’s family background. (11:1-3) (cf. Samson in 13:1-25)
  - (3) Jephthah the Negotiator becomes Jephthah the Leader. (11:4-11)
    - (a) Perhaps his interest in negotiations appears later in 11:30.
- ii) Jephthah’s correspondence with the king of Ammon (11:12-28)

- Note the time reference in 11:26. This dates Jephthah at @ 1100 BC.  
Cf. 1 Kings 6:1: 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon's fourth year
- (1) Jephthah's request for justifying the Ammonite invasion. (11:12-13)
- (2) Jephthah's explanation to the Ammonite explanation. (11:14-28)
  - (a) **Historical:** accurately challenges Ammonite's claim. (11:14-20)
    - (i) They took *Amorite* land, not *Ammonite* land. (11:19)
    - (ii) Summarizes Num. 20:14-21:26; Deut. 2:4-37.
  - (b) **Theological:** recognizes Yahweh's activity. (11:21-26)
  - (c) **Personal:** Three rhetorical questions. (11:25)
  - (d) **Chronological:** know your history. (11:26-27)
    - (i) Defends his own innocence and points out Ammon's sinful behavior. (11:27a)
    - (ii) Dependence on Yahweh the Judge. (11:27b)
- c) Jephthah's vow (11:29-31)
  - i) The Spirit of Yahweh enables Jephthah. (11:29)
    - (1) Cf. 3:10; 6:34; 13:25; 15:14
  - ii) Jephthah attempts to negotiate with Yahweh. (11:30)
    - (1) This approach is not a step of faith. (11:30)
    - (2) It is like trying to slip a bribe to the Judge. (Chisolm)
      - (a) Cf. Deut. 10:17
    - (3) Yet see Heb. 11:32.
  - iii) "Whatever" can also be "whoever." (11:31a)
- d) **TURNING POINT:** Yahweh gives victory (11:32-33)
  - i) Recognizes the efforts of both Jephthah ("he crossed over to fight") and Yahweh ("Yahweh gave them").
    - (1) The phrase "**he** struck them" probably refers to Yahweh's activity.
    - (2) "Were subdued" is a divine passive meaning "subdued by Yahweh."
  - ii) Little detail is given except the decisive defeat and the number of cities.
    - (1) The cities appear to be border defense cities.
- e) Jephthah's vow fulfilled (11:34-40)
  - There is no mention of giving glory to Yahweh, though Jephthah's daughter recognizes Yahweh's defeat of the Ammonites. (11:36)
  - There is no mention of rest for the land. (cf. 3:20; 5:31; 8:28)
  - i) Being his only child (11:34), this event insures the end of his family line.
  - ii) There are three primary views, each with problems: human sacrifice, perpetual celibacy, and life-time tabernacle service. (See Fruchtenbaum)
- f) Diplomacy in response to Israelite threat; tragic civil war (12:1-6)
  - i) Resentment is displayed by Ephraim. (12:1-3) (cf. 8:1-3; Josh. 17:14-16)
    - (1) The Somebodies of Ephraim don't like being treated this way by a Nobody like Jephthah.
    - (2) Some see extreme self-centeredness in Jephthah's response.
  - ii) Jephthah controls the Jordan River crossing. (12:4-6)
    - (1) Umm, your regional dialect is showing after 300 years. (cf. Matt. 26:73)
- g) Conclusion: summary of Jephthah's rule, death, and burial (12:7)

7) **Samson** of Dan (13:1–16:31) [against the Philistines]

- The author passes over three minor/secondary judges: Ibzan of Judah (south), Elon of Zebulun (north), and Abdon of Ephraim (central) (12:8-15)
  - The degeneration of Israelite male leadership continues.
  - The Philistines are the new kids in the neighborhood, having settled in the Land @ 1200 BC.
  - **evaluation:** negative
  - The seven units of Samson’s account are organized geographically.
  - Did “the evil” (namely, serve the Baals)—13:1
    - Cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1
  - There is no cry for relief as before. (cf. 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6-7; 10:10, 12)
  - Samson appears to be a budding punster. (cf. 14:14; 15:16)
- a) Samson’s birth (13:1–25)
- chronological note
  - his parents *see* God and do not *die*; reference to “day of his [Samson’s] death”
  - Samson grows up *between Zorah and Eshtaol*; mention of *Manoah*
- i) Samson’s childless, nameless mother hears of Yahweh’s grace. (13:1-7)
- (1) There are 23 references to the Angel of Yahweh in Judges (2:1, 4; 5:23; 6:11-12, 21-22) 13 of which are in connection with Samson (13:3, 13, 15-18, 20-21).
- (2) Samson is to be a life-long Nazirite. (cf. Num. 6:1-21)
- ii) Samson’s father prays to Yahweh. (13:8-14)
- iii) Samson’s father sacrifices to Yahweh. (13:15-20)
- (1) “Wonderful.” (13:18) cf. 13:19; Ps. 139:6; Is. 9:6.
- iv) Samson’s mother understands Yahweh’s actions. (13:21-23)
- (1) There is still a lingering echo of Exo. 33:20. (13:22)
- (2) Note the growth in their knowledge of God: “man of God” (13:6, 8) to “messenger of God” (13:21) to “God” (13:22).
- v) Samson’s birth and Spirit enablement. (13:24-25)
- (1) Samson is the only judge to be blessed by Yahweh. (13:24)
- (2) Of the seven references to the Spirit in Judges (3:10; 6:34; 11:29), four are in connection with Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:1).
- (3) Mahaneh-Dan is where Samson is eventually buried. (cf. 16:31)
- (a) The tribe of Dan eventually moves to the north. (cf. ch. 17-18)
- (b) This location controls the western entrance to the Sorek Valley, @ 15 miles west of Jerusalem.
- (i) The Philistine city of Ekron was west of the mouth of this valley.
- (4) Contrary to Jephthah, Samson has every advantage as a boy. (Herbert Wolf, EBC)
- b) Samson betrays his secret to his Philistine wife (14:1–20)
- begins: Samson *falls in love* with woman in Sorek Valley
  - Philistines threaten to burn woman’s house down if she will not *entice* Samson to betray secret

- woman *initially fails*; but when she questions his love for her, he finally reveals his secret to her; and *she tells the Philistines*
  - keyword: *tell* (12x)
  - setting: *Sorek* (“a choice vine”) *Valley* (Timnah)
  - i) Samson does down and chooses a wife based on externals. (14:1-4)
    - (1) Timnah is @ 5-6 miles from Zorah, or @ 2 ½ hour walk.
    - (2) Note Samson’s “she is right in my eyes” (14:3, 7) (cf. 17:6; 21:25)
      - (a) Cf. Deut. 12:8; Prov. 12:15; 21:2
    - (3) Yahweh is providentially working behind the scenes. (14:4)
  - ii) Samson and his parents go down to arrange the marriage. (14:5-6)
  - iii) Samson goes down and talks with the Philistine woman. (14:7-9)
    - (1) Does Samson break his Nazarite vow by touching the lion’s carcass?
  - iv) Samson’s father goes down to the woman. (14:10-18)
    - (1) Samson’s riddle is unfair.
  - v) Samson goes down to Ashkelon and kills 30 Philistines. (14:19-20)
    - (1) Ashkelon, on the coast, is @ 25 miles SW of Timnah.
- c) Samson visits his “wife” at Timnah (15:1–8)
  - angered by Philistines and destroys town’s fields
  - begins: Samson *goes* to visit his wife
  - ends: Samson goes down to Etam
  - i) This takes place in @ May (“wheat harvest”). (15:1)
  - ii) It was customary for the young wife to remain in her father’s house and the husband visit occasionally. (15:1)
  - iii) Bringing a young goat is the equivalent of flowers or chocolate. (15:1)
  - iv) He returns after his hasty departure in 14:19-20. His father-in-law assumes a motive based on observation of Samson’s actions. (15:2)
    - (1) No one will tell Samson how to find a wife. (cf. 14:1-4)
  - v) Samson’s fiery destruction impacts the Philistine economy. (15:5)
  - vi) The Philistines fulfill an earlier threat (15:6) (cf. 14:15)
  - vii) While Samson’s primary goal appears to be retaliation, Yahweh is still working through Samson to mock and punish the Philistines.
- d) **TURNING POINT:** Samson kills 1,000 Philistines with jawbone of ass; fellow Israelites reject Samson’s leadership and Philistines begin to take the initiative against him (15:9–20)
  - The wordplay focuses on the village name *Lehi*, which means “jawbone.”
    - Probably named Lehi after Samson’s victory
  - This is retaliation for Samson’s activity in 15:1-8.
  - i) Note how compliant the Israelites are under the Philistines. (15:9-13)
    - (1) Lehi is @ 12 miles SW of Jerusalem.
    - (2) Israel is a people who can forsake Yahweh instantly but who would not think of being faithless to the Philistines! (D. R. Davis)
    - (3) How far Judah as fallen since 1:1-2. Don’t disturb the status quo.
    - (4) “Oh, No! Not new ropes! Now he’s doomed.” (15:13)
  - ii) Emphasizes two provisions by Yahweh: enablement and water. (15:14-19)



- (1) This is the last reference to the Spirit of Yahweh in Samson's life. (15:14)
- (2) This is the first mention of Samson praying. (15:18)
- iii) Length of Samson's judgeship before the events in Gaza. (15:20)
- e) Samson visits a prostitute at Gaza (16:1-3)
  - opposed by Philistines and destroys town's gates
  - begins: Samson *goes* to the Gaza prostitute
  - ends: Samson takes the Gaza gates up to Hebron
  - Gaza is the furthest south of the five major Philistine cities.
- i) His unrestricted senses. (16:1)
  - (1) Gaza is about 35 SW of Zorah, and 12 miles south of Ashkelon.
  - (2) Why is he even here in the first place? It is probably not accidental.
- ii) How does one do this demolition so quietly? (cf. 16:2)
- iii) Two interpretations: (16:3)
  - (1) Some argue that the hill is near Gaza but facing toward Hebron.
    - (a) The humiliation of Gaza has already been accomplished (they are vulnerable), no matter how far he carries their city gates.
    - (2) Others argue that this is near the city of Hebron. If so, then he carries the city gates 40 miles away, with a climb of @ 3,000 feet in elevation.
      - (a) Because Hebron is a prominent city of Judah, perhaps this is a way of mocking the men of Judah for their earlier behavior. (Cf. 15:11)
    - (3) Based on archeological evidence, it is estimated that the gates weighed between 2.5-5 tons.
      - (a) If he does take them to near Hebron, this would require @ 28.5 hp to move 2.5 tons that distance at that incline.
  - iv) We are left with several unanswered questions.
- f) Samson betrays his secret to Delilah (16:4-22)
  - begins: Samson *falls in love* with Delilah in Sorek Valley
  - Philistines offer Delilah gifts to *entice* Samson to betray secret
  - Delilah *initially fails*; but when she questions his love for her, he finally reveals his secret to her; and *she tells the Philistines*
  - keyword: *tell* (7x)
  - setting: *Sorek Valley* (Delilah's home)
- i) Introduction to Delilah. (16:4-6)
  - She is the only woman in the Samson accounts that is named.
  - (1) Open to bribery. (16:5)
    - (a) If this refers to the five major cities (cf. 3:3), then this is 5,500 pieces of silver, or @ 140 pounds.
    - (b) Her allegiance is to the Philistines.
  - (2) Keeps her word. (16:6)
- ii) Three unsuccessful tests of Samson's strength. (16:7-14)
  - (1) Test # 1—new bowstrings of animal tendons (16:7-9)
  - (2) Test # 2—new ropes (16:10-12) (cf. 15:13-14)

- (a) Isn't it interesting how deceptive people want you to "play fair"?  
(16:10)
- (3) Test # 3—woven hair (16:13-14)  
(a) Can you hear the echo of Jael's work from 4:21?
- iii) Test # 4—shaved hair: Samson's secret is extracted. (16:15-17)
- (1) How ironic! The unloving accuses him of not loving, the deceiver accuses him of deception. (16:15)
- (2) Let's try perpetual nagging. (16:16)
- (3) Samson surrenders to her. (16:17) (cf. 14:17)
- (a) Note how his words are nearly identical to the Angel of Yahweh in 13:5.
- (b) His hair does not give him strength. It is from the Spirit of Yahweh. (cf. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14)
- (c) Cutting his hair reveals the deliberate renunciation of Yahweh's call. (cf. 13:5)
- (i) He simply wants to be like everyone else. Perhaps he tired of being different.
- iv) The Philistines finally capture Samson. (16:18-22)
- This is noted in John Milton's poem *Samson Agonistes*.
- (1) How ironic that the Philistines keep their promise to pay Delilah but Samson does not keep his Nazirite vow. (16:18)
- (2) The Spirit of Yahweh had departed from Samson. (16:20)
- (3) Four Philistine actions: seize, gouged, brought, and bound (16:21)
- (a) Consider how the last king of Judah is treated. (Cf. 2 Kings 25:7)
- (b) Down to Gaza, far away from his home.
- (c) The irony of grinding grain after he had destroyed their grain (15:4-5).
- (4) A hint of anticipation. (16:22)
- g) Samson's death (16:23–31)
- chronological note
  - Samson cannot *see*, and he *dies*
  - he is buried *between Zorah and Eshtaol*; mention of *Manoah*
- i) The worship of the Philistines. (16:23-24)
- (1) Temples to Dagon were in both Ashdod (1 Sam. 5:1-7) and Gaza.
- (2) Dagon was the god of grain and their chief god. He was considered the father of Baal. This is the god whose actions Samson had attacked in 15:4-5.
- (a) Dagon was not a Philistine god originally. When they migrated into the region, they adopted him from the Canaanites and the surrounding cultures.
- (3) It is ironic that the Philistines praise their god, but Samson did not bother to praise Yahweh in 15:16.
- (4) The main concern of the Philistines appears to be Samson, not Israel.
- ii) The entertainment of the Philistines. (16:25)

- (1) The word for entertaining is used 3x in 16:25-27.
- (2) The entertainment is probably focused on his blindness (hitting him, tripping him, obstacles, etc.), not his strength or puns/riddles. He is a blind person in a unfamiliar location.
- iii) The death of the Philistines. (16:26-30)
  - (1) The setting. (16:26-27)
    - (a) Some temples of this era were supported by only two wooden pillars mounted on stone bases. This probably worked well, unless you have a Samson attend your party.
  - (2) Samson's prayer. (16:28) (cf. 15:18-19)
    - (a) Note the names for the true God he uses in Dagon's temple.
    - (b) Samson seeks revenge for the very physical organs that had caused his problems. (cf. 14:1, 3, 7; 16:1, 21, 28)
    - (c) Samson is not only blind, he is shortsighted and self-oriented.
  - (3) The collapse. (16:29-30)
    - (a) Dagon cannot even defend himself on his home court.
    - (b) Samson appears to have twisted the pillars, which caused the collapse. (16:29)
    - (c) The death of so many Philistine leaders must have had a tremendous impact on their society for years to come.
    - (d) "This terrible blow necessarily made a powerful impression upon the Philistines, not only plunging them into deep mourning at the death of their princes and so many of their countrymen, and the destruction of the temple of Dagon, but filling them with fear and terror at the omnipotence of the God of the Israelites. Under these circumstances it is conceivable enough that the brethren and relatives of Samson were able to come to Gaza, and fetch away the body of the fallen hero, to bury it in his father's grave between Zorea and Eshtaol." (Carl F. Keil)
    - (e) Samson is the only judge to be killed in the line of duty.
- iv) Samson's burial. (16:31)

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This concludes the section of Judges (3:7-16:31) concerning individual judges.

### Epilogue—17:1-21:25 (The Bethlehem Trilogy)

- Bethlehem is mentioned only twice (12:8, 10) earlier in Judges, but seven times in the Epilogue (17:7, 8, 9; 19:1, 2, 18).

#### 1) Part One—Idolatry at Dan—17:1-18:31

- a) Micah (“Who is like Yahweh?”) of Ephraim sets up an *idolatrous shrine* for his private use (17:1–6)
  - Micah makes an *idol* and cultic objects for his *shrine*
  - result: peaceful
- i) Micah steals from and then returns silver (28 lbs.) to his mother. (17:1-3a)
  - (1) He fears the curse of his mother more than the wrath of Yahweh.
  - (2) **Further study:** How many of the 10 commandments did Micah violate?
- ii) His mother dedicates the silver to Yahweh and makes false gods. (17:3b-4)
  - (1) She may have worshiped Yahweh but not exclusively.
- iii) Micah makes a self-styled location and priest for worship (“house of gods”). (17:5)
  - (1) Like Gideon (cf. 8:27)
  - (2) The Tabernacle was in the territory of Ephraim at Shiloh.
- iv) The political and moral observations. (17:6)
  - (1) Political: no centralized authority (cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)
  - (2) Moral: individual authority; “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (cf. 14:3, 7; 17:6; 21:25)
    - (a) A shift away from “did the evil.” (cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)
    - (b) Contrast with “do what is right in Yahweh’s/God’s sight” (Exod 15:26; Deut 6:18; 12:8, 25, 28; 13:19; 21:9)
    - (c) Micah and his mother were not the exceptions, but the rule—the entire nation was corrupt. (Kuruvilla)
- b) Micah secures services of Levite (17:7–13)
  - Levite from the territory of Judah arrives at Micah’s home
  - “live with me *and be my father and priest*”; states benefits of the job; Levite agrees
  - result: peaceful
- i) The Levite should know better that true worship is limited to the Tabernacle. The Levite’s consent seems worse than Micah’s request. (FSB)
  - (1) This Levite seems to be Moses’ grandson, Jonathan, son of Gershom. (cf. 18:30)
    - (a) Some argue that the Hebrew text has been altered to protect Moses.
  - (2) Bethlehem of Judah is not one of the 48 cities set aside by Moses for the Levites.

- ii) Micah superstitiously upgrades his “shrine” with his “lucky Levite’s foot.”
  - (1) Be my companion (“live with me”), my father, and my priest.
- c) Danite spies visit Micah’s house in peace (18:1–6)
  - begins: they *set out from Zorah and Eshtaol* (Samson’s territory; Judg. 13:25)
  - result: peaceful
  - Some hear echoes of the spies of Num. 12-14; Deut. 1:19-46; and Josh. 2.
  - i) The absence of centralized authority is noted. (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)
  - ii) The tribe of Dan is abandoning their God-given allotment of territory. (18:1-2) (cf. Josh. 19:40-48)
    - (1) Due in part to their portion being the smallest of the 12 tribes.
    - (2) Due in part to the military activity of the Amorites (Judg. 1:34-35) and the Philistines (Judg. 13:1; 14:4; 15:11).
  - iii) The tribe of Dan is abandoning their God-given place of worship and means of revelation. (18:3-6)
    - (1) See the later idolatry. (18:27-31)
    - (2) Obedience to God is sometimes difficult. How easy it is to desire God’s blessing on our disobedience.
    - (3) The Levite’s ambiguous statement (18:6) can be interpreted in different ways.
  - iv) The Danites’ response to the crisis is natural but humanistic. Instead of confessing their sin of unbelief and appealing to Yahweh for aid, they do what is right in their own eyes. (Daniel Block)
- d) **TURNING POINT:** Danites carry out their mission and return to propose hostility (18:7–10)
  - i) They arrive in the farthest north territory in Israel. (18:7)
    - (1) Laish (aka Leshem (cf. Josh. 19:47) is at the foot of Mt. Hermon, @ 100 miles to the north.
      - (a) @ 25-30 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, @ 25 miles east of Tyre.
    - (2) The Danites observed four aspects of “Utopia”: security, no central authority, no interference from Sidon, and isolation.
    - (3) It is also known for plentiful water (one source of the Jordan River), fertile soil, and proximity to an international trade route.
  - ii) Their claim to God’s provision (18:10) appears to be based on the Levite’s vague statement in 18:6.
- e) Danite spies visit Micah’s house in hostility (18:11–17)
  - begins: they *set out from Zorah and Eshtaol* again, this time with an army, confiscate Micah’s idols and kidnap his priest
  - result: hostile

- i) They won't fight the Amorites and Philistines, but they don't mind threatening fellow Israelites.
- f) Micah loses services of Levite (18:18–26)
  - Danites take Levite from Micah's home to serve as their priest
  - "come with us and be our father and priest"
  - result: hostile
  - i) They are guilty of forceful god-napping, blackmail, and priest-napping. Apparently, one can never have too many gods or priests!
  - ii) The irony that a Levite for sale (17:10) becomes a Levite for sale (18:19).
  - iii) How quickly sinning people can betray their loyalties. (18:20)
    - (1) Here was an opportunity for an "expanded ministry." What could possibly be wrong with this?
    - (2) The private gods become tribal gods.
  - iv) The vulnerable are in front so the soldiers can protect the rear from Micah's crew. (18:21-22)
  - v) The irony that Micah the Thief (17:2) becomes the victim of thievery. (18:24)
- g) Danites set up an *idolatrous shrine* to serve their entire tribe (18:27–31)
  - Danites use Micah's idol in their shrine
  - Levite's identity finally given: Moses' grandson!
  - result: hostile
  - i) The isolated, peaceful people of Laish were not match for the Danites. (18:27-28a)
    - (1) Sadly, the priest is no longer identified as a Levite.
    - (2) The Danites brutally murder innocent people to achieve their goal. (18:27)
      - (a) Notice how your sympathies are shifted toward the Canaanites instead of the Israelites. (Block)
      - (3) Archeology confirms a burnt layer dating to 1200-1150 BC.
  - ii) The rebuilding and renaming of the city. (18:28b-29)
  - iii) The establishing of an alternate worship center. (18:30-31)
    - (1) Two options re: "the exile."
      - (a) It most likely refers to 722 BC (Assyrian captivity).
      - (b) It may refer to the Philistine capture of the Ark in 1 Sam. 4:1-11.
    - (2) Either way, this indicates a late date for the writing/editing of this book.
  - iv) Hebrew texts differ in 18:30. Some read "Moses" while others read "Manasseh". "Moses" is the correct reading. (cf. Exod. 2:22; 1 Chron. 23:14-15)
    - (1) Some Hebrew texts read: ben-Me<sup>na</sup>sheh instead of ben-Mesheh.
  - v) Dan becomes a center of false worship under Jeroboam I. (1 Kings 12:28-29)

## 2) Part Two—Rape of the Levite’s concubine—19:1-30

- a) The concubine leaves her home in Ephraim and goes to her father’s home in Bethlehem (19:1–2)
  - i) The absence of centralized authority is noted. (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)
    - (1) Because Israel refuses to acknowledge Yahweh as king, the nation lacks a theological reason for not sinking to the ethical level of the Canaanites at the personal, tribal, and national levels. (Daniel Block)
  - ii) The anonymous Levite may be transient due to the lack of support at the Tabernacle.
  - iii) A concubine is a second-status wife.
  - iv) The concubine deserts her husband (for adultery or intense anger, depending on the Hebrew root word), she is not sent away.
- b) Happy negotiations for the woman (19:3–4)
  - Levite comes and speaks kindly to his concubine and her father, and he wins her back. This response is unlikely if the problem was adultery.
  - *tranquil scene* of father and husband peaceably conversing (about concubine?)
- c) The father’s hospitality in Bethlehem (19:5–9)
  - the Levite is detained extra days by his hospitable host
  - i) The concubine seems to be absent from these meals. (Note “both of them” in 19:6, 8.)
  - ii) We see the unintended consequences of the father’s delay tactics in 19:11 and 19:25. However, the father is never blamed or presented negatively.
- d) **Turning Point:** Levite begins journey home; ironically refuses to stay overnight in Jebus, because it is “a town of foreigners” (19:10–13)
  - i) The trio heads north from Bethlehem, traveling @ 6 miles to Jerusalem, and an additional 4 miles to Gibeah. This trip would normally take 3-4 hours.
  - ii) The Levite’s decision will have unintended consequences.
  - iii) The tension is building through this series of micro-decisions.
- e) Inhospitability in Gibeah of Benjamin (19:14–22a)
  - local people do not take the Levite and his concubine in; finally taken in by an outsider, who fears for their safety
  - i) Their arrival in Gibeah. (19:14-15)
    - (1) Hospitality could be expected in this culture.
    - (2) In contrast to the earlier lavish hospitality (19:6, 8-9) in Bethlehem.
    - (3) This is the town identified with King Saul later. (1 Sam. 10:26; 14:2)
  - ii) The hospitality of the old man from Ephraim. (19:16-21)
    - (1) The only use of Yahweh or God in the entire chapter. (19:18)

- (2) The house of Yahweh (19:18) was in either Shiloh (@ 17-20 miles north) or Bethel (@ 7-10 miles north).
    - (a) The Septuagint (Greek OT) reads “my house.”
  - (3) The old man knows enough not to trust the people of Gibeah. (19:20)
    - (a) The danger of the square came as a surprise here for the simple reason that this should have been the safest place to be: inside the gate, in a public place, where everyone would pass by. (John McMath, MBC)
  - (4) Note the old man provides five things: shelter, care for livestock, comfort, food, and beverages. (19:21)
  - (5) Everything seems to be going right. (19:22a)
- f) Terrible negotiations for the woman (19:22b–26)
- evil men of Gibeah (New Sodom) come and speak hostilely to the old man who is hosting the Levite and his concubine; they prevail and rape the concubine
  - *tense scene* of old man and interested male parties discussing the concubine’s fate
  - distinct echoes of Gen. 19
  - This wickedness is referred to @ 650 years later in Hosea 9:9; 10:9.
  - These stories are not about hospitality. They are about the brutish depths to which people sink when God’s laws are flouted and no civil authority legislates their observance. (Reis, quoted in Kuruvilla)
  - This horrific act casts both the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin in a dishonorable light. The victim—the concubine—is from Judah, while the men who offer the innocent women are from Ephraim; the men who perpetuate the crime are from Benjamin (Judg 19:1, 14, 16, 22, 24). (FSB)
- i) “Vile fellows” is literally “sons of Belial/worthlessness.” (19:22)
    - (1) Cf. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 1 Kings 21:10, 13; 2 Chron. 13:7
  - ii) The old man has some type of moral compass remaining: “*do not do evil ... do not commit such a disgraceful act.*” (19:23)
    - (1) This appears to be more about the laws of hospitality and homosexual rape than regard for the women. He seems to have no qualms about adultery with the concubine and rape of his own virgin daughter.
  - iii) Note the familiar phrase of the second command he gives: “*do to them whatever is good in your eyes.*” (19:24)
    - (1) It is precisely those who have been called to be a people for Yahweh’s own possession who are refusing to be subject to his covenant law! *They will not have this God to rule over them.* (D. R. Davis)
  - iv) Shockingly, the Levite follows the suggestion of the old man. (19:25)
    - (1) Note that he does not sacrifice the daughter of the old man because he has no authority over her.
    - (2) The choice is between himself and his concubine. Who did he choose?



- v) The woman, after suffering unspeakable horrors, attempts to return to the Levite. (19:26)
  - o **Question:** is there really any difference between the old man, the Levite, and the vile fellows?
  - o **Question:** where are the other citizens of Gibeah and why don't they stop this atrocity?
  
- g) The concubine is brought back to her home in Ephraim—dead (19:27–30)
  - i) He steps out of the house to go on his way, not to look for the woman. (19:27)
    - (1) The Levite and the old man apparently did not stay up all night out of concern for her. They sit and sleep in comfort and safety while horrific, excruciating violence is done to this woman.
    - (2) The Levite clearly values himself more than anyone else.
  - ii) The calloused indifference of the Levite is appalling. (19:28)
    - (1) These are the first and only recorded words of the Levite to the woman.
  - iii) It is not clear exactly when the woman dies. It would seem she dies before he desecrates her corpse in 19:29, but we cannot be certain.
    - (1) Dismembering her corpse was like preparing a sacrifice. (cf. Exod. 29:17; Lev. 1:6, 12; 8:20; 1 Kings 18:23, 33)
    - (2) Cf. Saul in 1 Sam. 11:7.

### 3) Part Three—Battle against Benjamin—20:1-21:25

- a) The **first** all-Israel assembly (20:1–11)
    - tribes hear about atrocity in which the concubine was forcibly taken and raped by Benjaminites
    - they vow, “none of us will *return to his home*” until justice is achieved
  - i) The gathering. (20:1-3)
    - (1) “From Dan to Beersheba,” i.e. from north to south. (cf. 2 Sam. 24:2, 15)
    - (2) This Mizpah is probably the one centrally located at which Samuel gathered Israel, @ 3 miles north of Gibeah. (1 Sam. 10:17-27)
    - (3) “The people of God.” (20:2; cf. 2 Sam. 14:13; Heb. 4:9; 11:25; 1 Pet. 2:10)
    - (4) Concerns:
      - (a) Wrong location: Mizpah, not Shiloh where the Tabernacle is.
      - (b) Wrong method: they do not seek Yahweh’s will in this matter.
        - (i) It is awkward to ask God to bless your revenge.
        - (ii) However, they do cast lots. (cf. 20:9, 18)
  - ii) The self-oriented testimony. (20:4-7) (many 1<sup>st</sup> person references)
    - (1) Based on chapter 19, how trustworthy is this testimony?
    - (2) Only one witness is called. (cf. Deut. 19:15)
    - (3) Concerns:
      - (a) The criminals: “the men [lit. baals/lords] of Gibeah” is not accurate; it was the vile men of Gibeah. (cf. 20:13)
      - (b) The intention: “They intended to kill me” is not accurate; they wanted to rape him, not kill him.
      - (c) The convenient omission: “Instead, they violated my concubine” omits how the vile fellows got their hands on her in the first place.
  - iii) The reaction. (20:8-11)
    - (1) Unity at last, but against other Israelites, not against their normal enemies.
    - (2) Note that some Israelites are still living in temporary housing. (20:8)
- b) The **second** all-Israel assembly, immediately preceding the war (20:12–17)
  - Israel, enraged at the atrocity, *sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin* demanding that the culprits be turned over
  - *Benjaminites refuse to turn over to the Israelites the men who violently took and raped the concubine*
- i) The clear opportunity to do the right thing. (20:12-13a)
  - (1) Everyone heard, everyone knew what was expected from them, everyone knew how the rest of Israel intended to dispense justice.
- ii) The clear refusal to comply. (20:13b)
- iii) The clear decision to engage in civil war. (20:14-17)
  - (1) Benjamin is clearly outnumbered. Will skill defeat numbers?
- c) Israel defeated by Benjaminites (20:18–25)
  - two battles, each concluded with tally of casualties

- i) God might have answered through the Urim and Thummim. (20:18)
  - (1) **Question:** is Israel more worthy than Benjamin?
    - (a) Yahweh graciously answers their inquiry.
    - (2) Judah again leads them into battle. (cf. 1:1-10)
      - (a) Perhaps because the concubine was from Judah. (19:1-2)
  - ii) Battle # 1: Israel unexpectedly loses 22,000 men (20:19-21)
    - (1) The hilly terrain around Gibeah favors the defender.
    - (2) They seek confirmation from Yahweh. (19:23)
    - (3) **Question:** Are they second guessing because they failed the first time?
  - iii) Battle # 2: Israel unexpectedly loses an additional 18,000 men (20:22-25)
- d) **Turning Point:** Yahweh promises victory (20:26–28)
  - i) Israel retreats. (20:26)
    - (1) Perhaps to Bethel, @ eight miles north of Gibeah.
    - (2) Perhaps to the tabernacle at Shiloh, @ twenty miles north of Gibeah
  - ii) **Question:** why are they weeping? (20:26)
  - iii) The only time fasting or the ark are mentioned in Judges. (20:26, 27)
  - iv) Phineas the Dark-Skinned, Aaron’s grandson, inquires of Yahweh and Yahweh graciously grants assurance. (20:28)
    - (1) Phineas is to be remembered from Num. 25:7-8.
- o Israel defeats Benjaminites (20:29–48)
  - two phases of the battle, each concluded with tally of casualties
  - i) General/summary overview (20:29-36a)
    - (1) An ambush is added to the battle plan. (20:29)
    - (2) Benjamin grows overconfident in early apparent success. (20:30-32)
    - (3) The ambush is sprung. (20:33-34)
    - (4) Yahweh is the root cause for Benjamin’s defeat. (20:35)
      - (a) Benjamin loses @ 96-97% of their soldiers.
      - (b) Note that Benjamin recognizes they were “defeated” (used of Yahweh defeating them in 20:35).
  - ii) Specific/expansion details (20:36b-48)
    - (1) The ambush of Benjamin is explained. (20:36b-44)
      - (a) Echoes of the battle at Ai. (cf. Josh. 8)
    - (2) The retreat of Benjamin is explained. (20:45-48)
      - (a) Yahweh does not endorse the destruction of the cities. (20:48; cf. 21:6, 15)
      - (b) Israel nearly exterminates an entire tribe for the crimes of a few vile men. This is not holy justice but unholy revenge.
  - iii) **Question:** why doesn’t Israel act so decisively against the Canaanites?

- e) The **next-to-last** all-Israel assembly, immediately following the war (21:1–15)
- Israelites pity surviving Benjaminites; they *sent word to the Benjaminites* and proclaim peace; Israelites attack Jabesh-Gilead of Manasseh and slaughter all the inhabitants, saving alive four hundred virgins, whom they give to Benjaminites
  - *Israelites violently capture and turn over to Benjaminites four hundred innocent young women*
- i) The dilemma resulting from an impulsive, unwise vow. (21:1-7)
- (1) This vow is not mentioned in 20:1-2.
  - (2) Why build another altar (21:4) when there is already an altar in the tabernacle (cf. 20:26)?
  - (3) It appears that Israel borders on blaming Yahweh for their situation. (21:6)
- ii) The destruction of Jabesh-Gilead (21:8-12)
- (1) One can usually find a loophole to do what one desires.
  - (2) Israel's sorrow that extends toward Benjamin apparently is not sufficient to extend to the people of Jabesh-Gilead. Why doesn't the tribe of Manasseh speak up?
  - (3) There is no record of Israel consulting Yahweh for guidance in this matter.
- iii) (21:13-15)
- (1) The remnant of Benjamin has been hiding near "Pomegranate Rock" (Rimmon) for four months. (cf. 20:47)
- f) The **last** all-Israel assembly (21:16–25)
- tribes condone Benjaminites' forcibly taking for themselves two hundred women at Shiloh
  - then they *return*, "each to his own tribe and family"
- i) One sinful act (cf. 21:8-12) is apparently not enough. (21:16-18)
- (1) How interesting that they are finally anxious about keeping their oath.
  - (2) How convenient they forget they are the cause of the lack of women.
- ii) Justifying sinful behavior (kidnapping the young women of Shiloh) on a technicality (can't give, but it does say can't kidnap) with the guise of spirituality (an unknown feast at Shiloh). (21:19-24)
- (1) Shiloh is in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim.
  - (2) Is the feast legitimate or one associated with Canaanite idolatry?
  - (3) Yet another ambush is planned.
  - (4) How easy it is to be appalled at someone's sin (rape and murder of the concubine) but actively encourage another sin (stealing someone's daughter).
    - (a) Cf. Psalm 10:9 and the description of the wicked
    - (b) Rationalizing sin becomes easier and easier as time progresses.
    - (c) The complete disregard for these women is unnerving.

- iii) A summary of Judges. (21:25)
  - (1) The eyes of Yahweh (cf. 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1, 17; 10:6, 15; 13:1;
  - (2) The eyes of people (Cf. 14:3, 7; 17:6; 19:24; 21:25)
- iv) The Book of Judges illustrates both God's justice and His grace—justice in punishing sin and grace in forgiving sin. (F. Duane Lindsey, BKC)
- v) In the meantime Yahweh, the Lord of history and the Lord of the church, remains unchanged in character and intent. (Daniel Block)