

The Book of Judges: Navigating Dark Times



Pastor Aaron Michaud

Introduction: The Principle Approach to Biography

2 Peter 2:4-9 (NAS Selected) *“For if God did not spare ... the ancient world, but preserved Noah ... and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation ...”*

There are **two types of biographies** in the Bible: **Polemic** (to prove a point) and **Historical** (to reflect the larger story and thereby expose God’s heart).

Method for exposing the principles in a biographical portion:

1. **Mark the whole biography** from the beginning to the end. (i.e. the story of Gideon is in Judges 6-8; the story of Joseph is Gen. 37-50; the story of David is contained in several books - 1 Sam. 16-31, 2 Sam 1-24 and 1 Kings 1, 2). Read the whole story in one sitting if at all possible.
2. Passing over the story a second time, **divide the story into dramatic episodes** as if you were planning to take this book and make a mini-series for television. An episode should have several characteristics: a) one prevailing theme should dominate through the episode (i.e. a “moral” of the episode); 2) there should be a driving problem or question that has some resolution in the episode.
3. Once you have decided on the episode division points, **further divide the episodes into “acts and scenes”** as if plotting a drama for television. A scene is determined by when the camera would need to be moved to a new location in order to shoot the action and dialogue. For instance, if the players go into the house, a new scene begins at the entry to the new room. An act is a series of scenes that set up the problem, but provide the “commercial breaks” in the drama. If a scene can close and offer a time for the commercial, but that break is NOT the end of a true episode, it can be the end of an act. Simply mark them in the margin of your Bible by drawing a line to mark the end of each scene, act and episode. You may use a different color, or put only a line for a scene (-), a double line (=) on scenes that divide at acts and a triple line (= + -) line for the end of an episode.
4. Using a notepad, review each episode as though it were a part of a “whodunit” mystery. **Ask the question, what details did we see each scene** that became important to the whole drama? These details will expose the purpose of that scene, and may help expose the episode’s meaning. After listing the scenes and their purposes, can you determine the purpose of God sharing this slice of history in the episode? Form that purpose into the statement of a timeless truth or principle. Using that large principle, review the scene list and see if any sub-principles become apparent when the larger principle of the episode is

clear. What features and what scenes helped you arrive at the conclusion you did concerning the major timeless truth and purpose of the episode. These are the sub-principles (or scene truths).

5. Taking a broader view of the story, **state the purposes** in list form from your notepad review of each episode above. With a list of principles in front of you, ask the question, “What lessons do we learn from this example of how to live (or not live) a godly life?”

Five-step Biography Exercise:

Let’s look at the life of _____.

Step One: Where is the story told? Mark the beginning and end of the life in your Bible, and note at the beginning “Life of __ (person you are studying), to __ (address of ending verse).”

Step Two: Mark the text of the whole story in your Bible by underlining the people in blue pencil. Next mark the places mentioned in the text in green. Third mark the “props” used (that you would need to reproduce to make the minis-series) in brown. Finally, mark any verses that demonstrate a conflict (argument, fight, war, etc) in the color red.

Step Three: Are there obvious divisions for scenes, then acts, then episodes? Mark them in your Bible with lines in the margin.

Step Four: Look at the entire mini-series. What are the overall principles should we learn from the story that teach us about godliness and the priorities of our God?

Step Five: What does each scene teach us about godliness? Can you tie the scenes of one act into an overarching theme? Can you tie the acts into an episode that resolves a question or conflict? What important principles can you pick out from the scenes, acts and episodes that will lead you to godliness?

Assignment for next session: Read the book of Judges (this seems like a lot, but can be done by reading 3 chapters a day for one week and listening on CD in less than 15 minutes a day for one week).

Memory verses: 2 Peter 2:4-9

Notes:

Session 1: Structure of the Book

The book of Judges contains three major sections chronicling Israel's slip into one of the darkest times in the nation's history:

1. **Decline (Judges 1:1-3:6)** - Coexisting with the Canaanites - The beginning section paints the dark picture that existed during the time of the Judges. We see that after that death of Joshua that things quickly fell apart for the nation of Israel.
 - **Political Background (Judges 1:1-3:6)** - The Israelites took possession of much of the land, but did not drive the Canaanites out of the land as God had commanded and allowed them to live amongst them.
 - **Spiritual Background (Judges 2:1-3:6)** - The generation that followed the one that took possession of the land did not have a relationship with God nor did they have any regard for His standards. The failure of Joshua and his generation to groom up leaders to lead the nation after they passed.
2. **Deliverance (Judges 3:7-16:31)** - Conflict with the Canaanites - Because of Israel's refusal to follow the standards of the Lord and their inability to drive the peoples of the land out God had to repeatedly put them into bondage to get their attention. This section is characterized by 7 "Sin Cycles" with five stages (cp. Judges 3:7ff):
 - **Sin** - "The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord"
 - **Slavery** - "Then the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, so He sold them into the hands of..."
 - **Supplication** - "The sons of Israel cried to the Lord"
 - **Salvation** - "The Lord raised up a deliverer"
 - **Security/ slide** - "The land had rest..."

These cycles begin in these verses: Judges 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:33; 10:6; 13:1. The last of the cycles does not contain the supplication of the nation of Israel. As they continued to fall back in sin over and over and over, they eventually grew callous and stopped being repentant for their idolatry.
3. **Disgrace (Judges 17:1-21:25)** - Copying the Canaanites - The final section of Judges gives account to Israel's final descent into darkness. There are two accounts that show the spiritual depravity as a people and their inability to work together to become the people God wanted the to be.
 - **Danite Retreat (Judges 17:1-18:31)** - A man by the name of Micah stared out by created a molten image of silver and then setting up a house of gods and then made his son into his own priest. He then hired a Levite to be a priest for him thinking that would put God on his side. The sons of Dan then seek the advice and counsel of this Levite and eventually take Micah's idols and serve pagan gods for themselves.

- **Benjamite War (Judges 19:1-21:25)** - A Levite took a concubine for himself, but soon she ran away to her home. The Levite went to get her and upon his return he stopped in Gibeah. Some of the tribe of Benjamin come to where he is staying and try to sex with him. They end up raping and killing the concubine of the Levite. The Levite chopped up the corpse and sent pieces to rest of Israel to rally them against the tribe of Benjamin. During the ensuing war the tribe of Benjamin is destroyed by the rest of the sons of Israel.

These section are characterized by the phrase, “In those days there was no king in Israel...” found in Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25 and the first and last reference end with the sad summary statement, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Application Questions:

1. Do you have a “pet sin” or an area where the Enemy manages to get you to stumble repeatedly?
2. Do you find that over time you become less and less brokenhearted over this area of weakness?
3. What can you do to keep from succumbing to this area of weakness and giving up?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read Judges 1:1-36.
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 2: The Political Background

Judges opens with the death of Joshua. It is clear that there was no clear successor in that the people have to inquire of the Lord who is going to lead them. This passage gives a good pattern for victory as well as showing what some of the challenges will be as we try to accomplish the objectives that God has laid before us:

Formula for Success (Judges 1:1-15) - The opening of this chapter started with a formula for victory. Take a look at how God moved amongst the nation of Israel and what they did to start off well and succeed in the task set before them (at least at first):

- **“Sheep without a Shepherd” Principle (Judges 1:1)** - After the death of Joshua there was a not a clear successor. The people didn't know who was going to lead them next. A lack of clearly defined leadership will lead to feelings of vulnerability. The first step to victory is getting some leadership.
- **“Handpicked” Principle (Judges 1:2)** - When the people did not know who was going to lead them they inquired of the Lord and did not simply pick who they thought would be the best. We need to make sure the leaders we choose have the Lord's stamp of approval and that we do not simply resort to following those who look good by the world's standards.
- **“Bodybuilding” Principle (Judges 1:3)** - Just because God chose Judah to lead did not mean that he alone was supposed to fight. He promptly asked his brother Simeon to fight along side of him. Leaders are only as good as the team that they have around them. While we need good leadership they need cooperative followers. We must develop teamwork if there is to be progress and success.
- **“Finish the Job” Principle (Judges 1:4-10)** - Judah attacked the Canaanites and routed them, he pursued their king until he found him and cut off his big toes and thumbs. They went forth to Jerusalem, the hill country, and the lowlands. These men were following the commands that God had given them and did not stop they kept moving forward. Too often we can stop short of finishing the mission God puts us on. We cannot settle for partial obedience we must finish the tasks at hand.
- **“Achievement Award” Principle (Judges 1:11-15)** - Caleb offered his daughter as a prize for the man who was brave enough to capture Kiriath-sepher. He also rewarded them with upper and lower springs in the Negev. Rewarding those who put forth great effort and are able to accomplish tasks is a good way to encourage people to stay the course. It provides encouragement in the midst of trial and motivation for the future.

God gives a very simple formula for success: Godly appointed leaders + teamwork and cooperation + following God's mission = VICTORY!!!

Obstacles to Victory (Judges 1:16-36) - Not everything went smoothly for the Israelites. They were about to encounter some challenges that they would let push them to disobedience. God gave a pattern for success, but He did not promise that things would always go perfectly smooth. Look at some of the obstacles that we should anticipate:

- **“Pea-shooter” Principle (Judges 1:16-19)** - Judah and his army were unable to drive out

the people of the valley because they had iron chariots which were a much more advanced form of technology than the Israelites had. We cannot not be intimidated by the arsenal of the world. We must realized that no matter how big the obstacle is our God is bigger.

- **“Infiltration” Principle (Judges 1:20-21)** - The Benjamites did not drive out the Jebusites and allowed them to live among them. This would have meant that they would have had negative influence in their midst in the form of pagan gods and pagan values every day. We must try to ensure that we do not let the world system and values into the faith. We must do our best to have the Word of the Lord be our standard.
- **“A Few Good Men” Principle (Judges 1:22-26)** - The household of Joseph were not like the majority. They did not compromise or let the enemy remain amongst them. Not everyone is going to be fully obedient, but God can use a few fully surrendered to Him to do great things.
- **“Abort Mission” Principle (Judges 1:27-33)** - The majority of the people of Israel did not take possession of the land that they were supposed to. They let the peoples of the land live amongst them and compromised obedience to what God had called them to. We need to anticipate that there will be many in our own ranks who will succumb to the world's values and system and compromise the integrity of the faith and mission. We need to hold fast to obedience and truth.
- **“White Flag” Principle (Judges 1:34-36)** - The Danites not only did not drive out the Amorites they were not even able to take over the territory allotted to them. So they just stayed in the hill country. We must resist the temptation to give up when things get tough. God never promised to make things easy and we cannot simply surrender truth for the sake of ease or comfort.

Application Questions:

1. Are there areas in your life that you would qualify as unsuccessful? Are there any of the principles for success that you think would help in this area?
2. Are there any clear obstacles that you are facing in this area? Do any of the principles of obstacles seem similar to what you are facing?
3. What are some things that you can do to overcome these obstacles or even prepare for future challenges?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read Judges 2:1-3:6
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 3: The Spiritual Background

The Next Generation (Judges 2:1-3:6) - This passage records the transition from one generation to the next. We see that as Joshua and his elders pass away that the generation that follows does not carry on the faith. We see that we must be diligent in passing the faith to the next generation. Because they may not have had the direct experience with God that we have had they are susceptible to disobedience and attack.

1. **The First Generation (Judges 2:1-10a)** - The first generation was far from perfect, but they did have a real relationship with God. They managed to do some great things in service of Him. Look at some of their characteristics:
 - **Had God's Direct Promise (Judges 2:1-2)** - The first generation had been delivered through the wilderness and had a direct promise and covenant with God.
 - **Learned Repentance (Judges 2:3-5)** - When the first generation violated the commands of God they repented and called upon the Lord. They did not always do right, but they respected the standards of God.
 - **Had Seen God's Power (Judges 2:6-7)** - The Israelites had seen God guide them through the wilderness and give them a land of their own. All those who had seen His "great work" served them their whole lives.
 - **Failed to Pass the Baton (Judges 2:8-10a)** - Unlike Moses, Joshua failed to clearly define his successor though he had 110 years on the planet. Those who were with Joshua served the Lord, but they did not produce progeny that served the Lord.

2. **The Second Generation (Judges 2:10b-19)** - The generation that followed Joshua not only failed to accomplish the tasks and objectives that the Lord had laid before the nation of Israel, but they abandoned Him altogether. Look at some of their characteristics:
 - **No Relationship (Judges 2:10b)** - The generation that arose after Joshua did not know the Lord. They did not encounter Him in the way their parents had.
 - **Had not Experienced God's Power (Judges 2:10b)** - This was a generation that had not seen the deliverance from Egypt, they had not been there for the provision in the desert, they had not seen the victories as Israel had conquered the land. This generation had not seen the power of God firsthand.
 - **No Regard for God's Standards (Judges 2:11-13)** - The second generation had no regard for God's standards. They quickly abandoned God and served idols.
 - **Squandered Blessings (Judges 2:14-15)** - The Lord raised up people against them because of their disobedience. They gave away all the blessings that those who went before them spent life times building.
 - **Reject Salvation (Judges 2:16-17)** - God raised up judges who delivered them from their oppressors over and over, but they repeatedly rejected God's grace.

- **No Repentance (Judges 2:18-19)** - The second generation showed no repentance for the evil that they did. They kept returning to their sin and refused to follow the commands of the Lord.

Results of Disobedience (Judges 2:20-3:6) - Because of the idolatry and disobedience of the second generation the nation of Israel was going to have to live with a number of consequences that they were never meant to have to endure. These consequences reveal a pattern of how sin slowly creeps in and then takes over our hearts and lives:

- **Pressure of Enticement (Judges 2:20-22)** - The nation of Israel was forced to live with pagans in their midst. Their values and their gods would be a temptation and a snare to them and their children. When we place ourselves in positions that God never intended we have to live with temptation that we should never have to.
- **Pain of Insecurity (Judges 2:23-24)** - The Israelites had to live in constant fear of attack and rebellion from those who were living amongst them. They could never enjoy the security that God intended them to have. When we walk outside the standards of the Lord we lose the blessings and safety that He intended us to have.
- **Silver Lining (Judges 3:1-3)** - The Lord used this time to teach the art of war to those who had not experienced it before. God used His punishment purposefully to shape Israel and equip them.

How Failure Works (Judges 3:4-6) - The Lord left a pattern to show us how sin can creep into our lives and slowly take root and take over every area of our hearts and lives:

- **Enticement (Judges 3:4-5)** - Again, the Israelites had to live among the corrupting influences that their pagan neighbors. This was a temptation to abandon the commandments of the Lord. Sin begins with a slight tug on our heart strings and snow balls as we continue to flirt and entertain the idea of wrongdoing.
- **Participation (Judges 3:6a)** - The Israelites began to intermarry with the peoples of the land. Now they not only had to live amongst people who were doing wrong, but began to become involved with them and their value system. As we continue to place ourselves in a position of temptation the eventual result will be our involvement.
- **Transformation (Judges 3:6b)** - It was not long before Israel adopted pagan gods and walked away from the Lord. Soon they became just like the people they were supposed to be distinct from. We cannot entertain sin in our lives and expect to remain unchanged. Participating in sin will result in a change in our demeanor, attitude, and worldview.

Application Questions:

1. Think through the important roles that you play in your life and in ministry. Are you actively developing and discipling your replacement?
2. What are some things that you can do to show a generation that might not have had the same experience that you have had, the power and majesty of God?
3. Are there areas of your life that you have entertained enticement and temptation? What are

the dangers of doing so?

4. How have you seen the pattern failure at work in your own life or in the life of someone you know?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the life of Ehud (Judges 3:12-30).
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 4: The Life of Ehud

Developing a Plan of Attack (Judges 3:12-30) - If there is anything that Ehud's leadership teaches us it is that a great plan can really tip the scales in our favor. Ehud put together a great strategy to help free Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Looking at the details of his life we can find some principle that will help us develop our own strategies for taking our obstacles in our life. Many battles we face are won or lost before they begin!

- **“Assessment Principle” (Judges 3:12-15a)** - It was eighteen years of servitude before the nation of Israel cried out to the Lord. I wonder how many tried to rebel against King Elgon and failed before they realized what they needed was repentance. We need to take a moment to stop and correctly evaluate what the problem is if we are going to find the right solution.
- **“Macgyver” Principle (Judges 3:15a)** - In the ancient world the left hand was considered a hand of dishonor and of weakness. Ehud was probably not the most likely candidate for the job in the eyes of most people. Our plan should include the resources that God places before us and not rely on that which we do not have. Focusing on what we don't have will get us nowhere and cause discouragement.
- **“Rally the Troops” Principle (Judges 3:15b)** - Ehud had a plan that involved the people. He would not have been able to put together a tribute to get him into the presence of the King by himself. Though God may raise up a leader to lead, no person can create a movement by himself. Our plans should involve others.
- **“Catch Them Sleeping” Principle (3:16-19)** - Ehud knew that no one would suspect a leader to be left-handed, so he used that to his advantage by strapping his weapon to his right thigh (right-handed people carried their weapons on the left side). We need to look for where we can use the gifts that God gave us to reach an unsuspecting world.
- **“Upper Hand” Principle (3:20-25)** - Ehud created an advantage for the Israelites by taking out the leader of the Moabites. When things seem bleak we need to look to create an advantage. Our plan should include a strategy that will turn the tables in our favor.
- **“Two Steps Ahead” Principle (3:26)** - Ehud did not leave himself trapped with no way of escape. His plan did not just include taking out the leader, but also included a way out. We need to not be so near-sighted in our planning. A good plan does not simply plan for the immediate, but also for the long haul.
- **“Open Door” Principle (3:27-30)** - When Ehud had created an opportunity the people were ready to strike. They patiently waited to that point, but were ready for action. We must remember that the point of a plan of attack is to eventually attack. When God opens the door we must be ready to act.

Application Questions:

1. Do you have a plan for ministry? Is discipleship in your weekly planner?
2. In the areas of your life where you have developed plans and strategies, have you used or

violated any of these principles?

3. Look for an area of need (ministry or a person) or take an existing area or person in your life and use these principle to develop a plan to help accomplish the task or reach that person.

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the life of Ehud (Judges 4:1-5:21).
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 5: The Life of Deborah and Barak

No Commendation (Judges 4:4-5:21) - The life of Deorah and Barak teaches us that leaders need to be obedient even if it results in someone else getting the glory and honor of the efforts. We need to serve God for Him and not for what we get at the end. What are some things that we can do to help us be people who are focused on the glory of the Lord and not the glory of ourselves?

- **“Indirect Command” Principle (Judges 4:4-7)** - Barak received his call from the Lord through the mouth of Deborah, the prophetess. The Lord did not come and speak to him and his me directly. The Lord does not have to speak audibly to us directly in order to place an expectation of obedience on us. He often uses our leaders and His Word to communicate with us; we must understand that we are not the center of the work of God.
- **“Right Motive” Principle (Judges 4:8-9)** - Barak went into battle knowing that he was not going to get the honor and glory that came with killing Sisera, the commander of the Canaanites. We need to be willing to be obedient to the call of the Lord even when it is evident that we will not be benefiting in any sort of worldly way.
- **“Not Alone” Principle (Judges 4:10)** - Barak did not try to be the hero. He quickly called together Zebulun and Naphtali to aid in the battle that was about to be waged. When we involve others, it shows that it is not about us being the center of the attention. Getting others to come along side us will help be more efficient, effective, and will give us someone to share in victory with.
- **“Hand of God” Principle (Judges 4:11)** - God was going to use something and someone that seemed totally unrelated to this battle to bring about victory. When we acknowledge that God is at work in ways that we cannot see nor understand. We realize that we can take nor credit for victory because our success is only because He went before us.
- **“Pat on the Back” Principle (Judges 4:12-14)** - In the midst of the formation of the a formidable opponent, Deborah was there to reinforce and encourage Barak and the army that the Lord was with them and that they would have victory. When we focus on encouraging and empowering others, there is little time to focus on ourselves and selfish desires.
- **“No Reward” Principle (Judges 4:15-22)** - Barak and his armies fought, defeated, and chased the armies of Sisera, only to have a woman get the honor of killing the commander with a tent peg. It is easy to start a job with right motives, but after putting in a lot of effort and energy it is difficult to watch someone else get the reward. We must maintain a selfless attitude even at the end of each task.
- **“Eye on the Prize” Principle (Judges 4:23-24)** - Barak and Deborah's bigger objective was not to gain personal glory for themselves, but to free Israel from the oppression of Jabin and the Canaanites. When we become focused on our own selfish desires and gain then we have lost sight of the bigger objective that God is trying to accomplish.
- **“Praise God” Principle (Judges 5:1-21)** - Deborah and Barak sang praises to God for the victory. They gave God credit (5:4-5), they remembered what life was like before (5:6-11), they thanked Him for those who helped (5:12-15; 18-22; 24-27) and reminded Him of those

who did not (5:16-17; 23). When we are giving thanks to the Lord for all that He has done, giving Him credit, and acknowledging all the help that we had. We are not focused on what we don't have.

Application Questions:

1. Are there areas of your life that you really desire commendation or credit?
2. Are there areas of ministry that you would question the motive of your heart? Is it possible to be doing good things for a selfish motive?
3. What are some ways you can institute these principles to keep yourself from falling into the trap of needing to receive credit and applause for your actions?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the life of Gideon (Judges 6:1-8:35)
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 6: The Life of Gideon

Learning to See with Eyes of Faith (Judges 6:12-8:35) - The biblical definition of faith is learning to see the world the lens of the Lord and not believing what my eye tells me. Gideon was a man who struggled to see the world from the Lord's perspective. He was so caught up with the world which his eye was able to see that He could not take the Word of the Lord at face value. He was constantly testing the Lord and in need of some sort of physical proof, something he could see or feel. Let us look at some of the symptoms of a lack of faith and trust from the life of Gideon:

- **“Heaven's Perspective” Principle (Judges 6:11-12)** - The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon while he was threshing in a wine press (this would be one of the least ideal spots to try and accomplish this task). While Gideon was hiding the angel of the Lord greeted him as a “mighty man of valor”. The Lord clearly saw Gideon in light different than Gideon saw himself and was able to see past Gideon's current shortcomings to see the man he could become.
- **“Near-sighted” Principle (Judges 6:13)** - Gideon could not put together how the Lord could be with the nation of Israel and they be going through such difficult circumstances. He could not see how the Lord was working to try and soften the hearts of His people. We too can become so focused on our own circumstances that we lose the ability to see the bigger picture of what God might be doing through difficult times.
- **“Pick Up the Phone” Principle (Judges 6:14)** - Gideon would not trust God's call in His life. He had a problem with the current circumstances that the nation was in, but was not ready to be a part of the solution. When God places a burden or a stirring in our hearts we need to be ready to step out in faith and be read to be the tool that God uses to accomplish the task.
- **“Man in the Mirror” Principle (Judges 6:15-16)** - Gideon had trouble seeing past his own shortcomings and could not put together how he was going to defeat the Midianites. The key was the Lord told Gideon that He would be with Him. Too often we can allow our own self-esteem issues get in the way of faith. We have to remember that the work of the Lord is not based on how great or awesome we are. In fact, the Lord has a pattern of choosing the unlikely to do the impossible. We need to get over ourselves and be ready to give the Lord what little we do have.
- **“Show Me a Sign” Principle (Judges 6:17-24)** - Gideon was unable to trust that this was a message from the Lord and that the one that stood before him was actually a messenger from God without some sort of tangible evidence. He has to see the angel do a little fire trick with an offering and disappear before he is willing to heed the call of the angel. We too can fall into the trap of making God perform tricks for us before we are willing to let follow in obedience. We need to not require physical signs and wonders from God to walk in obedience to His call.
- **“Fear Factor” Principle (Judges 6:25-27)** - Gideon was told to tear down the altar to Baal and the Asherah and make an altar to the Lord and have a burnt offering there. He was too afraid to do it by day that he did it by night. Gideon let his fear alter his course of action. He did not trust that the Lord would protect him. In the same way we cannot have faith when we have fear. The two run counter to one another. Our fear is often a result of a

lack of trust in the Lord.

- **“Hindsight” Principle (Judges 6:28-32)** - At first it looked like Gideon had a good reason to be scared when the men of the city awoke to see their idols torn down and want Gideon dead. His father, Joash, stepped up and said that Baal should be perfectly capable of defending himself if he were truly a God. It was clear that God's hand of protection was on Gideon and he must have realized that God would have protected him in the same way had he done it during the day. If we let our fears get the best of us we can only look back and wonder what might have been should we have chosen to walk in faith.
- **“Moment of Clarity” (Judges 6:33-35)** - As the Midianites and Amalekites assembled for battle the spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he rallied the people from different tribes to come together for war. It seemed like for a moment Gideon was actually going to step out in faith. We need to understand that a moment of obedience is not the same of faith. Faith is an ability to view a situation through the eyes of God.
- **“Jump Through the Hoop” Principle (Judges 6:36-40)** - After Gideon assembled the army together, he resorted to testing God again. He asked God to do a sign if He would do “as [He] had spoken”. Gideon knew what God had said, but once again needed to see some sort of temporal proof. And if once wasn't enough Gideon has the audacity to ask God twice. We must be careful not to become presumptuous of God's patience. When we know what God had spoken we must walk in obedience and not challenge Him to do signs on our behalf.
- **“Turnabout is Fair Play” Principle (Judges 7:1-8)** - With all the testing that Gideon was doing to God, God decided to test Gideon a little. He whittled down Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 soldiers. God did not succumb to Gideon's fear or need for a sign forever. When we have a lack of faith and fall into a habit of not taking God at His Word then we are inviting Him to build our faith which might mean putting us in a situation in which we have no choice, but to believe Him.
- **“Dream, Dream, Dream” Principle (Judges 7:9-18)** - Once again Gideon was unable to take the Lord at His Word. The Lord gave Gideon the option of believing what He had spoken or of going down to the camp and hearing the dream of one of the enemy about the ensuing Israelite victory. Gideon would believe the dream of the enemy, but he couldn't fully believe the word of the Lord! We must be careful that we do not become more enamored with little signs than we do with God's Word. His Word is much more trustworthy. God will do what He has said, we need to trust Him.
- **“God of His Word” (Judges 7:19-25)** - God did as He said He would. The army of just 300 men was able to take out the army of Midianites. They were able to watch as the Lord set the Midianites against one another and slayed each other. They were able to gather more people together and pursue Midian and capture their leaders. When God says He will accomplish something it will get done. No matter how impossible it seems; the Lord always delivers on His Word and He can and should be trusted.
- **“Confidence” Principle (Judges 8:1-3)** - Gideon upset the people of Ephraim for not including them in his attack against Midian. The problem was that God told him to only use the 300 men that He had selected. Gideon did not feel the need to defend his actions and was able to talk to the men of Ephraim and disarm the conflict. When we are walking in faith we can be confident we are doing right and do not need to prove ourselves to the world

around us. This allows us to draw our confidence and security from our obedience and not the approval of men.

- **“Get Off the Fence” Principle (Judges 8:4-17)** - Gideon went to the city of Succoth and asked for bread for his hungry army, but they refused to join his side in case Gideon was unable to kill the kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna. These men were unable to see that God was at work and was going to use Gideon and 300 men to accomplish this task. This lack of faith resulted in Gideon returning and killing the men of the city. A lack of faith will sometimes result in disastrous consequences. God might be gracious, but certainly does not have to be. We need to get off the fence and be willing to dive in, faith first.
- **“He Gets it From His Father” Principle (Judges 8:18-21)** - We see that Gideon has come into his own as he captures and kills the kings of Midian, but this scene also shows that Gideon's son was afraid to step up and kill the kings as his father commanded him. We can see that Gideon's previous lack of faith and his fear of what his eyes saw manifested itself in the life of his son. We must realize that faith or a lack thereof is contagious. We must realize that there are always eyes watching and taking notes on our actions and attitudes.
- **“Something to Hold On To” Principle (Judges 8:22-27)** - Gideon did not try to take credit for himself, he knew that the Lord would be the one to lead these people, but even after all he had been through he had the need to create something that he could feel and touch. He made a golden ephod which would become a “snare to Gideon and his household”. It can be hard to trust in a God that we cannot see or touch, but He has left behind His Word. We must be able to trust in something that our senses cannot. Only then are we stepping out in faith. When we make God into an image, we are bound to create an idol and make Him into something He is not.

Application Questions:

1. What are some areas in your spiritual life where you think you might be struggling to have faith (to trust that things are as God says they are)?
2. Are any of the symptoms that Gideon exhibited (i.e. fear, testing God, need of proof) prominent in any area of your life?
3. What do you think you can do to develop your faith (ability to see things the way God says they are)?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the life of Abimelech (Judges 9:1-57).
2. Complete the steps for a biography on this section.

Notes:

Session 7: The Life of Abimelech

Recognizing Self Appointed Leaders (Judges 9:1-10:5) - The book of Judges takes a break from God raising up deliverers to record the story of a leader who appointed himself as a leader. This story is helpful because amid dark and troubling times everyone who tries to lead is not going to have God's stamp of approval. Let us take a look at the life of Abimelech to see if we can find some traits on how we can recognize self appointed leaders:

- **“Puppeteer” Principle (Judges 9:1-3)** - Abimelech was not content being one of seventy brothers who shared leadership responsibilities, so he stirred up support by manipulating and convincing the leaders of Shechem to follow him. One way to determine if a leader is self appointed is how they gather support. If they are using people's feelings and weaknesses to gain their support than chances are they are only in it for themselves.
- **“Trekkie” Principle (Judges 9:4)** - Abimelech went and hired 70 “worthless and reckless” fellows to help him do his dirty work. Another good way to determine where a leader is going is to see who they are surrounded by. We can generally know the heart of a man by the company that he keeps.
- **“Bulldozer” Principle (Judges 9:5-6)** - Abimelech went with these men and kill his brothers (all except one). Abimelech left a wake of dead bodies on his path to becoming king. When someone is willing to take out anyone and everyone, even those close to them on their way to becoming a leader it is a good sign that they are not receiving the position from the Lord, but taking it for themselves.
- **“Red Light” Principle (Judges 9:7-21)** - The people of Shechem ignored the warning from the Lord that came through Jotham. Jotham clearly called out the people had dealt dishonestly and craftily in order to make Abimelech king. When we have to ignore God's Word or look the other direction to justify to feel okay about a certain individual leading us than that person is likely seeking power on their own accord.
- **“Trouble Brewing” Principle (Judges 9:22-25)** - The marriage between Abimelech and the people of Shechem only lasted three years before much major contention arose. Soon the men of Shechem were would set ambushes against Abimelech. No leader will get along with everyone, even good ones, but contention and a lack of unity is a good sign that we are operating outside of the will the Lord. If a leader cannot even get along with those he bribed to get into his position that is another good sign he has obtained the position selfishly.
- **“What Goes Around, Comes Around” Principle (Judges 9:26-29)** - Abimelech's rebellious act in assuming power resulted later in Gaal proposing similar questions to the ones Abimelech posed to stir up discontent among the people. Rebellion will ultimately breed more rebellion, so if a leader has rebellious people all around him the question of where they learned the behavior should be asked.
- **“No Honor Among Thieves” Principle (Judges 9:30-41)** - Zebul was none too pleased with Gaal and some of his comments and he sent word to Abimelech in secret and they set up an ambush against the men of Shechem. Zebul even tried to trick Gaal when Gaal initially saw the armies of Abimelech coming down from the mountains. When it was too late then Zebul started to threaten and mock Gaal. When everyone in leadership has to deal dishonestly and is working back channels to protect themselves it should be a clear sign that God's hand is

not a part of what is taking place.

- **“Fear Factor” Principle (9:42-49)** - Abimelech did not simply win the battle, but then he burned fields and sowed them with salt so that they would be worthless from generations to come. He then took wood and burned about one thousand people alive in the tower of Shechem. Using ruthlessness and fear as a means of keeping order is a sign of a leader who is clutching onto the power for themselves. They clearly do not care about the people and do not have the security of know that the Lord is on their side.
- **“Unhappily Ever After” Principle (9:50-57)** - Abimelech tried to do a similar attack on Thebez, but when he went to set the tower ablaze a woman managed to crush his skull with a stone and he has to beg his armor bearer to pierce him with a sword so he is not remembered as being killed by a woman. Even on his death bed he was only worried about himself. Self appointed leaders leave a trail of destruction in their wake, the problem is that eventually it catches up to them.
- **“Replacement” Principles (10:1-5)** - God had Tola and then Jair waiting in the wings to lead Israel. For 45 years these two would bring relative peace to the nation before they slipped into idolatry again. Abimelech only reigned for three years. God has replacements waiting and leaders are only as secure in their position as the Lord says they are. Those who chose to try to hang on to power for selfish gain can expect their stay at the top to be short lived.

Application Questions:

1. Are you ever tempted to take leadership from someone in certain areas of your life? What are some of the reasons you give yourself?
2. What is the problem with taking leadership by force? What are some problems this might cause down the road?
3. Are you currently under any leadership that you feel appointed themselves? What would give you that impression? What do you do about it?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the Life of Jephthah (Judges 10:6-12:7).
2. Complete the steps for a biography on this section.

Notes:

Session 8: The Life of Jephthah

No Excuses (Judges 10:17-12:7) - Jephthah was an individual who had many things that went against him in his life. He was not dealt the best hand, but he never used any of those things as an excuse not to be used by God. The leaders of Gilead asked the question, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon?” (Judges 10:18). Let us take a look at some of the excuses that Jephthah could have used as a justification to sit around and not be the answer to this question, but instead overcame to rise up, save Israel, and become a man of God:

- **“God Can’t Use Me Because of My Past/ Background” (Judges 11:1)** - Jephthah was a man who was born out of a sinful union between his father and a harlot. He could have let this eat at him and keep him from becoming something, but instead he rose above his checkered background and became a valiant warrior. We must remember that our future is determined by our choices and we can let a poor family background or a checkered past become an excuse to continue poor choices in the present.
- **“No Body Likes/ Supports Me” (Judges 11:2-3a)** - Jephthah's half brothers ridiculed him and drove him from his father's household and he was forced to live in the land of Tob. Jephthah did not have the support of his brothers, his father clearly did not speak out on his behalf, likely because Jephthah was a constant reminder of his sinful action. When we are beat up and treated poorly by those who are supposed to love us, we can use that as an excuse to license disobedience or as a crutch not to pursue God's best.
- **“I am Constantly Surrounded by the Wrong Crowd (Judges 11:3b)** - When Jephthah arrived in Tob a band of “worthless fellows” gathered about him. Instead of allowing himself to be dragged down by this bunch, he led them. We are often put in situations and circumstances which we are surrounded by those who have no regard for our values or God's standards. We cannot let their sinful practices allow us to feel okay about sin in our lives nor can we compare ourselves to them and become content in our spiritual walk.
- **“But They Hurt Me” (Judges 11:4-11)** - The leaders of Gilead (which would no doubt include Jephthah's brothers) came to Jephthah and asked him to lead them against Ammon. Jephthah did not use his personal hurt as an excuse not to do the right thing. He knew that the people needed a leader and that the nation was more important than his personal conflict. We must not use our personal hurts as a reason not to serve our God in full obedience. We must keep focused on the bigger objective.
- **“But That Isn't Politically Correct” (Judges 11:12-28)** - The king of Ammon accused Israel of taking the lands and territories from them. Jephthah took a stand against the statement by giving a fuller background and making the bold statement that God gave them the lands because of Sihon, the king of the Amorites refusal to let Israel through. He boldly stated, “Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So, whatever the Lord our God has driven out before us, we will possess it”. We must take a stand on what is true and need not apologize for our God nor His Word and deeds.
- **“Well I Didn't Really Mean It” (Judges 11:29-40)** - Jephthah made a vow to the Lord to offer as a sacrifice the first thing to come through the doors of his house if he returned in victory. He had victory, but his daughter, his only child was the first thing to walk through his doors. He might have been thinking of a bull or a sheep or his mother-in-law when he made the vow, but that was not what happened. He did not back out of his vow and offered

his daughter as a sacrifice. We need to be people of our word, even when things do not go the way we thought they would. Circumstances must not dictate if we live up to our word. We must mean the words we let come out of our mouths.

- **“I Just Don’t Have The Resources/ Support” (Judges 12:1-3)** - Jephthah called for help from the Ephraimites and did not receive their aid, so he went and fought the sons of Ammon without them. He used the resources to accomplish the task God gave him and did not whine about not having a large enough army. We must not hide behind the excuse that we cannot be obedient because we do not have what we need. When God calls us to do something we must do the best with what we have and if we need more than He will be faithful to provide.
- **“That’s Not My Responsibility” (Judges 12:4-6)** - When the Ephraimites confronted Jephthah for going to war without them, he battled and defeated the enemy. This was not apart of the original plan or agreement that he had made, but he did it anyway. We need to be willing to go the extra mile and not try to get away from extra work. We must be willing to step up and take on that which others will not.

Application Questions:

1. Are there areas in you life for which you make excuses? What are the areas?
2. Which of these excuses do you feel like you fall into the most? Are there other excuses you use?
3. What are some of the dangers of hiding behind excuses?
4. What are some ways that you can keep from falling into the habit of making excuses for disobedience?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the life of Samson (Judges 13:1-16:31).
2. Complete the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 9: Life of Samson

Master of Compromise (Judges 13:1-16:31) - I remember growing up and being taught that Samson was this great and mighty strongman who fought on behalf of the Lord God, but when you really look at the life of Samson there is little, if any, positive about him as an individual at all. He was a man who compromised everything in his life: his walk with God, his family, his nation, and even his own life. He truly was a master of compromise. Let us take a look at some of the many things that Samson did that made him so good at what he did:

- **Forget Godly Foundation (Judges 13:1-25)** - Samson's story begins with God calling to his childless and barren mother. God told her she would bear a child that would be a Nazarite (cp. Numbers 6:1-21) committed to God. Samson would forget that his very existence was based on an agreement and commitment to serve the Lord (13:1-7). He would also refuse to listen to parents who had a heart to do God's best (13:8-14) and had a real reverence for the Lord (Judges 13:15-23). He would also forget that it was the Spirit of the Lord that stirred inside of him and gave him his strength (13:24-25). The beginning of compromise is forgetfulness that we owe God our existence, our heritage, and our abilities. Without Him and all that He has provided we would be nothing.
- **Put Yourself in the Wrong Place (Judges 14:1a)** - Samson went into Philistine territory and spent time in a place where he would only encounter things that would only pull him away from a walk with God and get him in trouble. Too often, we set ourselves up to fail. We need to be diligent to try and put ourselves in situation and circumstances that will lend themselves to success and not disobedience and compromise.
- **Focus on the Forbidden (Judges 14:1b-2)** - Samson became enamored with a Philistine woman, a woman that he had no right to marry (cp. Deuteronomy 7:3). This was not some passing fancy; Samson insisted that his father and mother get her for him. When we turn our attention to that which God has said that we cannot have or we focus on doing what he has said we ought not to do, we are setting ourselves up for disaster. God has blessed us with so much positive that we need not focus on the things that He has outlined as detrimental to us. When we believe the lie that the world has something better than we have and we entertain the desire we will eventually compromise.
- **Heed Not Warning (Judges 14:3)** - His father and mother tried to convince Samson that he did not need to marry a Philistine and pointed him back to his own people. Samson was not interested in hearing their words of wisdom and was focused too much on his own desire and kept insisting that they get him the Philistine woman. When we are already slipping into compromise we are not likely to be willing to hear the warnings and rebuke that come from those positive influences God has placed in our lives.
- **Ignore God's Voice (Judges 14:4)** - I was a little intrigued by this verse. God was going to use Samson's disobedience to accomplish an objective He had against the Philistines. In the case of all the other Judges, God would call them to battle and they would go (some more willingly than others), but in Samson's case there is no call recorded. This is likely because Samson was not listening and not because God was not speaking. One way to avoid compromise is to seek, hear, and obey God's call. We can easily slip into doing wrong if we are not actively pursuing right.
- **Avoid Accountability (Judges 14:5-6)** - Samson was attacked by a lion and he tore it like it

was a baby goat. This might have been worth mentioning to someone especially because as a Nazarite, he would not have been allowed to touch a dead carcass of any kind. When we dodge accountability, even on things that we could not control, we are setting ourselves up to become more and more accepting of sin in our lives. Accountability and honesty before the Lord and other is a great way to avoid slipping into a life of compromise.

- **Make Personal Pleasure a Priority (Judges 14:7)** - Over and over again Samson used the phrase “She looks good to me” and finally the text emphasized that the woman looked good to him. Samson kept elevating his own personal desires above God’s commandments, above the honor of his parents, and what was good for the nation. When our own personal desires and wants the highest priority we will be bound to compromise something from our walk with the Lord to get it.
- **No Regard for Commitment (Judges 14:8-9)** - Touching a dead lion carcass because he had to kill it when it attacked him was one thing, but going back and digging honey out of the body and then sharing it with his parents is a different story. Samson needed to come clean with the violation of his Nazarite vow before this, but instead he shows that he had no regard for the commitment whatsoever. When our commitments no longer mean anything to us we are bound to delve deep into compromise and violate the things we have said that we would do.
- **Surround Self with Non-Committed (Judges 14:10-11)** - Samson finally convinces his father to go and get the woman (Samson’s parents are a whole other study). Samson made a feast and was surrounded by 30 other young men, who were pagan in background and would have had no regard for the things of the Lord. It is likely that at a feast with this crowd Samson might have been drinking wine which would have violated another part of his Nazarite vow. It is easy to slip into sin when we surround ourselves with people who are accepting of sin and are more steeped in it than ourselves. We can feel like we are doing well when really we are compromising, just not as much as the next guy.
- **Be Flippant With Your Words (Judges 14:12-14)** - Samson made a wager with the 30 men that came to his feast to answer his riddle. Each of the men was on the hook for a linen wrap and a change of clothes. This put Samson on the hook for 30 of each himself, which would be quite a lot (a person would have been considered wealthy if they had a extra change of clothes). This was a bet that Samson would not be able to pay off if he were to lose. We need to be careful to not let our words get us into trouble. When we say things we cannot live up to, we set ourselves up for future compromise.
- **Put Others in Danger (Judges 14:15)** - Samson’s wager put his wife in a life threatening position. She had to try and get the answer from him or the men were going to take her life as well as the lives of her family. When we make choices that leave others in a troubling position we could be forced to compromise in order to get ourselves out of that situation later.
- **Entrust Secrets to Untrustworthy (Judges 14:16-18)** - Samson told the secret of his riddle to a woman who clearly was more concerned about saving her own hide and helping out her own people than being a trustworthy wife. We must be careful who we share our hearts and secrets with. Giving vital information or sharing our emotions with someone who is not concerned with our well being and come back to bite us.

- **Get Someone Else to Pay Your Debt (Judges 14:19)** - Samson did not have 30 linen wraps and changes of clothes, so he had to go and kill 30 men in Ashkelon in order to pay his debt. When we place ourselves in the position where others are going to have to pay our debt, willingly or forcefully, we have placed ourselves in a compromising situation. We need to try our best to not place ourselves in a situation where we need to take or expect others pay for our poor decisions.
- **Become Obsessive (Judges 14:20-15:2)** - Samson's wife was given to another man by his father-in-law. After some time Samson comes back for her, but her father refuses to give her to him. Samson was unable to let her go even though she had proved to be untrustworthy and unfaithful. Even her father clearly was not too hip on Samson. We can often become consumed by things that are clearly not in our best interest. Our judgment becomes clouded and we are willing to do almost anything to get what we want.
- **Justify Your Wrongdoing (Judges 15:3-5)** - Samson clearly thought he bore some sort of guilt for killing 30 men to pay off the debt he incurred when he lost the riddle wager. This time though he was justifying the course of action he was about to take because of the wrong that was done to him. He was able to license burning down the fields of the Philistines in his own mind. When we convince ourselves that there is a good reason to do wrong we make it very easy on ourselves to compromise and slip into sinful patterns.
- **React in Emotion (Judges 15:6-7a)** - The Philistine's kill Samson's wife and her father. This does not sit well with Samson and he decides that he will take revenge. When we let our emotions dictate our choices we are living in dangerous territory. Right and wrong are not determined by how we feel.
- **Convince Yourself That You Can Quit Anytime (Judges 15:7b-8)** - Samson convinced himself that this would be the last time he would go out and slaughter people. He would get his revenge and that would be the end of it. The problem is that it would not be the last time. We can fool ourselves into thinking that we can do wrong once or delve into sin once and not make a habit of it, but the truth is once it gets started it becomes harder and harder to stop. Many addicts were born out of this line of thinking.
- **Drag Others Into Conflict (Judges 15:9-13)** - Samson's actions ended up causing the Philistines to come up to the sons of Judah to get Samson. He put them in a position in which they were going to have to hand Samson over to the enemy or to fight those who were oppressing them. We need to avoid putting others in a position in which they might have to compromise their values unnecessarily. We need to try not to drag others into our issues and make obedience tougher for them than it needs to be.
- **Do Right the Wrong Way (Judges 15:14-20)** - Samson did not have Judah fight against the Philistines. He gave himself up and was handed over to the Philistines. He proceeded to defeat the Philistines on his own, all 1,000 of them. The problem was he used the jawbone of a donkey and as a Nazarite he was not supposed to touch the body of any dead creature. Even in victory Samson was compromising on his commitment. We need to realize that the ends do not justify the means. We need to do right, the right way.
- **Repeat the Same Mistakes (Judges 16:1)** - Samson again goes into enemy territory and put himself in a place he should not of been. He goes to a foreign prostitute. Samson fell into the same pattern that got him into a lot of trouble the first time. We need to be aware

when we start to slip up in the same areas repeatedly. The more we do wrong the easier it become to compromise the next time.

- **Provoke Those What Already Want to Harm You (Judges 16:2-3)** - The Gazites were out to kill Samson. They were waiting till morning to ambush him. In the middle of the night Samson took the gate of the cities and put them on top of a mountain. This action probably didn't win over any of the Gazites. When the enemy is already out to get us, we should not try to do more to provoke them. Walking in obedience is tough enough, asking for opposition and trouble is not going to lead to success.
- **Repeat the Same Mistakes Again (Judges 16:4)** - Different place. Different woman. Same result.
- **Flirt with Disaster (Judges 16:5-7)** - The lords of the Philistines got Delilah to try and get Samson's secret to his strength out of him. Rather than put to rest any chance that Delilah would have at getting out of him, he makes up a lie. This pattern would eventually catch up to him. We need remove ourselves from positions and conversations that could result in trouble, not walk as close to the line as possible.
- **Don't Take a Hint (Judges 16:8-14)** - Three times Samson gave Delilah false strategies to steal away his strength. Each time she would have had him handed over to the Philistines. Samson refused to see that this woman did not care for him and would be his down fall. We need to be aware of the attacks of the enemy. We need to take advantage of when the Lord protects us and learn from our experience.
- **Give in to Enemy (Judges 16:15-22)** - Samson finally succumbs to the constant nagging from Delilah and told her his secret. That night she cut his hair and he is captured and his eyes were gouged out. When we place ourselves in a position when we have to resist attack after attack after attack we wear down and will succumb to the attack of the enemy. We need to try to avoid temptation, but when we are faced with it we must stand strong and resist.
- **Ruin the Testimony of the Lord (Judges 16:23-24)** - Because of Samson's mistake the Philistines had reason to celebrate their god and rejoice and exalt him above the God of Israel. When we choose to walk in compromise we ruin the testimony of the Lord and can give others a reason to seek something other than the God that can set them free.
- **Focus on Self Unto Death (Judges 16:25-31)** - Samson asked the Lord for strength one last time, so that he could pull down the house on top of the Philistines. His reason was to "be avenged for my two eyes". Even in this last act, Samson showed that he was more focused on himself than being obedient or used of the Lord to set the nation of Israel free. We can think that we will eventually mature or when it really matters we will choose to do the right thing, but being obedient and being spiritual is not like flipping a switch. It takes diligence and consistency to develop obedience and to avoid compromise.

Application Questions:

1. Are there areas in your life you find yourself compromising? What are they?
2. Are you falling into any of the same traps that Samson fell into? Which ones?

3. What are some things that you can do to keep yourself from continuing to compromise in the areas?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the Danite Retreat (Judges 17:1-18:31).
2. Do the steps for a biography for this section.

Notes:

Session 10: The Danite Retreat

The Danite Retreat (Judges 17:1-18) - This begins the darkest section of the book of Judges. As we take a look at the nation of Israel and realize they forgot what a walk with God entailed entirely. We see the phrase repeated throughout this section that “There was no king in Israel” and this led to the nation doing what it pleased. This section opens with a look into the life of Micah and his interactions with the Danites. As we look at these parties we will see what it looks like when the people of God no longer have any clue of what He is looking for. Here are 11 signs that the people have God are doing right in their own eyes:

- **Celebrate Mediocrity (Judges 17:1-2)** - Micah went to his mother and informed her that he had stolen the 1100 silver pieces that she was missing. She was very excited and even praises her son for his actions. I am all for repentance, but when some robs you and then gives back what they took, that doesn't exactly make them a saint. When we see believers celebrating mediocrity in each others lives it is a sign that we are not walking with the standards that we should.
- **Worship by Own Rules (Judges 17:3-6)** - Micah's mother dedicated her silver to the Lord by commissioning a graven image and a molten image!?! Micah set up a shrine with these idols and consecrated one of his sons as his priest. It seems as though the family thought that the Lord would somehow be pleased by these direct violations of His Word. When we start worshiping God by our own rules and do things that we think He would like without checking it with what He has commanded, it is a sign that we are no longer seeking Him the way we should.
- **Compromise for Comfort (Judges 17:7-11)** - A young Levite showed up on Micah's doorstep and Micah offered him a place to live and a salary to come and be a priest in his shrine of idols. The Levite agreed. The Levite was willing to compromise his role as a Levitical priest and servant of the Living God in order to have the material comfort that Micah offered. When believers are willing to bend rules to ensure that they get the comfort and material possessions they desire, it is another sign that the people of God are way off course.
- **Use Wrong Standard (Judges 17:12-13)** - Micah really thought that now that he had a Levite as a priest that God would be pleased with him. He convinced himself having a proper priest would make God happy, the problem was the priest abandoned God's standard when he agreed to serve in a household of idols. Having a priest from the right tribe might have been secondary to idolatry. As believers we have to use God's standard to evaluate if we are pleasing Him. We cannot be obedient in one area and abandon the rest of His standards and expect him to be pleased.
- **Find Alternatives to Obedience (Judges 18:1-2)** - The Danites did not have an inheritance because they were forced into the hill country (cp. Judges 1:34). Rather than take the land that they were supposed to have taken they went to search for land elsewhere. When obedience takes effort and commitment we can have the tendency to seek out other “good things” as an alternative to simple obedience. There are many good deeds that are simply masked obedience.
- **Advice from Poor Sources (Judges 18:3-6)** - The sons of Dan came to hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. The Danites recognized the Levite and ask him to inquire of the Lord, so they would know which way would make them prosperous. The priest told them

that they were headed in the right direction. This was a priest that had just told them that he had been hired to serve in a house of idols and they sought his advice anyway. When the people of God are not discerning in the places they take advice from it is another sign that we are not seeking the Lord the way we should.

- **Base Decisions on Personal Gain (Judges 18:7-13)** - The spies from the tribe of Dan saw that the Sidonians were living in peace and security. They saw that the land was abundant and suggested that they take the land. The Danites did not take the land because they were following the Lord's commands, but were taking it because they saw that it would be a very convenient place to live. This set them up for compromise later. God's people need to make decisions based on his Word and not on what benefit we will reap. Self-centered thinking is a sign believers are not walking the way they should.
- **Plot Wrongdoing (Judges 18:14-18a)** - The Danites scouted and then decided to steal Micah's idols. They did not just slip into doing wrong they actively planned it. When believers start to make plans that are going to take them further and further from the standards of Scripture it is a sign that we are no longer even seeking the voice of the Lord.
- **Join Others in Sin (Judges 18:18b-20)** - The Levite was more than happy to steal Micah's idols and join the Danites. When we see a migration towards wrong and believer's "heart[s] grow glad" to do wrong, we know that the faith is straying further from God. It is one thing to make mistakes, but when we willfully and joyfully join in wrongdoing we know we have slipped into a new realm of depravity.
- **Threatening Others to Get Our Way (Judges 18:21-26)** - The Danites threaten to kill Micah if he didn't let the Danites take what was his and go on his way. They were no longer following the Lord or trusting Him to fight their battles. They simply took what they wanted by force. When believers start using threats and force they have become self-reliant and are no longer trusting or waiting on the Lord.
- **Incorporate World System (Judges 18:27-31)** - The Danites took these idols and set them up at Laish. They incorporated these images into their worship. We need to be very leary of taking things from the world and mingling them with our worship of God. Holy means distinct and we violate God when we bring Him to the level of something else.

Application Questions:

1. Do you find your walk with God straying from His standards? In what areas?
2. Do you find that you are exhibiting any of the signs presented in this passage?
3. What are some ways you can get out of these habits? What are some ways you can avoid them in the future?

Assignment for Next Session:

1. Read the Benjamite War (Judges 19:1-21:25).
2. Complete the steps for a biography on this section.

Notes:

Session 11: The Benjamite War

Benjamite War (Judges 19:1-21:25) - The final section of Judges continues the theme that “There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes”. This section records the heinous act of some of the tribe of Benjamin and the ensuing war with the rest of the nation. The book ends with Israel mourning the loss of one of their own tribes rather than celebrating the land that they were supposed to have taken. Let us take a look at 10 more signs that believers are doing right in their own eyes with no regard to God's standards:

- **Compromised Leadership (19:1-2)** - This section starts off with a Levite who has taken for himself a concubine and one that would not be faithful to him. Just like in the story of Micah, we see a Levite, who is supposed to be the representative of God and spiritual head in a community, making dubious choices. If we are going to walk with God the way we are supposed to we need to choose leaders whose lives are without compromise.
- **Sidetracked Leadership (19:3-9)** - The father of this Levite's concubine managed to sidetrack the Levite from getting back to his home for five days. He kept preparing to go, but time and time again he would end up eating and drinking the day away. Leaders need to be diligent and capable of avoiding getting pulled off task.
- **Out of Touch Leadership (19:10-21)** - The Levite refused to go into the city of foreigners, but was willing to go into the tribe of Benjamin. He may have thought that staying within the city of brothers that he would be safe, but it was clear the man who offered him a place to stay knew that staying in the square was not going to be safe. Leaders need to be aware of state of their people, we can fool ourselves into thinking that the world is the only one with problems.
- **Sexual Depravity (19:22)** - Some of the men of the city try to force the Levite out of the house in which he is staying so that they can rape him. This shows a deep sexual perversion in the hearts of these men. As believers continue to slip away from the standard of the Lord, one clear sign will be a tolerance of sexual sin.
- **Sacrificing the Helpless (19:23-26)** - The Levite let his concubine be thrown to these men and she was then raped and beaten and left for dead. They first offered both her and the man's daughter. It is sad when leadership and the head of household are willing to sacrifice defenseless people to save their own hide. People of God should look to protect those who cannot protect themselves, not use them to avoid harm.
- **Unwillingness to Punish Sin (19:27-20:17)** - The Levite gathered together the rest of Israel to come together to deal with Benjamin by chopping up the body of his concubine and sending pieces all over the nation. The gather together against Benjamin and ask them to hand over the men of Gibeah that were responsible for the death of the concubine. The tribe of Benjamin refused. Unrepentant hearts and the excusing of sin is a sign that the people of God are walking on their own accord. We must be broken by sinfulness.
- **Disunity and Conflict (20:18-48)** - The tribe of Benjamin went to war with the rest of Israel. It was a necessary conflict, but it happened because some of God's people refused to do right. A problem that might not have existed if Israel was focusing on driving out and fighting those who God had told them to earlier. When the people of God are focused on fighting and dealing with each other they are not dealing with the objectives God had in

store for them to expand their kingdom.

- **Making Detrimental Vows (21:1-7)** - The men of Israel consulted the Lord before going against their brothers, but they went beyond going to war and made a vow not to allow any of their daughter marry into the tribe of Benjamin. This put them in a position where now the tribe of Benjamin faced becoming lost completely. Because they made these promises they were forced to come with other solutions. God's people must consult him before making vows and promises that could harm others or cause future problems.
- **Force a Solution (21:8-15)** - The sons of Israel take and kill the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead for not coming to Mizpah. They take 400 virgins from the tribe and give them to the sons of Benjamin, but there was not enough for them all. When we jump into something that creates other problems we can feel the need to force a solution to the problem. We must be careful not to compound sin with sin.
- **Plan Wrong as a Solution (21:16-25)** - Because there were not enough women, the elders of the congregation proposed that the sons of Benjamin lay in wait during the feast and kidnap the daughters of Shiloh. The elders said that they would not hear the fathers and brothers of these women if they came to complain. When we are willing to do more wrong to solve our own stupid mistakes rather than admit our wrong and seek the Lord's guidance we have missed the heart of God. We should not plan wrong or encourage others to do wrong.

Application Questions:

1. Do you feel that you are “doing right in you own eyes” in some areas of you life? In what areas?
2. Which of these symptoms are apparent in your life? Can you think of a good example of where you have seen yourself exhibit them?
3. What do you plan to do to move past these issues?

Assignment for Next Session:

None

Notes: