



**The Summit**  
Green Campus of Canton Baptist Temple

# **Resources for Your Life**

Judges  
15 Sessions

[www.thesummitgreen.com](http://www.thesummitgreen.com)  
[tomhogsed@gmail.com](mailto:tomhogsed@gmail.com)

## Resource Guide

This resource was compiled from the personal Bible study and blog entries created by Tom Hogsed, pastor of the Summit in Green. You can find the original blog entries at [www.tomhogsed.com](http://www.tomhogsed.com).

The **introduction** to this book has been written so the reader has a better understanding of the Biblical author, his purpose in writing, and important points to understand before reading.

Following the introduction, each new page represents a **verse by verse overview** of the Scripture passage. The best way to study is to first read the Scripture verses from your Bible relying on the Holy Spirit to provide understanding and then to support your understanding with the commentary written below.

At the end of each Scripture commentary, there is a short **prayer** written so the reader can personally apply what has been discovered; however, it is suggested that you also pray from your heart in response to God's Word.

Feel free to make your own personal notes in your Bible, on this page, or even in a journal.

If this resource has helped you or you have further questions, please send an e-mail to [tomhogsed@gmail.com](mailto:tomhogsed@gmail.com).

## Introduction to Judges

The book of Judges was written somewhere between 1045-1000 BC by the prophet, Samuel. Although Samuel is never identified as the author, the Jewish Talmud declares that he penned it; furthermore, as one who lived and wrote (1 Samuel 10:25) during the events of Judges, Samuel would be qualified to document the history of Israel in this time period. The historical events written in Judges span approximately 350 years (1383-1043 BC), which begin with the death of Joshua (1383 BC) and end just before the monarchy was instituted in Israel (1043 BC). While the book of Joshua celebrated Israel's obedience to God and inheritance of the Promised Land, Judges was a dark period in Israel's timeline because of their disobedience and idolatry. After the death of Joshua, the nation of Israel gradually began moving away from the Lord by failing to remove the Canaanites from the land (Judges 1), worshiping other gods (Judges 2), and intermarrying with the Canaanites (Judges 3:5-6). Moses had forewarned Israel about the dangers of all three of these things and told them about the consequences of not obeying God (see Deuteronomy 7); however, they failed to listen to the voice of Moses as well as Joshua.

Each time Israel disobeyed the Lord, He would send judgment upon them by allowing their enemies to conquer them and each time their enemies had victory over them, Israel would cry out to the Lord for deliverance. In the book of Judges, God's deliverance arrived for Israel whenever He would send judges (men to protect Israel from their enemies) to call the people to repent and return to the Lord. The history of these fourteen judges is recorded in Judges 3:7-16:31. Here is a listing of the judges:

Othniel (Judges 3:7-11)  
Ehud (Judges 3:12-30)  
Shamgar (Judges 3:31)  
Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5)  
Gideon (Judges 6:1-8:32)  
Abimelech (Judges 8:33-9:57)  
Tola (Judges 10:1-2)  
Jair (Judges 10:3-5)  
Jephthah (Judges 10:6-12:7)  
Ibzan (Judges 12:8-10)  
Elon (Judges 12:11-12)  
Abdon (Judges 12:13-15)  
Samson (Judges 13:1-16:31)

Even though Israel was unfaithful to God, He delivered them from their enemies every time they were oppressed. God's mercy is clearly recognized throughout the book of Judges, but those who love God must not take advantage of His willingness to forgive. It is always best to obey the first time. Although God's mercy is demonstrated numerous times during this 350 year time period, the concluding words of Judges still read like this, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). The words of this book should be a firm reminder that God expects obedience in all areas of life and anyone who ignores Him will experience the consequences of their sin.

*Dear God, help me to obey You the first time.*

## **Joshua 1:1-2:23**

Joshua died in 1383 BC (Joshua 24:29), just fifteen years following the conquest of Canaan which ended in 1398 BC. Although the major cities of Canaan had been conquered by the Israelites, there were a few remaining tribes spread throughout the Promised Land who needed to be expelled. Both Moses (Deuteronomy 7) and Joshua (Joshua 23) had forewarned Israel that they were to remove all the people of the land lest they should be influenced to worship other gods and intermarry with their enemies. Desiring to remove the remaining tribes from Canaan, the children of Israel inquired of the Lord about which tribe should lead the way in fighting against the Canaanites (1:1). The Lord commanded that the tribe of Judah lead the way and then promised that He would give them the victory (1:2). The tribe of Judah joined forces with the tribe of Simeon and the Lord gave them the victory over the Canaanites and the Perizzites (1:3-4a). Ten thousand men were killed in this battle at Bezek (1:4b). Adoni-Bezek, a king in this region, had his thumbs and big toes cut off as an act of retribution (1:5-6); however, it does not appear that God commanded this barbaric act to take place, but Adoni-Bezek did recognize Israel's actions as punishment from God since the king had done this many times himself (1:7). After defeating the Canaanites and Perizzites, Judah successfully attacked Jerusalem and set it on fire (1:8). The tribe of Judah continued in their efforts and fought against those in the southern mountains and lowlands (1:9-20). Judah defeated the people dwelling in the southern mountains, but they failed to drive out the inhabitants of the lowlands because they had chariots of iron (1:19). God had promised Israel that He would enable them to defeat all their enemies (Joshua 17:16-18) so Israel had no excuse for not expelling them. The tribe of Benjamin also failed to drive out the Jebusites (1:21). The tribe of Joseph only partially expelled the central parts of Canaan (1:22-26). Manasseh as well as Ephraim disobeyed God by not removing all of the inhabitants from their territory (1:27-29). The tribes of Zebulun (1:30), Asher (1:31-32), Naphtali (1:33), and Dan (1:34-36) also failed to drive out their enemies from northern Canaan, which was part of the land God had promised to give them. Israel had quickly forgotten the words of the Lord and was now in danger of experiencing His judgment. Since the children of Israel had disobeyed God in not fully driving out the inhabitants of Canaan (Judges 1), an Angel of the Lord (a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ) told them that God would keep His covenant with them, but that the people of Canaan would become thorns in their side and their gods would ensnare Israel (2:1-3). When the nation of Israel heard these words of the Angel, they wept and even sacrificed to the Lord but they did not turn from their disobedience. Their sacrifices were an external action and not motivated by internal repentance.

Beginning in Judges 2:6, the author of Judges links the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 6:1-12:24) with the stories of the judges written in this book. He begins by reviewing the death of Joshua (2:6-9) and then provides an explanation of why Israel strayed away from God's commandments. Here are the words he writes, "When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel" (2:10). The generation following Joshua's death was a faithless generation, which resulted in God's judgment upon the entire nation. This faithless generation worshiped other gods and caused the Lord's anger to fall upon them (2:11-12). God's anger was unleashed by allowing these inhabitants of Canaan to oppress them (2:13-15) until they would cry out and He would raise up a judge to deliver them from oppression (2:16); however, Israel's deliverance would soon lead her back into disobedience (2:17-19), which caused the cycle to begin again (2:20-21). Instead of miraculously expelling Israel's enemies from the land, God left them there in order to test the nation's obedience to Him (2:22-23). If Israel would remove their enemies from the land, they would experience God's blessings; but if Israel refused to expel them and worshiped their gods, they would face God's judgment. Israel needed to choose whom they would serve.

*Dear God, may I fully obey Your commandments so that I might experience Your richest blessings.*

## **Judges 3:1-31**

It had only taken seven years for the children of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan (1405-1398 BC); however, some enemy tribes still remained scattered throughout the Promised Land and Israel was commanded to completely remove them. Moses (Deuteronomy 7) and Joshua (Joshua 23) had forewarned Israel that they were to remove all the people of the land lest they should be influenced to worship other gods and intermarry with their enemies. Unfortunately, Israel did not completely expel their enemies (Judges 1-2) and they ended up intermarrying and worshiping other gods (3:1-6). "So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years" (3:7-8). After the oppression had lasted for eight years, Israel finally cried out to God and He sent Othniel, who delivered them from their enemies and gave them rest in the land for the next forty years (3:9-11). Following nearly four decades of peace, Israel "...again did evil in the sight of the Lord" so He allowed Eglon, king of Moab, to overtake them for eighteen years (3:12-14). When Israel then cried out to God, He sent Ehud to deliver Israel from their enemies (3:15a). Ehud, a left-handed man, armed himself with a dagger (3:16) and was sent by Israel to Eglon with a tribute (3:15b), but the offering of gifts was simply a tactic for Ehud to get close to Eglon, who is described as being a "very fat man" (3:17). After Eglon had received the tribute, those standing together with them in the room were sent away when Ehud said that he had a secret message for the king (3:18-19). As soon as Ehud was alone with the Eglon in his private chamber, Ehud took the hidden dagger and thrust it so deeply into Eglon's belly that the fat closed around the dagger (3:20-22). Ehud made a quick escape from the king's private chambers, but the king's attendants became suspicious when the king did not open the doors to his chamber for an extended period of time (3:23-25a). When they could not wait any longer, the king's servants opened the door with a key and found him dead on the floor (3:25b). By the time Eglon was found dead, Ehud was far away and eventually returned to the children of Israel, who quickly attacked the people of Moab and subdued Moab (3:26-30a). Israel experienced rest in the land for eighty years (3:30b), which was the longest period of peace experienced by Israel during the time of the judges. After Ehud, Shamgar was also a judge and deliverer of Israel (3:31). Not much detail is given concerning his circumstances except that he killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad.

God passionately loved His people, Israel, but they continued to turn their back on Him by disregarding His commandments and worshiping other gods. Instead of abandoning the children of Israel for their disobedience, God heard their cries to Him and sent deliverers to free them from their oppressors. The Lord's continual forgiveness and patience should have caused Israel to worship and love Him as the one, true God; however, they continually walked away from Him and embraced the things of this world. The consequences Israel faced because of their disobedience should be a warning to any whose hearts are turned from God in exchange for the pleasures of this world.

*Dear God, may I embrace You while continually turning my back to the things of this world.*

## **Judges 4:1-5:31**

"When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel" (Judges 4:1-3). Three judges (Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar) had already been sent by God to deliver Israel from their oppressors but after the latest judge, Ehud, was dead the Israelites returned to their evil ways. God's judgment came upon them once again by an enemy overtaking them and oppressing them for twenty years. After two decades of oppression, Israel finally cried out to God and He sent another judge to Israel whose name was Deborah. She was a prophetess in Israel known for wisdom and discernment among the people (4:4-5). One day Deborah called for a man named Barak and commanded him to take 10,000 warriors to battle against Sisera, who would be defeated (4:6-7). Barak responded to her request by saying that the only way he would go to battle was if she accompanied him (4:8). Deborah agreed to go but said these words to Barak about his conditional agreement, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (4:9). Deborah did accompany Barak with an army of 10,000 soldiers and they swiftly defeated Sisera's army (4:10-15a, 16); however, Sisera escaped on foot (4:15b) and took refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber (4:17). It is obvious that Sisera had some type of peaceful relationship with Heber, but it appears that Heber's wife, Jael, did not share that same relationship. Jael initially received Sisera into her tent and hid him under a blanket, but after promising to keep him hidden from his enemies she quickly went into action (4:18-20). "Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died" (4:21). Not long after she had killed Sisera, Jael came out to meet Barak and showed him the body of Sisera inside of her tent (4:22). In this culture, being killed by a woman was disgraceful, but Jael's actions were a fulfillment of Deborah's words to Barak in Judges 4:9. Through the actions of both Barak and Jael, God brought victory over Sisera (commander of the army) and Jabin, king of Canaan (4:23-24). In celebration of Israel's victory over their enemies, Deborah and Barak sang a song that day as an expression of praise to God, which is recorded in Judges 5. Singing songs of praise were common expressions of worship throughout Israel's history and this song was most likely written by Deborah (see Judges 5:7), although Barak added his voice to the song (Judges 5:1). As Deborah praised God for His personal involvement in Israel's victory, modern-day worshipers should also be careful to express their praise to God for His goodness in their lives. Failure to give God thanks for His work reveals a selfish heart on the part of a believer. All glory goes to God for every good thing!

*Dear God, I praise You for all the victories You have given to me in my life.*

## Judges 6:1-40

Israel had been experiencing a period of judges, whom God used to turn the nation's attention back to Him. God's people were constantly influenced by the pagan tribes surrounding them and often guilty of worshiping other gods, which was a direct violation of His commandments. When Israel turned their hearts away from God, He allowed their enemies to oppress them until they finally cried out to Him for deliverance. God would respond to their cry by sending a judge to Israel who would free them from oppression and restore the nation's relationship with Him. Here are the judges God had already used to turn Israel back to Him: Othniel (Judges 3:7-11), Ehud (Judges 3:12-30), Shamgar (Judges 3:31), and Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5). Unfortunately, Israel would soon return to their evil ways after a judge would die.

After the time of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5), Israel had rest in the land for 40 years (Judges 5:31); however, the children of Israel "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (6:1a) and were oppressed by the Midianites for seven years (6:1b-2). This oppression was the worst they had faced during the time of the judges. During this seven-year oppression, Israel hid in caves/mountains out of fear (6:2); furthermore, during Israel's harvest of their crops, the Midianites would destroy their food supply and leave them without any sustenance (6:3-6). Israel's desperate situation caused them to cry out to the Lord and He sent a prophet to expose their sin and disobedience (6:7-10). About this same time that the prophet came to Israel, the Angel of the Lord (pre-incarnate Christ) appeared to Gideon who was threshing wheat in a hidden location so that the Midianites could not destroy it (6:11). The Angel said to Gideon, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (6:12). In response to the words of the Angel, Gideon said, "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 forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (6:13). Gideon refused to believe that God was with Israel because of their current circumstances, but the Angel assured Gideon that God was going to use him to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites (6:14-16). Gideon was still skeptical about the words of the Angel so he requested a sign from God that he could lead Israel to victory over the Midianites (6:17). The Angel did give Gideon a sign by miraculously causing fire to come out of the rock where Gideon had placed an offering he had prepared for the Angel of the Lord (6:18-21). Upon witnessing this supernatural act of the Angel, Gideon realized that he had been in the presence of the Lord and built Him an altar as an act of worship (6:22-24).

On the same night Gideon built the altar, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. Then build an altar to the LORD your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down" (6:25-26, NLT). Gideon obeyed the word of the Lord and took ten men with him to carry out the command of the Lord (6:27). When the men of the city discovered what Gideon had done, they demanded that his father, Joash, bring him out so that they could kill him (6:28-30). Joash refused to bring out his son to the men of the city and told them that if Baal was real, he could take revenge on his own (6:31). From that day forward Gideon's father referred to him as Jerubbaal, which means let Baal contend (6:32). Soon after this incident, the Midianites and Amalekites gathered themselves together to fight against Israel but the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he quickly assembled an army of soldiers (6:33-35). Still having a few doubts concerning the outcome of this battle, Gideon asked God to provide another sign that He would give Israel the victory through him (6:36-40). Gideon laid out a fleece asking that it would be wet with dew the next morning, while the rest of the ground surrounding it is dry (6:36-37). God answered his request (6:38). Gideon then asked for another sign, but this time he asked that the fleece would be dry and the ground surrounding the fleece would be wet with dew (6:39). Once again, God answered Gideon's request and proved that He would give Israel the victory by his hands (6:40). The actions of Gideon demonstrate that God understands our lack of faith and is sometimes willing to strengthen our faith through performing the miraculous.

*Dear God, allow me to see a sign of Your presence with me.*

## Judges 7:1-25

The book of Judges is a record of God using specific men and women to deliver Israel from their oppressors and guide them back into an obedient relationship with Him. Numerous judges were needed throughout this time in Israel's history because the nation would turn from God once the judge had freed Israel from oppression and died. Under Israel's judge Othniel (Judges 3:7-11), Israel was oppressed 8 years and then experienced 40 years of peace. Israel then disobeyed God and faced another 18 years of oppression until Ehud (Judges 3:12-30) delivered them, which gave them 80 years of rest in the land. Shamgar (Judges 3:31) was a judge, but not much is known about his reign. Israel then experienced another 20 years of oppression because of their disobedience, but God sent Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5) to deliver His people and give them 40 years of peace. Once again, Israel did evil in the sight of God and was oppressed for 7 years until God called out a man named Gideon (Judges 6) to give them victory over the Midianites. Gideon was skeptical about God using him to give Israel victory over their enemies, but God provided three supernatural signs (Judges 6:19-24; 6:36-38; 6:39-40) in order to prove that he would destroy the Midianites.

With full confidence that God was with him, Gideon (also called Jerubbaal, see Judges 6:28-32) took the army that he had gathered (6:33-35) and camped "...beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley" (7:1). While they were camped there the Lord spoke to Gideon and said, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me'" (7:2). Although it seems odd that God would require Gideon to cut down on the amount of soldiers accompanying him to battle, the Lord wanted to make sure that Israel knew that it was His power rather than theirs that gave the victory. Gideon first cut down the number of warriors from 22,000 to 10,000 by allowing anyone "fearful and afraid" go home (7:3); however, the Lord still thought there were too many soldiers so He commanded Gideon to take those who remained down to the water where He would reduce the number even more (7:4). When Gideon arrived at the water with his army of 10,000 men the Lord said, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream" (7:5, NLT). The 300 men who used their hands to drink the water were the soldiers God told Gideon to take into battle against the Midianites (7:6-8), whose army was said to be "as numerous as locusts" (7:12). Taking 300 men to battle against a very large army does not make sense humanly speaking; however, God is capable of accomplishing the miraculous even when the circumstance appears to be impossible. God commanded Gideon to go down that same night and overtake the Midianites, but He also told Gideon that if he was scared he could take his servant, Purah, and listen in on a conversation in the enemy camp that would strengthen his hands against the Midianites (7:9-11a). Since Gideon was fearful, he decided to secretly take Purah with him to the enemy encampment and there they heard a man recounting a dream he had and the dream was interpreted by another man as God delivering the Midianites into the hand of Gideon (7:11b-14). When Gideon heard the words of this man, he worshiped the Lord and returned to the camp of Israel where he divided his army of 300 men into three companies and gave each of them a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a torch to go inside the pitcher (7:15-16). These tools would be used to make it appear as if the Midianite camp had been surrounded by a whole host of Israelite soldiers. A little after midnight when the Midianites were asleep, Gideon had the three companies surround their camp, blow the trumpets, break the pitchers to reveal the torches, and shout "The sword of the Lord and Gideon!" (7:17-20). When the Midianites awoke to this chaos, they ran around in a panic and even turned their swords on each other because of the confusion (7:21-22). Those Midianites who escaped from the camp were then pursued by additional warriors from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh (7:23). Gideon also enlisted the tribe of Ephraim to prevent the escaped Midianites from crossing the Jordan River (7:24-25). God had given Gideon and the children of Israel an incredible victory over the Midianites through unorthodox means. Their knowledge that God had helped them would hopefully bring Israel back into an obedient relationship with Him.

*Dear God, thank You for overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles.*

## **Judges 8:1-35**

Gideon had been called out by God to deliver the nation of Israel from the oppression of the Midianites, which had been occurring for seven years (Judges 6:1-24). Although Gideon was skeptical of God using him to free the people from bondage, the Lord gave him several signs to prove that he would surely lead Israel in victory over the people of Midian (Judges 6:36-40). Gideon quickly formed an army of 32,000 warriors (Judges 6:33-35; see also Judges 7:3), but God reduced the army to 300 men (Judges 7:3-8) in order to ensure that Israel could not claim victory in their own strength (Judges 7:2). Through God's power and an unorthodox battle strategy, Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7:16-22). After the initial surprise attack of the Midianites by Gideon's 300 men, he called on other tribes (Naphtali, Asher, Manasseh, and Ephraim) to assist him in pursuing the small amount of people who had escaped (Judges 7:23-25). In an act of jealousy, the men of Ephraim became upset with Gideon because he had not involved them in the initial attack on Midian, but Gideon was able to avert the conflict by praising Ephraim for their actions concerning the escaped enemies (8:1-3; see also Judges 7:24-25). When this conflict was resolved, Gideon and his army of 300 men continued to pursue the 15,000 Midianites who had escaped the slaughter of the 120,000 other Midianites (8:4, 10). His army was exhausted from their pursuit so they asked the men of Succoth to provide some food in order to gain some strength (8:5). The leaders of Succoth refused to give Gideon's men bread to eat so he promised to return and punish them after he had captured Zebah and Zalmunna (8:6-7). Gideon's army traveled a little further and asked the men of Penuel to give them food, but they also refused so Gideon promised to return and tear down the tower in their city (8:8-9). Even though they were exhausted from the battle and pursuit of those who escaped, Gideon's men continued to chase the escaped Midianites until they had captured Zebah and Zalmunna and killed the remaining 15,000 enemy soldiers (8:10-13). Upon returning from battle with Zebah and Zalmunna in custody, Gideon punished the men of Succoth, who had refused to give his men food, by having their bodies dragged over thorns and briars (8:14-16). Gideon also visited the men of Penuel, who had earlier refused to give his army food, and "...tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city" (8:17). He then killed Zebah and Zalmunna, which completed Israel's victory over the Midianites and gave them 40 years of rest (8:18-21, 28).

"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.' But Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you'" (8:22-23). Gideon showed great wisdom in guiding the people to desire God alone as their king; however, Gideon made a prideful request that all the people of Israel give him the golden earrings plundered from the Midianites (8:24). Gideon's indulgence in the spoils of battle may have been a way to make himself great in the eyes of the people, even though he did not want to be their king. The children of Israel gladly handed over their golden earrings which totaled over 40 pounds (8:25-26). Gideon then melted down the golden earrings and made it into an ephod (8:27a), which was probably an idol at this time in Israel's history. Unfortunately, Israel ended up worshiping the ephod Gideon had created and "it became a snare to Gideon and to his house" (8:27b). It appears that Gideon also continued to stray away from God until he died, as he took to himself many wives and concubines (8:28-32). "So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel" (8:33-35). How quickly Israel forsook God and returned to worshiping other gods.

*Dear God, please keep me from turning my back on You.*

## **Judges 9:1-57**

Following the death of Gideon (Judges 8:29-32), the judge who had delivered Israel from the oppression of the Midianites (Judges 7), the Israelites turned again to other gods and "...did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side" (Judges 8:33-34). The children of Israel also refused to show kindness to the house of Gideon even though he had done so much good for them (Judges 8:35). Without Gideon ruling over Israel as a judge, a struggle for leadership and power over Israel began to surface with Abimelech who was one of Gideon's sons. Abimelech went to Shechem and spoke with his mother's family saying, "Ask the leading citizens of Shechem whether they want to be ruled by all seventy of Gideon's sons or by one man. And remember that I am your own flesh and blood!" (9:1-2, NLT). The men of Shechem decided to support Abimelech and even gave him money, which he used to hire "worthless and reckless men" (9:3-4). Abimelech took these men and their first rebellious act was to kill all of his brothers; however, Jotham (his youngest brother) hid himself and escaped the mass murder (9:5). After this horrendous act, the men of Shechem gathered themselves and made Abimelech their king (9:6).

When Jotham heard what his brother had done, he stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and spoke a parable of the trees (9:7), which is written in Judges 9:8-15. Jotham's parable spoke of the trees who repeatedly asked for someone to rule over them, but three times (olive tree, fig tree, vine) they had been refused (9:8-13). After three refusals, the trees finally asked the bramble (thorn-bush) to rule over them even though the bush was considered inferior to the others (9:14). The thorn-bush agreed to rule over them as long as they would "...take shelter in my shade" (9:15). It was impossible for the thorn-bush to provide shade so this statement by the bush was made in pride. Jotham revealed that the thorn-bush in his parable represented Abimelech, who had elevated himself in pride in an attempt to rise to power. Jotham then confronted the men of Shechem and asked them if they were honoring the memory of Gideon by making Abimelech their king (9:16-19). If the men of Shechem had not acted in sincerity and truth, Jotham asked that they be destroyed along with Abimelech (9:20-21). Three years passed since Abimelech had come to power, but then the Lord caused a spirit of trouble between the men of Shechem and Abimelech so that those who dwelled in Shechem planned a revolt against Abimelech (9:22-25). This revolt was led by Gaal, son of Ebed, but Abimelech soon found out about their plan when Zebul sent word to him while he was away (9:26-33). Abimelech quickly formed a plan to attack Gaal and he eventually took the city, killed the people, demolished the city, and polluted the land with salt (9:34-45). The events described in Judges 9:46-49 are probably further details concerning Abimelech's attack on the people of Shechem. After his defeat of Shechem, Abimelech attacked and captured the town of Thebez but the men and women escaped to a tower and barricaded themselves inside (9:50-51). Abimelech decided to set the tower on fire, but as he was standing near the entrance a woman dropped a millstone from the roof and it crushed his skull (9:52-53). "Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, 'Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, A woman killed him.' So his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place" (9:54-55). By dying in this matter, "...God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (9:56-57). Although it may seem like those who rebel are getting away with their selfish acts, their actions will eventually be punished.

*Dear God, guard me from leading in foolishness and pride.*

## **Judges 10:1-12:15**

Several judges had already presided over the nation of Israel and they were primarily used by God in order to deliver Israel from her oppressors and bring His people back into a right relationship with Him; however, the people would often rebel and invite more oppression into their lives. Under Israel's judge Othniel (Judges 3:7-11), Israel was oppressed 8 years and then experienced 40 years of peace. Israel disobeyed God again and faced another 18 years of oppression until Ehud (Judges 3:12-30) delivered them, which gave them 80 years of rest in the land. Shamgar (Judges 3:31) was a judge, but not much is known about his reign. Israel then experienced another 20 years of oppression because of their disobedience, but God sent Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5) to deliver His people and give them 40 years of peace. Once again, Israel did evil in the sight of God and was oppressed for 7 years until God called out a man named Gideon (Judges 6) to give them victory over the Midianites (Judges 7-8). The defeat of the Midianites brought Israel 40 years of peace until Gideon's son, Abimelech (Judges 9), led a rebellion which brought civil war in the land. After Abimelech was destroyed (Judges 9:50-57), Tola (Judges 10:1-2) judged Israel 23 years and then Jair (Judges 10:3-4) judged Israel 22 years.

Unfortunately, Israel had not learned their lesson even though they had been repeatedly oppressed because of their continued disobedience and rebellion against God. "Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him" (10:6-7). Israel's failure to worship God alone brought an 18 year oppression from the Philistines and Ammonites (10:7-9). When Israel could not handle the oppression any longer, they cried out to the Lord for forgiveness (10:10), but God rejected their cries and told them to call out to the other gods for deliverance (10:11-14). Upon hearing God's cold response to their cries of distress they said, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray" (10:15). Israel decided to put away the foreign gods and serve the Lord, which got the attention of God and "His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel" (10:16). As a result of Israel's repentance and lifestyle change, God allowed another judge to be raised up to deliver Israel from her oppression (10:17-18). Jephthah, a mighty man of valor, was driven out of his home at a young age because he was the son of a prostitute (11:1-3); however, after some time had passed, the elders of Gilead approached him to be their leader in a war against the Ammonites (11:4-6). Jephthah agreed to be their leader against the Ammonites if they would make him their head after he was victorious over their enemies (11:7-9). The elders of Gilead agreed to the terms (11:10-11) so Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon and he told them that he was angry because Israel had taken some of his land (11:12-13). Jephthah responded to the king by declaring that their land was actually the land of the Amorites when Israel took possession of it and Israel had remained there for hundreds of years because God had given the land to them (11:14-27). The words of Jephthah were not well-received by the king of Ammon (11:28) so the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he made his way to battle against the people of Ammon (11:29). Before entering into battle, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord saying, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lords, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (11:30-31). Jephthah eventually fought against Ammon and the Lord delivered Israel's enemies into his hands (11:32-33), but when he returned home from battle, his only child was the first thing to come out of the doors of his house to meet him (11:34). Jephthah was distraught by the fact that it was his daughter whom he would have to offer as a sacrifice to the Lord in fulfillment of his vow (11:35). His daughter encouraged Jephthah to keep his vow to the Lord, but she requested to be allowed to lament her virginity for two months before the vow was fulfilled (11:36-37). Jephthah permitted her to go and then she returned to her father, who carried out his vow to the Lord (11:38-40). Scholars have debated whether Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter or if she was actually sentenced to be a lifelong virgin. Scripture seems to indicate that Jephthah sacrificed his only child as a fulfillment of his vow. No matter which view a person takes, Jephthah's vow was made in haste and should be a warning to anyone who would make a vow to the Lord without thinking about the ramifications. Jephthah then had to deal with Ephraim's jealousy over his military success (12:1-6), but he went on to rule Israel for 6 years until he died (12:7). After Jephthah judged Israel, there were several judges to follow: Ibzan judged Israel 7 years (12:8-10); Elon judged Israel 10 years (12:11-12); and Abdon judged Israel 8 years (12:13-15).

*Dear God, may any promise or vow made to You not be done in haste.*

## **Judges 13:1-25**

God had sent 12 judges over a period of 300 years in Israel's history (1383 - 1043 BC) in order to deliver the disobedient nation from oppression and turn their attention back to God. The judges would temporarily free Israel from oppression and usher in a time of peace; however, God's people repeatedly returned to their disobedient ways and brought more judgment upon themselves. The final judge mentioned in this book of Judges is a man named Samson, who is probably the most recognized judge during this time in Israel's history. When the children of Israel did evil in the sight of God following Abdon (Judges 12:13-15), God judged the nation with 40 years of oppression from the Philistines (13:1); however, there was a glimmer of hope as God was raising up Samson to deliver the nation of Israel from their enemies.

A man named Manoah was married to a barren woman, but their lives were about to change as an Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and said, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (13:2-5). The child to be born would become a lifelong Nazirite, which meant he was set apart to God for special use and therefore could not drink wine, cut his hair, or touch a dead body. When the woman told her husband what the Angel had said, Manoah prayed to the Lord and asked Him to send the Angel once again to teach them what they should do for this coming child (13:6-8). The Lord answered Manoah's prayer and the Angel of God appeared to them and repeated the same things He had initially spoken to Manoah's wife (13:9-14). Upon hearing these words directly from the Angel, Manoah said, "Let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You" (13:15). The Angel of the Lord responded to Manoah's request saying, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord. (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the Lord.)" (13:16). Manoah's curiosity about the Angel was heightened so he asked, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?" (13:17). The Angel responded to Manoah's question by asking, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?" (13:18). At this moment when Manoah offered the grain offering, the Angel did a "wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on" (13:19). As the flame from the offering "...went up toward heaven from the altar, the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar!" (13:20). Upon seeing this supernatural happening, Manoah and his wife fell on their faces and when the Angel did not appear to them again, they knew He was the Angel of the Lord (13:21). Their reaction evidenced that they believed they had been in the very presence of God! Both of them feared for their lives and thought they would die because they had seen God (13:22); however, Manoah's wife said, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have told us such things as these at this time" (13:23). "So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol" (13:24-25). Although Israel was in the midst of a 40 year oppression, God's plan was unfolding and He was about to send a deliverer to rescue them from bondage.

*Dear God, even when it may not seem like You are at work, help me to remember that Your plan is always unfolding.*

## **Judges 14:1-20**

Samson was born to Manoah and his barren wife, who were told by the Angel of the Lord that the child would be a Nazirite used to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression (Judges 13). Becoming a Nazirite meant that Samson would be set aside for God's special use and was to abstain from drinking wine, cutting his hair, or touching a dead body (13:3-5). Abstaining from these outward actions would evidence an inner dedication to God. When Samson grew older, he went down to Timnah and saw a woman among the Philistines whom he desired to take as his wife (14:1). Samson returned to his parents to tell them that he had found a woman to marry (14:2), but his parents encouraged him to find a wife among his own people (14:3a). In this culture, marriages were arranged by the parents but Samson rejected their advice and told his father that the woman of the Philistines pleased him well (14:3b). Although the Mosaic law prohibited Israelites from marrying those from pagan nations (see Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3), Samson's parents determined to get this Philistine woman as a wife for their son. The writer of Judges does provide some further insight into God's allowance of Samson's parents to permit their son to marry a Philistine, "But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (14:4). God turned a seemingly disobedient situation into a way for the Israelites to be delivered from Philistine oppression.

Samson and his parents made the journey to Timnah and when they arrived, Samson must have gone by himself into the vineyards where a young lion came against him, but the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and "...he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done" (14:5-6). His parents must have gone ahead of him to begin the betrothal arrangements, so when Samson arrived he was able to speak with this Philistine woman (14:7). Samson returned home after the betrothal arrangements were made and then he came back to Timnah to marry the Philistine woman one year later (the approximate betrothal period) but on his journey to Timnah he stopped to see the carcass of the dead lion and scooped out some honey left by a swarm of bees (14:8-9). Coming in contact with the dead carcass of the lion would have been a violation of Samson's Nazirite vow. Samson then continued on his journey where the wedding ceremonies were being prepared by his father (14:10a). As was the custom of young men, Samson threw a big feast and when the bride's parents saw what Samson had done they gave him 30 men to be his companions (14:10b-11). During the seven day wedding feast, Samson said to these 30 companions, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing" (14:12-13a). The 30 companions agreed to the challenge (14:13b), but after three days of confusion the men said to the Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? Is that not so?" (14:14-15). The threats of these men caused Samson's wife to fear so she secretly begged him to tell her the meaning of the riddle, but Samson refused to tell her the meaning (14:16). The woman continued to beg and plead with Samson until he finally gave in and told her the meaning of the riddle and she, in turn, told the men (14:17). On the last day of the feast, the men appeared before Samson and gave the proper interpretation of the riddle (14:18) but "...then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's house" (14:19). Samson's wife was then given to his best man so that she became his wife rather than Samson's (14:20). Although these circumstances were disappointing to Samson, God was at work to bring good from what seemed bad.

*Dear God, thank You for using negative circumstances for good.*

## **Judges 15:1-20**

Samson, the final judge mentioned in this book of Judges, had a miraculous birth to a barren woman (Judges 13) and it was revealed that he would deliver Israel out of the 40 year oppression they had been experiencing by the hands of the Philistines (Judges 13:1-5). After the birth of Samson there is very little information about his early life; however, the storyline picks up when Samson falls in love with and marries a Philistine woman (Judges 14). The marriage practically ended before it even began. Samson had introduced a riddle during the marriage feast and said to the male guests who had been invited by the bride's parents, "If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing" (Judges 14:12-13). The men could not solve the riddle so they threatened Samson's wife to extract the answer from him. She eventually deceived Samson into telling her the answer and the men were able to solve the riddle, which made Samson angry and caused him to return to his home without taking his wife.

After some time had passed, Samson returned to his wife's father to take his wife (15:1) but her father refused his request and attempted to appease Samson by offering his wife's younger sister (15:2). Samson was angered by the father's response (15:3) so he "...went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves" (15:4-5). Samson's act of revenge angered the Philistines so they burned the father and his daughter, Samson's wife (15:6). The actions of the Philistines against his wife's family resulted in Samson unleashing a great slaughter upon them (15:7-8). Taking revenge on others only results in more revenge. Angered by Samson's slaughter of their people, the Philistines gathered an army and requested that the men of Judah release Samson to them so that he could be held accountable for his crime (15:9-10). The men of Judah feared the Philistines so they decided to arrest Samson and deliver him into their hands (15:11-12a). Samson willingly gave himself to the men of Judah but asked that they not kill him themselves (15:12b), so they instead tied him up securely and delivered him to the Philistines (15:13). When the Philistines saw that Samson had been captured, they shouted against him but "...then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it" (15:14-17). The powerful actions of Samson indicated to Israel that God was with them and delivering them out of the hands of the Philistines through the strength of Samson. Samson's victory over the Philistines had left him exhausted and thirsty so he asked the Lord to provide water for him (15:18). God heard the cry of Samson and supernaturally provided water so that "his spirit returned, and he revived" (15:19a). In response to God miraculously providing water for him, Samson called the place of the miracle En Hakkore which means spring of the caller (15:19b). Although Samson was not perfect in all of his actions, God greatly blessed him by allowing him to defeat the Philistines and judge Israel for 20 years (15:20).

*Dear God, I'm amazed that You use me even when I'm not perfect.*

## **Judges 16:1-31**

Samson was the last judge during this time in Israel's history (1383 – 1043 BC). The nation had experienced 40-year oppression (Judges 13:1) by the hands of the Philistines until God brought up Samson as the one who would deliver them from bondage. From the time of his birth, Samson was a Nazirite which meant that he was set aside for God's use (Judges 13). As a Nazirite, Samson was required to evidence his dedication to God by abstaining from three things: drinking wine, cutting his hair, and touching a dead body (Judges 13:3-5). At times Samson struggled to keep his Nazirite vow and these struggles were often exposed through his weakness for women. Samson fell in love with and married a Philistine woman; however, the marriage practically ended before it began (Judges 14). The abrupt end of the marriage left a rift between Samson and the Philistines which eventually resulted in Samson flaunting his strength and bringing defeat to the Philistines (Judges 15).

Unfortunately, Samson's weakness for women leads him to Gaza (a Philistine city) where he spends time with a prostitute (16:1). When the Philistines found out that Samson was in their city, they surrounded the prostitute's residence and waited until morning for Samson to exit so they could kill him (16:2). "And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron" (16:3). Samson's actions in Gaza exhibited the great strength given to him by God and probably made the Philistines cower in fear. Sometime after this incident, Samson's weakness for women surfaced again when he fell in love with a woman named Delilah (16:4). When the leaders of the Philistines became aware of Samson's new-found love, they employed Delilah to find out the secret of Samson's strength so that they could overpower him and eventually kill him (16:5a). If Delilah was able to tell the Philistines the secret of Samson's strength, they promised to give her a very large sum of money (16:5b). Without hesitation Delilah began questioning Samson concerning the secret of his strength saying, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you" (16:6). Samson responded to Delilah's question by lying and saying, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (16:7). Upon hearing this information, the Philistines went into action and Delilah bound Samson; however, when she yelled "The Philistines are upon you," Samson easily broke the strings which bound him and the secret of his strength was not known (16:8-9). When Delilah knew that Samson had lied to her she said to him, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with" (16:10). Samson lied to her two more times (16:11-14) and Delilah finally became frustrated by his lying game. She kept pestering him daily about the secret of his strength until Samson finally became weary of her constant questioning and revealed that his strength was wrapped up in the fact that his hair had never been cut (16:15-17). After Delilah knew that Samson had told "...her all his heart" she lulled him to sleep on her lap while the Philistines came in and shaved his hair off (16:18-19). After his head had been shaved, Delilah yelled that the Philistines were upon him and Samson awoke thinking that he would overcome them as he had before; however, the Lord had departed from him and his strength was gone. Samson's disobedience and weak character had finally caught up with him and he was left without the power of God.

"Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven" (16:21-22). The Philistines worshiped and rejoiced in their god, Dagon, whom they attributed with giving them the victory over Samson (16:23-24). During this time of celebration they brought Samson out of prison and placed him between two pillars so that they could mock him (16:25). Samson asked the young boy who had led him into the temple to lean him against the pillars that supported the structure and then Samson cried out to God saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" (16:26-28). Upon hearing Samson's prayer, God gave him strength one more time and he pushed down the pillars that supported the temple so that in his final action he killed more Philistines than he had killed during his life (16:29-31). Although Samson's life had been marred by many bad choices, God allowed him to finish his life in victory.

*Dear God, help me to finish well.*

## **Judges 17:1-18:31**

The book of Judges mostly contains the history of fourteen judges who were sent by God at different times to the disobedient nation of Israel (Judges 3:7-16:31). Each time Israel disobeyed the Lord, He would send judgment upon them by allowing their enemies to conquer them and when their enemies had victory over them, Israel would cry out to the Lord for deliverance. Throughout the time of the judges (1383-1043 BC), God's deliverance often arrived for Israel whenever He would send judges to be victorious over their enemies and call the people to repent and return to the Lord. Israel's relationship with God during this time is best described as unstable. Disobedience led to oppression. Oppression led to Israel crying out to God for help. A cry for help led to God sending a judge to deliver Israel from oppression. Israel would experience a time of peace until they fell back into disobedience. The cycle would begin again.

In the final chapters of Judges (17-21), various stories of Israel's disobedience are documented in order to communicate the extreme apostasy and immorality that characterized this time in the history of Israel. Two major stories make up the conclusion of the book of Judges: Micah and the Danites' idolatry (Judges 17-18) as well as immoral actions of a priest and certain men of Gibeah (Judges 19-21). The first story is focused on a man named Micah who stole 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother (17:1-2). When Micah found out that his mother had pronounced a curse on the one who stole the silver, he confessed his wrongdoing to her and she surprisingly blessed him (17:2). After Micah had returned the money to his mother she said to him, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you" (17:3). She then paid a silversmith who made two different idols for Micah to place in his home (17:4). The actions of Micah and his mother were strictly forbidden according to God's law, which prohibited anyone from creating a carved image for worship (Exodus 20:2). In addition to having a shrine and household idols, Micah consecrated his son as his own personal priest (17:5). Setting up his own priest was also forbidden since priests were only permitted of the tribe of Levi (Leviticus 13). Even though this was only one example of what was taking place in the nation of Israel, it seems like everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes (17:6). To make matters worse, a man of the tribe of Levi was searching for a place to stay when he came to the mountains of Ephraim and took up residence in the house of Micah (17:7-8). Whenever Micah found out that the wandering man was a Levite, Micah asked him to stay in his home and become his priest (17:9-10). The man agreed and Micah decided to pay the Levite ten shekels of silver a year and also provide food as well as clothing (17:10-11). "So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, 'Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!'" (17:12-13). The actions of Micah and the Levite were serious sins and reflected an overall lack of obedience throughout the nation of Israel.

After the Levite had settled into Micah's home as his personal priest, the tribe of Dan was searching for a land to dwell since they had not yet settled in the land that had been designated to them (18:1). The Danites sent five men to spy out a land and as they journeyed through the mountains of Ephraim, they lodged with Micah (18:2). While they were dwelling at Micah's house, they recognized the voice of the young Levite and inquired about why he was staying with Micah (18:3). The Levite revealed to them that he had been hired by Micah to be his personal priest and the men then asked him if the journey that they were on would be prosperous (18:4-5). The priest told them that the presence of the Lord would be with them (18:6) so the men continued to Laish and returned to their people with a good report (18:7-10). Upon hearing the report of the spies, they sent 600 Danites on a journey to overtake Laish (18:11); however, on their journey to Laish, the five spies had them stop into the house of Micah once again and they persuaded the young Levite to become a priest over their tribe (18:12-19). The priest willingly agreed to a priest over the Danites so he took the idols and departed with them to Laish (18:20-26). Upon their arrival in Laish, they struck the people with the edge of the sword, burned the city, and then rebuilt it (18:27-29). Unfortunately, they continued in their sinful ways by setting up for themselves Micah's carved image and consecrating unqualified priests to lead them (18:30-31). The tribe of Dan's disobedience would negatively influence many generations to come.

*Dear God, may I worship You alone.*

## **Judges 19:1-21:25**

In the final five chapters of the book of Judges (17-21), a couple stories of Israel's disobedience are described so that future readers could understand the extreme apostasy and immorality that characterized this time in Israel's history. There are two main stories which comprise the conclusion to this book: Micah and the Danites' idolatry (Judges 17-18) as well as the immoral actions of a priest and certain men of Gibeah (Judges 19-21). The first story focused more on Israel worshiping false gods while this second story focuses more on the immorality plaguing the people of God. Instead of speaking generally about the immorality in Israel during the time of the judges, the author provides a specific example of a Levite from the mountains of Israel who "...took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah" (19:1). Priests were permitted to marry (Leviticus 21:7, 13-14), but a concubine was typically a slave woman whose purpose was to carry on the duties of the household and provide sexual pleasure for her husband. Having a concubine implied that the man had multiple wives, but the concubines were often treated unfairly and did not possess the same privileges as a wife; therefore, this Levite was not living in a way that was acceptable to God. This Levite's concubine was eventually unfaithful to him and she departed for her father's house where she resided for four months (19:2). After four months of separation, the Levite visited her father's house and brought his wife back with him after he had lodged there for five days (19:3-10). On their journey home they stopped in the city of Gibeah and were invited to lodge in the home of a man, who knew that the Levite and his wife would not be safe in the city square (19:11-21). "As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house and beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!" (19:22). The man of the house refused to release his male guest to the perverted men of the tribe of Benjamin (19:23), so in a disgusting compromise the host offered to release his virgin daughter and the man's concubine to fulfill their sexual desires (19:24). The men of the city rejected this offer but the Levite became fearful of the men, presented his wife to them, and they sexually abused her all night long (19:25). The men let her go in the morning and then she returned to the door of the host's home where her master was lodging (19:26). "When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. And he said to her, 'Get up and let us be going.' But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place" (19:27-28). The actions of this priest and these men are unfathomable and represent the extreme immorality plaguing the nation of Israel during this time. Even though the Levite was ultimately responsible for the death of his wife, he was angered by the actions of these Benjamite men of Gibeah so "...when he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel" (19:29). Along with the parts of her body the Levite man probably sent a message describing what had been done to this woman by the men of Benjamin. When the territories received the body part and message, their anger against the men of Benjamin was kindled and they vowed revenge on them (19:30). An army of 400,000 men gathered together against these perverted men of Gibeah (20:1-11) and requested that the people of Gibeah hand over the men who were responsible for the death of this woman (20:12-13). Rather than surrendering these men to the army of Israel, they formed an army of 26,000 men and to fight against Israel (20:14-17). Two times the army of Israel went up to defeat the men of Benjamin but they were defeated (20:18-25). Israel's defeat was most likely a punishment for the nation's tolerance of such immorality. Following their second defeat by the hands of the people of Gibeah, Israel cried out to God and He gave them the victory over the tribe of Benjamin and only 600 Benjamite men survived the slaughter of the Israelites (20:26-48). Although Israel had made an oath not to allow anyone to give their daughters in marriage to the remaining 600 Benjamite men (21:1), the rest of Israel cried out at the reality of one tribe's extinction from the twelve (21:1-7). This dilemma resolved itself when Israel discovered that no soldiers from Jabesh Gilead had come to help in the battle against Gibeah, so they killed everyone in that city except 400 virgins and gave them to the men of Benjamin so that their tribe would remain (21:8-18). This still left 200 Benjamite men without wives so they found a "loophole" in their oath and instead of giving them wives, they commanded them to steal wives from the daughters of Shiloh (21:19-24). The concluding words of the book of Judges read like this: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). This is an unfortunate description of the people who were supposed to be worshiping and obeying God alone.

*Dear God, keep me from doing what is right in my own eyes.*