

JUDGES - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- Why did God do it/allow it?
- Why did He record it for our study?
- What should it teach us today?

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of Judges? Who do you think wrote this book which includes events scattered over 300 years?

To many people's minds this book is perhaps the lowest point in Israel's Old Testament history. Yet we can see several indications that God is still doing His very best to reach these people who are so prone to rush off to worship the "gods" of the Canaanites. This book could be described as the ups and downs of God's people depending on whether they were faithful to Him or worshiping other "gods". It is particularly noteworthy to read in the midst of this book several passages that indicate that someone even in the days of the Judges or soon thereafter recognized the difficulties they were having and the reasons why.

Judges 10:16:

Biblia Hebraica:

וַיִּגְיוּ חֲשֵׁן עַל כּוֹפֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"...kai; wjl igoyuchsen ej tw/ kopw/ Israhl." (*Septuagint*)

"...and His soul is grieved with the misery of Israel." (*Young's Literal*)

"...And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the

LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."

(*Geneva, KJV, Darby, ASV, NASB*)

"...And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel." (*NKJ*)

"...and He could not bear the miseries of Israel." (*Tanakh*)

"...and he became indignant over the misery of Israel." (*RSV*)

"...and he was grieved by their misery." (*TLB, NLT*)

"...And he could bear Israel's misery no longer." (*NIV, NASB 1995 Footnote:*

His soul was short with the misery of Israel)

"...and the plight of Israel become intolerable to him." (*Anchor*)

"...he could no longer bear the plight of Israel." (*REB*)

"...and he became troubled over Israel's distress." (*GNB*)

"...Finally, there came a time when the LORD could no longer stand to see them suffer." (*CEV*)

"... So the LORD could not bear to have Israel suffer any longer." (*God's Word*)

"...and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer." (*NRSV*)

"...who could bear Israel's suffering no longer." (*New Jerusalem*)

"...So he felt sorry for them when he saw their suffering." (*NCV*)

"...The Lord had pity on His people and couldn't stand by and see them suffer any longer." (*Clear Word*)

"...and His heart became impatient over the misery of Israel." (*Amplified Bible*)

Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25:

Biblia Hebraica:

וַיְהִי כִּי יָשָׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הַיַּם וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"...in those days there is no king in Israel, each that which is right in his own eyes doth." (*Septuagint*)

"...in those days there is no king in Israel, each that which is right in his own eyes doth." (*Young's Literal*)

"In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was good in his

owne eyes." (*Geneva*)

“In those days *there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*”
(KJV)

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.”
(Darby, NKJ, ASV, RSV, Amplified, NEB, REB, NASB, NASB 1995)

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Each one did what was right in his own eyes.” (Anchor)

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best.” (NAB)

“In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did as he pleased.” (Jerusalem; Tanakh)

“In those days there was no king in Israel, and everyone did as he saw fit.” (NJB)

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” (NIV)

“(For in those days Israel had no king, so everyone did whatever he wanted to—whatever seemed right in his own eyes.)” (TLB)

“In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.” (NLT)

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did what seemed right in his own eyes.”
(Leeser)

“In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.”
(NRSV)

“There was no king in Israel at that time; everyone did whatever they wanted.” (GNB)

“This was before kings ruled Israel, so all the Israelites did whatever they thought was right.” (CEV)

“In those days Israel didn’t have a king. Everyone did whatever he considered right.” (God’s Word)

“At that time Israel did not have a king, so everyone did what seemed right.” (NCV)

“In the old days of Israel before the monarchy, men lived by the best light they had.” (Knox)

“In those days there was no king or central government in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes, especially if he had money. This was the case with Micah.” (Clear Word)

“Judges is the history of the Hebrew people from the death of Joshua, c. 1375 B.C., to the establishment of the monarchy, c. 1050 B.C., a period of approximately 300 years. The book takes its name from the title by which the men who governed Israel during this period were known. These judges were appointed by God (Judges 3:15; 4:6; 6:12; etc.). Civil and military authority centered in the office of judge, though the book of Judges stresses principally the military leadership of the judges in delivering Israel from foreign bondage. Since their exploits were largely military in character, the term ‘chieftain’ would seem to describe their function more accurately. The need for such leaders arose out of the prevailing apostasy, anarchy, and foreign oppression. The more illustrious of the judges, such as Gideon, Deborah, and Samson, became national heroes.

“Ancient Jewish tradition makes Samuel the author of the book (see Babylonian Talmud *Baba Bathra* 14b, 15a). The recurring expression, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), indicates that the book was written after the establishment of the monarchy under Saul. However, it must have been written before David’s victory over the Jebusites and his capture of Jerusalem early in his reign (2 Sa 5:6–9; cf. Judges 1:21; 19:10, 11).

“The occupation of Canaan by the Hebrews was a gradual process (see Judges 2:3). The preliminary conquest, which was completed in 6 or 7 years after the crossing of the Jordan, brought sufficient land under Hebrew control to provide permanent homes for all and to make possible the tribal apportionment of the land (Joshua 7:16, 23). But even after “Joshua took the whole land,” and “the land rested from war” (Joshua 11:23), he told the people that “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (Joshua 13:1). At first the Hebrews occupied chiefly the mountainous region in the center of the country, while the various Canaanite tribes continued to live in the valleys....

“Some of the judges seem to have ruled the entire nation, whereas others served only one tribe or a group of tribes. The record in the book of Judges is largely one of military operations. Separated as the Hebrew tribes were from one another by fortified Canaanite towns, they were exposed to attack, and it was only with difficulty that they could unite their efforts to hold onto the land they had already wrested from the hostile population. Apostasy and idolatry still further weakened the bonds of national unity. The great lesson of the book is that sin and apostasy result in the withdrawal of God’s protecting hand, but that true repentance brings deliverance and that righteousness exalts a nation.” *SDA Bible Commentary, Judges*

"If all the terms of the judges are calculated consecutively, along with the stated periods of oppression, the total number of years is 407. Neither a fifteenth- nor a thirteenth-century B.C. date of the Exodus allows for this much time. The reasonable conclusion is that the careers of several of the judges overlapped. For example, 10:7 suggests that the careers of Jephthah and Samson were contemporaneous. Several of the judges acted locally rather than on behalf of all Israel. The period of the judges (cf. Ruth 1:1; 2 Samuel 7:11; 2 Kings 23:22) may be reckoned from the death of Joshua and the elders (Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7–10), 1390–1350 B.C. (based on a fifteenth-century date of the Exodus), to the coronation of Saul as the first king, c. 1050 B.C." (*Believer's Study Bible*)

2. Why would God's people carry on a practice of cutting off the big toes and thumbs of conquered kings? (Judges 1:6,7) We expect the heathen to be cruel, but shouldn't God's people "love their enemies?" (Matthew 5:43,44)

This practice was quite widespread in ancient times. It prevented the conquered foe from ever using a bow again or handling a spear or javelin. It was also regarded as a way to spread fear among one's enemies. The Israelites simply adopted this practice from their enemies. "Similar practices involving decapitated bodies are mentioned in the Mari texts and in classical sources and are widespread among preliterate and semiliterate cultures. See Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament*, pp. 416-417,528." (*Anchor Bible - Judges* p. 55)

3. What kind of relationship do you think existed between the Israelites and all the cities of Canaan that were not conquered but continued to exist among them? (Joshua 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:13,18; Compare 21:43-45; 23:10-16) How do you explain the statements that Jerusalem was conquered several times, but it was still ruled by the Jebusites? (Joshua 10:1-5,23; 12:10; 15:63; 18:28; Judges 1:27-34) How do you explain the differences between Judges 1:8 and 1:21? [There is a difference of readings in some ancient texts in Judges 1:18,19]

This was clearly not God's plan. God had said repeatedly that they should have nothing to do with these wicked and pagan peoples who had reached the point where God said that they should be driven out or destroyed. It wasn't long, as we know, before the Israelites became attracted by the fertility cult worship ceremonies and were drawn into what was to prove to be their downfall. (See Exodus 23:32; 34:12; Deuteronomy 7:6,25; 12:30; Hosea 4:17)

The city of Jebus (Jerusalem) lay on the border between the territories assigned to Benjamin (North and East) and Judah (South and West). It is likely that the less well protected and unwallled area to the South and West (which later become know as the city of David), was at least partially conquered by the tribe of Judah, while the more formidable and well fortified area to the North and East could not be conquered by the Benjaminites, or even by the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:63).

4. Why were some of the Israelite tribes so reluctant to move in and conquer their enemies if "any one of you can make a thousand men run away?" (Joshua 23:10; Compare Deuteronomy 32:30) How can you reconcile this with the statement that they were not able to conquer the people of the plain because of their iron chariots? (Judges 1:18,19; Compare Joshua 17:18) Couldn't they be driven out by "the forces of nature?" (Exodus 23:20-33)

This statement was originally a poetic one given by Moses describing what would happen if Israel disobeyed. (Deuteronomy 32:30) Joshua is just suggesting that they had or could carry it out. The "iron chariots" were not fully iron but only had iron parts (a completely iron chariot would have been too heavy to be usable). The real reasons why Israel didn't drive out or conquer their enemies were probably:

- a. They grew tired of fighting.
- b. They felt that by keeping these peoples as servants they would be better off.
- c. They were cowards.
- d. They didn't stay close enough to God to allow Him to help them conquer their enemies.

e. They didn't recognized the terrible danger of living with them in their midst and being attracted by their "gods".

- 5. Was it right for the man of Bethel to betray his whole city to save himself?(Judges 1:22-26) Should God's people reward him for this? Compare Rahab. (Joshua 2)

This is a thought question. How do you feel about their doing this?

- 6. What do you think of God's going back on His word? (Judges 2:1-5) Or did He? (Exodus 23:32,33; Deuteronomy 7:6,25; 12:30; 29:19; 22-28; 31:17-18; 34:12; Joshua 23:11-16)

God had repeatedly warned them that if they adopted the "gods" of these conquered nations they would suffer terrible consequences. That is exactly what happened. But these consequences were the natural result of what they did, and not a punishment imposed on them by God.

- 7. Are the first two chapters of Judges plagiarized from the end of Joshua?

Even the last part of Deuteronomy was probably written by Joshua. Moses could not have written about his own death and burial! The editor who put together the book of Judges (probably Samuel) meant only to show its connection to Joshua.

- 8. What happened to the next generation after Joshua that they "knew neither the Lord, nor what He had done for them" (Judges 2:10)? Is Judges 3:1-7 an answer?

It has been said many times that those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it! Others have suggested that what we learn from history is that we don't learn from history! It was inevitable that if Canaanites were left behind in the land of Canaan they would come into repeated contact with the Israelites who had moved in. The rest is history! When the Israelites turned away from Jehovah, all He could do was to allow them to reap the consequences of their own actions.

- 9. What do the following passages teach us about God's anger and its results?

Look first at God's prediction of what would happen if they left Him: Deuteronomy 31:16-18:

16 "And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to sleep with your fathers; then this people will rise and play the harlot after the strange gods of the land, where they go to be among them, and **they will forsake me** and break my covenant which I have made with them. 17 Then **my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them**, and they will be devoured; and many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because **our God is not among us?**' 18 And **I will surely hide my face** in that day on account of all the evil which they have done, because **they have turned to other gods.**" (RSV)

16 The LORD said to Moses, "You will soon die, and after your death the people will become unfaithful to me and break the covenant that I made with them. **They will abandon me** and worship the pagan gods of the land they are about to enter. ¹⁷When that happens, **I will become angry with them; I will abandon them, and they will be destroyed.** Many terrible disasters will come upon them, and then **they will realize that these things are happening to them because I, their God, am no longer with them.** ¹⁸And I will refuse to help them then, because they have done evil and worshiped other gods." (GNB)

Deuteronomy 31:17: (the key words)

μhme ynḅ; yTir [T'shīwō μyTb] aWhh'Am/Yb' /b yPia' hrj wō
aI h} aWhh' μ/YB' rm'awō t/rxwō t/Br' t/[r; Whaxm] I kaō , hyhwō
.hLah; t/[rh; ynMaxm] yBirḅB] yh'l aō-yae AyKi I ['

"...orgisqhsomai qumw/ eij aytou;..kai; katalaiyw aytou; kai; apostreyw to; proswnpon mou ajp/ aytwn," (Septuagint)

“...Mine anger hath burned against it in that day, and I have forsaken them, and hidden My face from them,” (*Young’s Literal Translation*)

“...Wherefore my wrath will waxe hote against them at that day, and I will forsake them, and will hide my face from them:” (*Geneva*)

“...my wrath shall be kindled against them...I will forsake them and hide my face from them.” (*Rheims-Douay*)

“...my anger shall be kindled against them...I will forsake them...I will hide my face from them.” (*KJV, Leeser, Darby, ASV, Amplified, NASB, NASB 1995, RSV, NRSV, NIV*)

“...My anger shall be aroused against them...and I will forsake them,...I will hide My face from them,” (*NKJV*)

“...my anger will be roused against them...I shall abandon them and hide my face from them.” (*NEB, REB*)

“...my anger will flare up against them; I will forsake them and hide my face from them.” (*NAB*)

“...I will be so furious that I will abandon them and ignore their prayers.” (*CEV*)

“...my anger will flare up against them...I will abandon them...I will conceal my face from them;” (*Five Books of Moses*)

“... I will become angry with them. I will abandon them and turn away from them.” (*God’s Word*)

“...Then my anger will flame out against them and I will abandon them, hiding my face from them,” (*TLB*)

“...my anger will blaze forth against them. I will abandon them, hiding my face from them,” (*NLT*)

“...I will become very angry at them, and I will leave them. I will turn away from them,” (*NCV*)

“...my anger shall blaze against them,...I will forsake them, and withhold my favor from them.” (*Smith-Goodspeed*)

“Then shall my anger blaze against them, and I will forsake them, withdrawing my favour from them...” (*Moffatt*)

“...my anger will then blaze out against them...” (*Berkeley*)

“...my anger shall blaze against them; I will forsake them and hide my face from them.” (*Jerusalem*)

“... my anger will blaze against them; I shall desert them and hide my face from them.” (*NJB*)

“...My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them.” (*Tanakh*)

“...I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies.” (*Clear Word*)

Earlier God had said:

Leviticus 26:14 The LORD said, “If you will not obey my commands, **you will be punished**. If you refuse to obey my laws and commands and break the covenant I have made with you, I will punish you. I will bring disaster on you—incurable diseases and fevers that will make you blind and cause your life to waste away. You will sow your seed, but it will do you no good, because your enemies will conquer you and eat what you have grown. I will turn against you, so that you will be defeated, and those who hate you will rule over you; you will be so terrified that you will run when no one is chasing you.

18 “If even after all this you still do not obey me, **I will increase your punishment seven times**. I will break your stubborn pride; there will be no rain, and your land will be dry and as hard as iron. All your hard work will do you no good, because your land will not produce crops and the trees will not bear fruit.

21 “If you still continue to resist me and refuse to obey me, **I will again increase your punishment seven times**. I will send dangerous animals among you, and they will kill your children, destroy your livestock, and leave so few of you that your roads will be deserted.

23 “If after all this punishment you still do not listen to me, but continue to defy me, then **I will turn on you and punish you seven times harder than before**. I will bring war on you to punish you for breaking our covenant, and if you gather in your cities for safety, I will send incurable diseases among you, and you will be forced to surrender to your enemies. I will cut off your food supply, so

that ten women will need only one oven to bake all the bread they have. They will ration it out, and when you have eaten it all, you will still be hungry.

27 “If after all this you still continue to defy me and refuse to obey me, then **in my anger I will turn on you and again make your punishment seven times worse than before.** Your hunger will be so great that you will eat your own children. I will destroy your places of worship on the hills, tear down your incense altars, and throw your dead bodies on your fallen idols. In utter disgust I will turn your cities into ruins, destroy your places of worship, and refuse to accept your sacrifices. I will destroy your land so completely that the enemies who occupy it will be shocked at the destruction. I will bring war on you and scatter you in foreign lands. Your land will be deserted, and your cities left in ruins. ³⁴⁻³⁵Then the land will enjoy the years of complete rest that you would not give it; it will lie abandoned and get its rest while you are in exile in the land of your enemies.

36 “I will make those of you who are in exile so terrified that the sound of a leaf blowing in the wind will make you run. You will run as if you were being pursued in battle, and you will fall when there is no enemy near you. ³⁷You will stumble over one another when no one is chasing you, and you will be unable to fight against any enemy. ³⁸You will die in exile, swallowed up by the land of your enemies. ³⁹The few of you who survive in the land of your enemies will waste away because of your own sin and the sin of your ancestors.

40 “But your descendants will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors, who resisted me and rebelled against me, ⁴¹and made me turn against them and send them into exile in the land of their enemies. At last, when your descendants are humbled and they have paid the penalty for their sin and rebellion, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and with Isaac and with Abraham, and I will renew my promise to give my people the land. ⁴³First, however, the land must be rid of its people, so that it can enjoy its complete rest, and they must pay the full penalty for having rejected my laws and my commands. ⁴⁴**But even then, when they are still in the land of their enemies, I will not completely abandon or destroy them.** That would put an end to my covenant with them, and I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵I will renew the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I showed all the nations my power by bringing my people out of Egypt, in order that I, the LORD, might be their God.” (GNB)

Numbers 32:13-15: “**The LORD was angry** with the people and made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that whole generation that had displeased him was dead. ¹⁴And now you have taken your fathers’ place, a new generation of sinful men ready to bring down the fierce anger of the LORD on Israel again. ¹⁵If you people of Reuben and Gad refuse to follow him now, **he will once again abandon all these people** in the wilderness, and you will be responsible for their destruction.” (GNB)

Deuteronomy 29:19: “Make sure that there is no one here today who hears these solemn demands and yet convinces himself that all will be well with him, even if he stubbornly goes his own way. That would destroy all of you, good and evil alike.” (GNB)

Deuteronomy 32:15-30:

“**They abandoned God their Creator** and rejected their mighty saviour.

¹⁶ Their idolatry made the LORD jealous; the evil they did **made him angry....**

¹⁸ They forgot their God, their mighty saviour,
the one who had given them life.

¹⁹ “When the LORD saw this, **he was angry**
and rejected his sons and daughters.

²⁰ **‘I will no longer help them,’** he said;
‘then I will see what happens to them,
those stubborn, unfaithful people....

²¹ “So I will use a so-called nation to make them angry;
I will make them jealous with a nation of fools.

²² **My anger** will flame up like fire

and burn everything on earth....
26 **I would have destroyed them completely,**
so that no one would remember them.
27 But I could not let their enemies boast
that they had defeated my people,
when it was I myself who had crushed them.” (GNB)

Joshua 7:1-12: “But the people of Israel broke faith (Compare Numbers 20:12)...the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel...Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become a thing for destruction. I will be with you no more,” (RSV)

“The Lord was furious with the Israelites...¹² this is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They retreat from them because they themselves have now been condemned to destruction! I will not stay with you any longer unless you destroy the things you were ordered not to take!” (GNB)

Joshua 23:16: “if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God...Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you,...you shall perish quickly from off the good land which he has given to you.” (RSV)

Judges 2:12-14: “and they forsook the LORD...they provoked the LORD to anger...he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them; and he sold them into the power of their enemies round about, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies.” (RSV)

Judges 2:19-23: ““But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods,...the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel...I will not henceforth drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, 22 that by them I may test Israel, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not.’ 23 So the LORD left those nations, not driving them out at once, and he did not give them into the power of Joshua.” (RSV)

Judges 3:7-9: 7 “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God...Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cu’shan-rishatha’im king of Mesopota’mia;” (RSV)

Judges 10:6-12: 6 “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD...the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites,” (RSV)

It should be very clear from all of these passages that God’s “anger” is not like our anger. *“The Bible repeatedly describes God’s anger as His turning away in loving disappointment from those who don’t want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.”* (A. Graham Maxwell)

Romans 1:18-28:

18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth...²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,...²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.”

How does God feel about leaving His children to the consequences of their own choices?

Hosea 11:1,2,7-9: The LORD says,
“When Israel was a child, I loved him
and called him out of Egypt as my son.
²But the more I called to him,
the more he turned away from me....

⁷They insist on turning away from me.
 They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them,
 but no one will lift it from them.
⁸"How can I give you up, Israel?
 How can I abandon you?
 Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah,
 or treat you as I did Zeboiim?
 My heart will not let me do it!
 My love for you is too strong.
⁹I will not punish you in my anger;
 I will not destroy Israel again.
 For I am God and not a human being.
 I, the Holy One, am with you.
 I will not come to you in anger." (GNB)

It seems that this turning away from God and reaping the consequences, which we have called God's "wrath", was a recurrent theme in Judges: Judges 3:7,8,12,15; 4:1-3; 6:1-8; 10:6-16; 13:1. Doesn't the section in Judges 10:6-16 seem like a very logical response on God's part? What should God have done at this point? God's wrath or anger or fury is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible. How does what we have learned here in Judges impact your understanding of Revelation 14:9-11?

10. Why do you think the Angel addressed Gideon as a "brave and mighty warrior" when he was secretly hiding in a wine press trying to thresh some wheat? Why do you think Gideon's father had altars to Baal and Asherah? (Judges 6:25) Is the story of Gideon and his fleece a story of great faith (Judges 6:36-40) or very weak faith? Should we be asking for such signs today? Shouldn't Gideon have put away his many wives and a concubine and his idols (Judges 8:27-31) before God blessed him? Why did God allow him to kill the people of Sukkoth and Penuel (Judges 8:5-17)?

The only reason for Gideon to be called a "brave and might warrior" was that he was willing to do what God asked him to do after God went to considerable effort to convince him! It took four miracles before Gideon was ready to go to battle with the Midianites. (Judges 6:11-21, 36-40; 7:9-15) Gideon's father had fallen prey to the prevailing customs of the times and that is why he had these idols on his property. Gideon's faith needed a lot of help and it was not the best kind of help either. In our day we have the accumulated evidence of all of Scripture and the rest of history. We should not need the miracles that Gideon needed to get him to do what God asked. **If God should depend on motivating us by the use of miracles in our day, what would prevent the devil from using "miracles" as well, and then how would we know who was doing the miracle?** God must use people where they are, speak to them in language that they can understand, and lead them no faster than they are able to follow. He did not demand that Gideon be a perfect saint before God would work with him. If God worked with and for only perfect saints, what chance would any of us have? The people of Sukkoth and Penuel were apparently a wicked and doubting group. They were selfish and ungenerous traitors and cowards. They were not willing to cooperate with God's chosen leaders even after God had clearly performed a great miracle to show that He was blessing them. Such people would have been a real problem for leadership in the future.

11. Of what value is the story of Abimelech? (Judges 9:1-57) Why was it included?

This is one more example of the terrible depths to which the nation was sinking. Abimelech had no right or call to serve as a "king" except his illegitimate relationship to Gideon and his desire to rule.

12. How would you have responded if you had been Jephthah's daughter? (Judges 11:31, 34-40) Don't you think Jephthah's promise was rash? Did God expect him to abide by it after he had made it?

There is no verse that says that what Jephthah did was God's plan. In those days most of the houses were built in a U-shape with a central courtyard where many of the animals were kept. No doubt Jephthah assumed that the first thing to come out of the courtyard would be one of these animals appropriate for a sacrifice. When his daughter appeared first he was shocked but thought that in the light of his vow he must carry it out. (Leviticus 27:28,29) We are not really sure what happened to his daughter.

There is a good example of how the nations of that day thought about different "gods" found here in the story of Jephthah. Jephthah said to the king of the Ammonites, who was trying to reclaim the land that Moses and the Israelites had conquered by destroying King Sihon:

Judges 11:24: "Are you going to try to take it back? You can keep whatever your god Chemosh has given you. But we are going to keep everything that the LORD, our God, has taken for us." (GNB)

13. What is implied by the angel's response when Manoah asked for his name? (Judges 13:17,18) Do you think that Samson was actually led down to Timnah to choose a Philistine bride by the Lord? (Judges 14:3,4) Did God actually bless Samson to kill a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass? What do you think was Samson's actual source of power? (Judges 15:15) What do you expect to happen when the Holy Spirit is poured out on us in our day?

Yahweh's (Jehovah's) messenger or angel is following a pattern that is similar to the experience of Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13) and Gideon (Judges 6:17). The name God gives through His angel is "Wonderful" or "Wonder-Worker". To people in those days the important thing about a "god" was how powerful He was.

Many ancient cultures believed in many "gods"—polytheism—and had a "god" for each different thing that happened. The Bible does its best to eliminate polytheism, and thus ends up suggesting that everything that happens comes from the one God—monotheism. Thus when Samson did things that seemed mysterious or unexplainable to the people they naturally attributed them to Yahweh. There is no reason for us to be confused by such statements today because we know that there is only one God and we understand His relationship to the Devil and the work of the Devil. We should also recognize that neither God nor the Devil need to be involved for us to be led into sin in many cases. (See James 1:12-15)

We can learn from other parts of Scripture that the Holy Spirit prefers to work in a very different way. (Galatians 5:22,23) But in this case God worked with His appointed leaders to do what the people expected a leader to do in those days. We certainly do not have a verse referring to these experiences that says, "Go and do likewise"!!

14. Did God actually lead the people in those days to do things that He would later tell them He didn't want them to do? What do we learn from the massive wars between the different tribes of Israel? (Judges 20:1-3,18,21,25)

We have no way of knowing this side of the kingdom of heaven exactly how God was involved in each of these events. We do know, however, that they thought God was responsible for everything that happened.

These battles were a part of the terrible story of the Levite and his concubine (Judges 19-21). In those days it was felt that the ultimate way to solve any grievance was to go to war! What the people of Gibeah did was terrible and the rest of Israel felt that such evil must be eliminated from the land. **The bigger question might be: Why didn't they eliminate all the Canaanites from among them when these people were clearly doing similar things?**

15. Why did God use precious space in the scripture to include the incredible story of the Levite and his concubine? (Judges 19-21) Are you glad that this story is included in the Bible? Does it increase your faith? Do you find any verses that say that God was happy about what was done?

This is an actual story that had to be told to explain the elimination of almost one complete tribe of Israel. It is also an example of what happened when "every man did was right in his own eyes"

(Judges 17:6; 21:25). **This important piece of background history is necessary for us to understand other statements made in the Bible. It should at least make us look at God with greater respect and appreciation to realize that He was still doing His best to work with such people.**

16. Would it still be correct to think of this period as a “Theocracy” where God is the real ruler? If so what is implied by Judges 17:6 and 21:25? Who were supposed to be the religious leaders to keep them loyal to the true God? Does the story of Micah help us to understand what was going on? (Judges 17,18)

Times were very difficult in the days of the Judges primarily because they followed whatever notion they had instead of following God. These are simply historical accounts that explained major events that took place that could not be ignored and needed to be explained even to their children. (See various translations of Judges 17:6 under #1 above)

17. **The Bible is supposed to be an answer to Satan’s charges against God in the great controversy. Do the books of Joshua and Judges help very much? Is it clear from these two books exactly what God is trying to accomplish? Why didn’t God move in on a few occasions and clean up the mess?** (Compare Habakkuk 1,2 and Micah 4:12) How would you compare the picture of God that you get out of these two books with the picture of God in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses)?

Events after the death of Joshua certainly demonstrated how quickly things could deteriorate! The picture that Moses had in the Pentateuch was quite elevated. Here we see things at their lowest. It is pretty hard to get any clear understanding about God from these books where so little that is done is clearly God at work! These books do, however, give us a pretty clear picture of the historical background of the times and thus help us to understand why God does some of the things that He does do!

18. Of all the people in the Bible (e.g., Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea) who could have been included in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, why do you think so many people from the period of the judges are included? (Hebrews 11:32)

God is giving us an encouraging note here. If even the people of the book of Judges could be included among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, we have a chance too!

19. Would you agree with Hebrews 4:8? Did the people enter the kind of relationship of rest and peace that God wanted?

They clearly did not enter into the “rest” that God wanted to give them. (Contrast Joshua 21:43-45) Even after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years they didn’t seem to learn much, and they were so quick to be attracted by the fertility cult religions around them. In such a setting there is no way it can be God’s rest!

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