

Rebellion and Redemption

Conflict and Crisis: The Judges

Lesson #4 for January 23, 2016

Scriptures: Judges 4; 6; 14; Hebrews 11:32; 1 Samuel 2:12-25; 8:1-7.

1. In this lesson we will study the repeating cycles of evil as presented in the book of Judges. Repeatedly, the Israelites sinned against God, worshiping Baal and Astarte and other Canaanite gods, leading to God's "wrath" described as God selling them into the hands of an oppressor. After some considerable period of subjugation by their enemies, they cried out to the Lord on multiple occasions, and the Lord repeatedly raised up a deliverer who helped them overcome their enemies and brought peace back to the land. What did the judges actually do? Mostly, they helped to settle civil suits. But, at times, they also were military leaders.
2. Those judges ruled for various lengths of time until they died; and then, the people fell back into their old evil ways again. Judges 2 and 3 are among the most succinct descriptions of God's "wrath" in the entire Bible. What happens when God becomes furious or angry? See the handout on www.TheoX.org: "God's Wrath/Anger in the Book of Judges."
3. The picture of God's wrath throughout Scripture could be summarized in the following words: *God's wrath or anger is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.*
4. In this lesson we will discuss briefly the stories of Deborah and Barak, Samson, Gideon, Eli's sons, and Samuel.
5. How would you assess the spiritual condition of God's covenant people living in Palestine during the period of the judges? What would God say about our church today? About the Christian community as a whole? About the world in general?
6. Jabin, King of Hazor, tried to organize a large number of kings from the northern part of Canaan to attack and destroy the Israelites when the Israelites first entered Palestine. Many years later, Jabin, which was the name for each king of Hazor, appointed Sisera his army chief to attack and destroy the Israelites living near him. **Deborah**, designated as a prophetess and judge, received a message from God to appoint Barak to meet the challenge from Sisera.
7. Read Judges 4. Who was the victor in that battle? How many times in the Bible did God do the "fighting" instead of having the children of Israel do it? (What about Jericho? The Amalekites? etc.) What were the results when God took charge? Why were the Israelites so determined to do their own fighting on so many occasions? How did they do? Did they only let God do the fighting when they recognized that their chances of succeeding by themselves were nearly hopeless?
8. Deborah was not the only female heroine in this story. Heber was a descendent of Jethro and his son Hobab the Kenite, Moses's brother-in-law. His wife Jael who lived not far from Hazor welcomed the escaping general, Sisera, into her home and promised to hide him from the pursuing Israelites. While he was sleeping, she got a large hammer and drove a tent peg through his temples and into the ground. That ended the domination by the Canaanites over the Hebrews for about 40 years.

9. Do you think it was God's idea for Jael to kill Sisera? How did she manage to do that without waking him up first?
10. Read Judges 4:7; 5:4-5,21. It seems clear from these passages that the iron chariots of Sisera's army became a serious hindrance instead of a help as they bogged down in the flash floods that swept away many of Sisera's soldiers. Once again, God was the winner.
11. Do you think the Israelite armies put their trust in Deborah because of her beauty? Her personality? Her force of character? Her righteous judgments? Or, because they believed that she was directed by God?
12. Many years after the story of Deborah, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the desert tribesmen began to oppress the Israelites, coming up from the southeast and stealing and plundering whatever they could from the Israelites. (Read Judges 6:3-16.)
13. Why do you think God chose **Gideon** to defeat them? Was God's angel being sarcastic when he said to Gideon: "The LORD is with you, brave and mighty man!" (Judges 6:12, *GNB*) while Gideon was hiding in a wine press, trying to thresh wheat? How could God command him: "Go with all your great strength and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I myself am sending you"? (Judges 6:14, *GNB*) Gideon required quite a lot of convincing and several miracles before he was ready to undertake the mission. Maybe Gideon's greatest qualification was his own sense of unimportance and weakness. Does that remind you of the call of Ellen White?
14. Who can forget the story recorded in Judges 6:36-40? Gideon put out his fleece and asked that the fleece be full of water in the morning while the ground was dry. God, recognizing the terrible condition of things in the land, complied with Gideon's request. But, the next morning after ringing a lot of water out of his piece of wool, Gideon recognized that perhaps the water would naturally remain in the wool longer than it would on the ground. So, he requested God to send another miracle and have the ground be wet and the wool be dry. So, God complied.
15. But, when Gideon called together an army of 32,000 men, God effectively said, "Whoa now! That is way too many. If the Israelites go to war with that many men, they might be inclined to think that they managed to win the victory themselves." (See Judges 7:2.) So, 22,000 were allowed to go home because they were afraid. Then, another test was applied, depending on how they drank water at a small stream. Only 300 were left. Finally, those 300 were divided into 3 groups with lanterns hidden in clay pots and trumpets made of ram's horns. In the middle of the night, they blasted on their ram's horns and broke the pitchers, revealing the lights from three different sides of the Midianites, giving the appearance that thousands of soldiers were surrounding the Midianites. God did the rest. The enemy—confused in the middle of the night—attacked themselves, one against the other, and the Israelites did not even need to fight. Only a fleeing group of men including some of the Midianite chiefs and two kings of Midian were finally captured and killed by the Israelites. From an enemy army of 120,000, only 15,000 escaped.
16. The story of **Samson** is a sordid one. His birth was predicted, and his mother was clearly instructed about how she should prepare for that special baby. (See Judges 13:4,13-14; Leviticus 11; and Deuteronomy 14.) But, although Samson received very special training as a child, things began to turn bad just as he was becoming a young man.

Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time when he must execute his

divine mission—the time above all others when he should have been true to God—Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel. He did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 563.1.

17. Read Judges 14:1-4. Clearly, Samson had a weakness for foreign women. So, how did God use that terrible weakness as “an occasion to move against the Philistines”?

Samson “moved” against the Philistines in a number of ways, each in angry response to personal slights. First he killed 30 men and took their clothes back to his wedding feast to pay a debt (*Judg. 14:19*). Then he destroyed their crops when his wife was given to his best man (*Judg. 14:20, 15:1-5*). Then Samson killed many in revenge for the Philistines killing his wife and her father (*Judg. 15:6-8*). When the Philistines tried to avenge that action (*Judg. 15:9, 10*), he killed one thousand with a donkey’s jawbone (*Judg. 15:14, 15*). Finally he pulled down their temple and killed three thousand for blinding him (*Judg. 16:21, 28, 30*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, January 19.

18. But, incredible as it may seem and despite all his flaws and foibles, Samson ended up in the “faith chapter” in Hebrews 11:32. What do you think about Samson being named in that chapter alongside Rahab, Jephthah, and David as well as Abraham, Sarah, and Moses?
19. Read Ruth 1:8,16-17; 2:10-12; and 3:10-11. Why did those famines keep occurring in Judah and Israel? Did God literally send the famines? Or, did God just remove His blessings which had previously come in the form of rain? Was Satan involved in any way?
20. The country of Moab was located across the Jordan Valley from Bethlehem, the home of Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons. It is easy to see across the valley from Bethlehem to Moab. They must have thought that the grass looked greener on the other side of the valley! But, a few years later, with all the men in her family dead, **Ruth** was left with only two mourning daughters-in-law in the country of Moab. Why do you think that neither of those young women managed to get pregnant from their young husbands while in Moab? Was God practicing “birth control”? While Orpah at the urging of Naomi returned to her mother’s home, Ruth, for reasons that we are not completely aware of, was determined to stay with Naomi and return with her to Bethlehem. Remember that the Moabites were descendants of Lot and his oldest daughter. (Genesis 19:30-38) Naomi decided to return home because it was her rightful inheritance to take the property that had belonged to her husband. Arriving at Bethlehem, Ruth was quickly identified by the people there as industrious, probably beautiful, and they welcomed her. No doubt, by the guidance of God, Ruth chose to go and gather what she could from the gleanings in the field of Boaz. She obviously attracted the attention of Boaz. He instructed her not to go to anyone else’s field because it was not safe. How were the Israelites supposed to treat Moabites? See Deuteronomy 23:3. We do not know exactly how old Boaz was; but, the story seems to suggest that he was older than Ruth. Remember that he was the son of Rahab the prostitute from Jericho and one of the leaders from the tribe of Judah by the name of Salmon. After some legal arranging, Boaz married Ruth; and soon thereafter, she happily produced a baby son by the name of Obed who became the grandfather of King David. Did Boaz choose to ignore the rules recorded in Deuteronomy?

21. What do you think this story has to do with the great controversy? It is important to remember that the story of Naomi and Ruth took place during the times of the judges. Why do you think this personal story made it into Scripture? Was it because Boaz's mother was Rahab the prostitute from Jericho? Or, because Ruth's great grandson was King David?
22. Near the end of the times of the judges, we have the story of **Samuel**. Elkanah, from the tribe of Levi but living in the town of Ramah, had taken a second wife because Hannah did not seem to be able to bear children. He loved her; but, her barrenness was a bitterness for both of them. Every year Elkanah, Hannah, as well as Penninah and her children traveled from Ramah to Shiloh to offer sacrifices to the Lord. Those were bitter experiences for Hannah. On one occasion, she went to the tent opening and prayed silently but fervently for a baby. Eli, thinking she might be drunk but being assured that she was not, promised her that God would grant her wish. After he was weaned, she took her baby son to the tabernacle or tent at Shiloh and placed him in the care of Eli.
23. Read 1 Samuel 2:12-25. Considering how evil **Eli's sons** were, should Hannah have dared to place her young son in the hands of Eli?
24. God destroyed Aaron's sons for taking the wrong incense into the tent/tabernacle while they were intoxicated. Why did He not destroy the sons of Eli? Or, did He?

Eli was priest and judge in Israel. He held the highest and most responsible positions among the people of God. As a man divinely chosen for the sacred duties of the priesthood, and set over the land as the highest judicial authority, he was looked up to as an example, and he wielded a great influence over the tribes of Israel. **But although he had been appointed to govern the people, he did not rule his own household. Eli was an indulgent father. Loving peace and ease, he did not exercise his authority to correct the evil habits and passions of his children. Rather than contend with them or punish them, he would submit to their will and give them their own way.** Instead of regarding the education of his sons as one of the most important of his responsibilities, he treated the matter as of little consequence. The priest and judge of Israel had not been left in darkness as to the duty of restraining and governing the children that God had given to his care. But Eli shrank from this duty, because it involved crossing the will of his sons, and would make it necessary to punish and deny them. **Without weighing the terrible consequences that would follow his course, he indulged his children in whatever they desired and neglected the work of fitting them for the service of God and the duties of life.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 575.1. [Bold type is added.]

25. In contrast to the story of Eli and his grown sons, the small boy, Samuel, grew into being a man of God. "So all the people of Israel, from one end of the country to the other, knew that Samuel was indeed a prophet of the LORD." (1 Samuel 3:20, *GNB*)
26. Read 1 Samuel 4:14-18. The Israelites faced a time of war with the Philistines. They were doing very poorly without God's help. They called upon Eli's sons to take the covenant box to the battlefield, trying to force God to help them fight. The results were a disaster. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phineas, died; the covenant box was captured by the Philistines. When Eli, very old at that point, heard about it, he fell backwards from his chair and died.
27. That left the young Samuel in charge of the sanctuary. Unfortunately, Samuel did not do

much better with his children than Eli had done with his. As Samuel's sons grew up, it became apparent that they were not like their father. They were doing evil things such as accepting bribes and perverting justice. Even though Samuel managed to establish the schools of the prophets, because of the evil activities of his sons, the leaders of the tribes and the people of Israel insisted that Samuel anoint a king for them. The result was the choosing of Saul as the first king of Israel. Saul was the kind of king they wanted, not the kind of king God wanted.

28. How do you understand that story? (1 Samuel 8:1-9) Would the people have been satisfied with their so-called "theocracy" and their "judges" if the sons of Samuel had been as faithful as their father was?
29. After appointing Saul and watching him deteriorate, Samuel was given the challenge of secretly anointing David to become the next king.
30. One of the obvious facts in the great controversy is that we each are free to make up our own minds and go our own ways.
31. It is very clear that the Bible does not gloss over the behaviors—even the sins—of its prominent characters. *Sons of Belial* is the term 1 Samuel 2:12-25 uses for the sons of Eli. *Belial* is a Hebrew word which means basically "worthless," "useless," as well as other negative terms. It is sometimes used to describe Satan himself.
32. What a tragedy the sons of Eli and the sons of Samuel proved to be. Was God responsible for the death of Eli's sons?

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown.—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 36.3; *The Great Controversy* 36.1.

33. In the great controversy, every individual must make up his own mind. We are either on God's side or on Satan's side. We cannot remain as fence-sitters.
34. What should we learn about God from the book of Judges? In addition to learning some important things about God's wrath, we should also note that He could not resist the cries of those who honestly turned back to Him. More than that, He chose feeble, defective human beings to work for Him. Who else was available? Should God have used angels to do His work?
35. If we had time to review all of the book of Judges, we would note that God was involved in one way or another in many very serious battles. How did God involve Himself in those battles?
36. Clearly, in the book of Judges, we see this cycle repeated over and over again: 1) Apostasy, 2) Oppression, 3) Cries for help, and 4) Divine intervention. How do you think God felt about all of that? How did the onlooking universe feel about those events?
37. Even the angels needed to learn some important things through the great controversy.

For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to his ambassadors, at his holy law prostrate, despised, trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was

being corrupted.

A crisis had arrived in the government of God...All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth....

The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon himself.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900 par 4-7. Compare *Desire of Ages* 37.2. [Bold type is added.]

38. Try to imagine yourself among the angels in heaven, watching the events we have studied in this lesson. Would you have agreed with their feelings? How well do we understand God's actions and His patience today?

© 2015, *Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH*. *Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged.* Info@theox.org

Last Modified: November 14, 2015

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\R&R-Great Controversy\SS-4-R&R-GCT-2016_01_23-Fin+.wpd