

LECTURE 10: JUDGES
“The God who disciplines and delivers”
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I. Orienting Data:

- A. Definition of “Judge”:** A divinely empowered deliverer who executes “judgment” on Israel’s enemy oppressors
- B. Content:** The cyclical narrative of the time of the judges, with emphasis on Israel’s repeated lack of covenant loyalty and Yahweh’s unrelenting covenant faithfulness
- C. Historical Coverage:** From the death of Joshua to the beginning of the monarchy; “period of settlement”
- D. Emphases:**
1. God’s constant rescue of his people, despite their habitual failure to keep covenant with him
 2. The uncompleted nature of conquest results in desperate conditions and an overall downward spiral, that stresses the need for a good king
- E. Theme:** Yahweh’s response to the Canaanization of Israelite society during the period of the settlement

II. Structural Overview

A. Introduction of Israel’s Canaanization and Their Disciplining, Delivering God (1:1–2:23)

1. The Report of Israel’s Performance: Failure in Yahweh’s War of Judgment (1:1–36)
2. The Theological Significance of Israel’s Performance (2:1–23)

B. Israel’s Judges and Yahweh’s Response to Israel’s Degeneracy (3:1–16:31)

1. Introduction: Testing Israel through the Nations (3:1–6)
2. The Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance (3:7–16:31) [*signaled by “the people did (again) what was evil in the sight of Yahweh” (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)]

Group 1	Ø	Introduction
	“and”	Aram-Naharaim & Othniel Cycle (3:7–11)
	“and again”	Moab & Ehud Cycle (3:12–30)
		(Parenthesis #1: Governorship of Shamgar, 3:31)
Group 2	“and”	Midianite & Gideon Cycle (6:1–9:57)
		(Parenthesis #2: Governorship of Tola & Jair, 10:1–5)
	“and again”	Ammonite & Jephthah Cycle (10:6–12:7)
		(Parenthesis #3: Governorships of Ibzan, Elon, & Abdon, 12:8–15)
	“and again”	Philistine & Samson Cycle (13:1–16:31)

C. The Effects of Israel’s Canaanization without a King (17:1–21:25)

1. Israel’s Religious Decay (17:1–18:31)
2. Israel’s Social Decay (19:1–21:25)
 - a. The Background to the Outrage at Gibeah (19:1–10a)
 - b. The Nature of the Outrage at Gibeah (19:10b–30)
 - i. The social outrage (19:10b–21)
 - ii. The moral outrage (19:22–30)
 - c. The Israelite Response to the Outrage at Gibeah (20:1–48)
 - d. The National Crisis Precipitated by the Outrage at Gibeah (21:1–25)

III. The Message of Judges

A. Introduction of Israel’s Canaanization and Their Disciplining, Delivering God (1:1–2:23)

1. Israel’s Failure in Judging the Canaanites (1:1–36)
 - a. *Question:* What had Israel failed to do that ultimately caused her to lose her unique identity as God’s people?
 - Deut 7:1–4. When Yahweh your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, ... and when Yahweh your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.
 - Deut. 20:16–18. But in the cities of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, ... as Yahweh your God has commanded, that they may not

teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against Yahweh your God.

- See Judg. 1:27–36.

b. *Question:* Why was God destroying the Canaanites?

- Gen. 15:16. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.
- Deut. 9:5. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations Yahweh your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Know, therefore, that Yahweh your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.

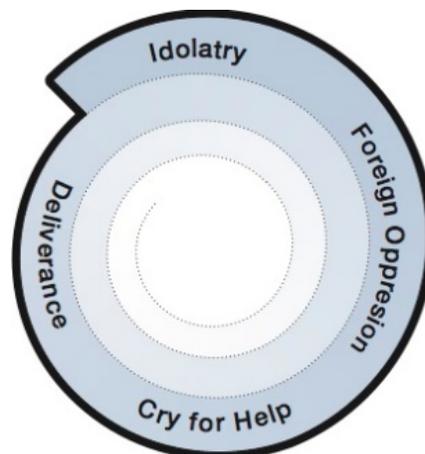
c. *Question:* What did God promise would happen to Israel if they failed to destroy the Canaanites and/or went after the gods of the nations?

- Num. 33:55–56. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell. And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.
- Deut. 8:19–20. And if you forget Yahweh your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that Yahweh makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of Yahweh your God.
- See Judg. 2:1–3, 14–15, 20–23; 3:5–6.

2. The Cycles of Disobedience and Deliverance in Judges

- The people rebel in idolatry (2:10–11, 20)
- God curses via foreign enemy oppression (2:14–15)
- The people cry for help (2:16, 18)
- God graciously delivers through a judge (2:16, 18)
- Apostasy gets increasingly worse (2:19)

Fig. 10.1. The Downward Spiraling Cycles of Disobedience in Judges



B. Israel's Judges and Yahweh's Response to Israel's Degeneracy (3:1–16:31)

1. Introduction: Testing Israel through the Nations (3:1–6)
2. The Cycles of Apostasy and Deliverance (3:7–16:31) [*signaled by “(and) the people did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh” (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1)]
 - a. The Better Judges (3:7–5:31)
 - i. *Othniel*: Caleb's younger brother successfully defeats the Mesopotamian king with the help of Yahweh's Spirit (3:10).
 - ii. *Ehud*: God uses an unlikely Benjamite to deliver Israel from the oppressive Moabites (4:28–30).
 - iii. *Barak and Deborah*: Barak's hesitance leads to God's using Deborah as judge and to his exalting a woman as the victor over the Canaanites (4:8–9).
 - b. The Worse Judges (6:1–16:31)
 - i. *Gideon*: The idol destroyer not only defeats the Midianites but leads Israel into idolatry (6:28–32; 8:27)
 - ii. *Jephthah*: The defeater of the Ammonites practices Ammonite worship by sacrificing his daughter (11:32, 39; cf. Lev 18:21; 1 Kgs 11:7).
 - iii. *Samson*: The consecrated Nazarite (13:4–5) sleeps with Philistines (14:3; 16:1, 4), breaks all of his vows (14:9; 16:17), and comes to a tragic death (16:30).

Fig. 10.2. The Six Cycles of Disobedience & Deliverance in Judges

		<i>Judge</i>	<i>Tribe of Origin</i>	<i>Enemy Opposition</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
I	1.	Othniel	Judah	Mesopotamia	Judg. 3:7–11
	2.	Ehud	Benjamin	Moab	3:12–30
		Parenthesis 1: Governorship of Shamgar			3:31
	3.	Deborah & Barak	Ephraim	Canaan	4:1–5:31
II	4.	Gideon	Manasseh	Midian	6:1–9:57
		Parenthesis 2: Governorship of Tola & Jair			10:1–5
	5.	Jephthah	Gilead	Ammon	10:6–12:7
		Parenthesis 3: Governorship of Ibzan, Elon, & Abdon			12:8–15
	6.	Samson	Dan	Philistia	13:1–16:31

THINK!

Read through the following two descriptions of well-known stories in Judges and consider Van Pelt's different interpretation. Is it reasonable to see the judges in Judges as imperfect Christ figures, or should we view them as progressively leading Israel in their Canaanization?

Van Pelt, “Rethinking Jephthah's Foolish Vow”

14 Oct 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/rethinking-jephthah-foolish-vow>

Most Christians struggle to understand the narratives recorded in the book of Judges. Consider the opening account where Adonai Bezek is captured by the tribe of Judah, humiliated by having his thumbs and big toes cut off, and then dies in Jerusalem. What about Gideon's fleece in Judges 6, or Samson's repeated relationships with illicit

women in Judges 14–16? How do we understand and explain such difficult texts? Do we ask, “Who are the Adonai Bezek’s in your life?” or “What would Samson do?” Maybe it would be better to “dare to be a Gideon,” but I don’t think so.

Another troubling episode recorded in the book of Judges appears in 11:29-40, when the judge Jephthah makes a vow that many have argued cost him the life of his daughter and only child—a human sacrifice. How could Jesus, in good conscience, proclaim that such a narrative testifies to him ([John 5:39](#); [Luke 24:44](#)), or how could Paul understand this text as the gospel promised beforehand ([Romans 1:2](#))? Did Jephthah really kill his daughter in order to fulfill a foolish vow made in the heat of battle? For many, the answer to this question is a troubling “yes.” But there is another option.

It is also possible that Jephthah never intended to sacrificially kill anyone or anything that came out of his house after he had returned from battle. Rather, this vow may be symbolic of a full or complete offering to the LORD as an expression of thanks for his grace in delivering Israel from their oppressors. Let’s consider the evidence together.

Six Reasons to Reconsider the Human Sacrifice Interpretation

1. The New Testament evaluation of the judges presented in the book of Judges is positive. Consider [Hebrews 11:32–34](#): “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah of David and Samuel and the prophets—who by faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” Notice how the author of the book of Hebrews lists Jephthah with the likes of David, Samuel, and the prophets. Additionally, these men served “by faith” and “executed justice,” not innocent young girls. Could the author of Hebrews rightly include Jephthah in this list if his last act as Judge included the illegal and horrific slaying of his own daughter?

2. In addition to the New Testament, the book of Judges itself affirms the calling and work of these men. For example, in [Judges 2:16–19](#), it is recorded that the LORD raised up these men to save Israel, not to kill them. Additionally, the text is clear that the LORD was with the judges in their work. So to impugn the work of the judge is to impugn the work of the LORD through that judge. I am not saying that the judges were sinless, perfect people. With regard to their callings, however, they were faithful by God’s grace through the power of his Spirit. Additionally, it is important to observe that when God’s appointed leaders do fall into sin, the Bible is always ready to point it out. Moses struck the rock twice and so was banned from entering the promised land ([Num. 20](#)). David committed adultery and murder and received public, prophetic condemnation ([2 Sam. 11–12](#)). Even Paul rebuked Peter over the issue of eating with Gentiles ([Gal. 2](#)). There is no such condemnation recorded for Jephthah.

3. In [Judges 11:29](#), it is recorded that the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and then in the next verse (11:30), Jephthah makes his infamous vow. Contextually speaking, therefore, this vow is the result of coming under the influence of the Spirit, not something in opposition to the work of the Spirit. This is a common pattern in the book of Judges. For example, in [Judges 6:34](#), the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon, and then two verses later (6:36) he proposed the sign of the fleece. Additionally, with Samson, when the Spirit of the LORD rushed on him he killed a lion (14:6) and defeated the Philistines (14:9; 15:14, 19).

4. With Jephthah’s vow, we must understand that he did not expect some type of animal or household pet to burst forth from the house upon his return. We know this to be true for a couple of reasons. First, in 11:31, the verb “to meet” is always used for people, never for a person encountering an animal. Second, in the ancient world, when men returned from battle, women would customarily come forth in procession in order to participate in celebratory dancing (cf. [Ex. 15:20](#); [Jud. 5:28](#); [1 Sam. 18:6](#)). Give the cultural context in which these events transpired, Jephthah likely assumed that a woman would come out from the house to meet him, perhaps a servant girl or, even better, his mother-in-law, but certainly not an animal. A better translation for 11:31 would include “whoever comes out,” not “whatever comes out.”

5. With Jephthah’s vow in 11:31, we read that this offering would belong to the LORD, and that it would be offered up as a “[whole] burnt offering.” This particular offering is not used symbolically in any other part of the Old Testament. However, offerings in general, both in the Old and New Testaments, may be used symbolically in order to characterize something offered to the LORD by way of sacrificial giving. For example, in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, Aaron and his sons (the Levites) were symbolically offered to the LORD as a wave offering (something completely consumed with fire), a gesture of complete and total dedication to the LORD’s service. In [Psalm 51:17](#), a broken and contrite heart is the sacrifice that the LORD desires. And in [Romans 12:1](#), Paul admonished believers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to the LORD, an act of spiritual worship. Thus it is clearly possible, and more likely probable, that Jephthah, under the Spirit’s guidance, was using the language of sacrifice symbolically in this

context, symbolic of complete and total dedication to the LORD.

6. The willing fulfillment of this vow by Jephthah's daughter (11:36) appears to contradict the literal interpretation of a child sacrifice. Not only were such sacrifices clearly forbidden and abominated in Scripture (Deut. 12:31; 18:9–12; cf. 2 Kings 3:27; 23:10; Is. 57:5), but the concern of the text is never death, but always virginity. In 11:37, Jephthah's daughter requests a two-month leave in order to lament her virginity. Then, in 11:38, the text records that while with her friends, she wept over the fact of her virginity. Then again, in 11:39, it is recorded that Jephthah fulfilled his vow to the LORD, and the text clearly describes how this vow was fulfilled—"that is, she did not know a man." It appears, therefore, that Jephthah's vow consisted of offering a member of his house to the full-time service of the LORD, and thus not to the normal duties of a household, such as marriage and having children. Service of this type is not unknown in the Old Testament (Ex. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22; cf. 1 Sam. 1:11, 22–28).

Ultimate Judge

This is certainly a difficult text to interpret, and both options deserve careful consideration. But consider the book of Judges as a whole. It begins with the faithfulness of Joshua's generation and the tribe of Judah, but terminates with the tribe of Benjamin becoming Canaanite, as wicked as Sodom (cf. Gen. 13 with Jud. 19–20). As the book develops, God's people decay into greater and greater wickedness (Jud. 2:19), but the LORD was merciful and continued to send judges in order to deliver his people. The greater the wickedness of the people, the greater the LORD's salvation through each judge.

By the end, Gideon must forsake his family, Jephthah must offer up his only child (cf. Gen. 22:2), and Samson must die in order for God's people to experience salvation from sin and oppression. Does this not sound like the gospel promised beforehand, a sure testimony to the person and work of Jesus? He left his family, the only begotten child of God. He died to finish the work of the judges that he had sent in ages past that we might keenly fix our eyes on him, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Van Pelt, "What Was Samson Doing with a Prostitute in Gaza?"

2 June 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-was-samson-doing-with-a-prostitute-in-gaza>

Of all the judges in the book of Judges, Samson is perhaps the most famous. Who can forget his miraculous birth, long hair, feats of great strength, and, most notoriously, his relationship with Delilah?

Most of us like Samson because we can identify with him. Samson was a sinner, and I am a sinner. If God can use Samson, then surely God can use me. In fact, we are probably attracted to a figure like Samson because we believe that Samson sinned in ways greater than most of us do. So if God can love and use someone as "sinful" as Samson, then maybe God can love and use someone like you and me.

I wonder, however, if this type of interpretation is correct. Do these biblical narratives exist only to make us feel better about ourselves, or is there something more to this story? Did the author of the book of Hebrews include Samson in the "Hall of Faith" (Heb. 11:32) because of his value for our self-esteem or because of the faithful execution of his office as judge—"who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised" (Heb. 11:33)?

Gaza in Context

In order to demonstrate my point, let's consider his night with a prostitute in Judges 16:1–3. In this short account, Samson travels to Gaza, spends half the night with a prostitute, steals the city gates, and then travels with them on his back for some 40 miles to the region of Hebron. Was this a night of frustrated passion culminating in an act of rage as most commentators suggest? Perhaps, but probably not.

Samson's story begins with a miraculous birth to a barren mother and ends with his death in a Philistine temple. The visit to the prostitute in Gaza introduces us to the second part of his life and his well-known encounter with the infamous Delilah. It is, therefore, no accident that we read of Samson visiting a prostitute *in Gaza* in 16:1–3. This is the same Philistine town to which he will be taken captive (16:21), and the same town in which he will kill more Philistines in his death than in his life (16:30). In other words, Judges 16 is about Samson's overthrow of the Philistine stronghold in Gaza by way of his associations with two women of questionable character.

How, then, does this episode with a prostitute in Judges 16:1–3 set us up for the rest of the chapter? What was Samson doing with a prostitute in Gaza, and did Samson have sex with this prostitute? Did Samson Have Sex with this Prostitute?

Let's begin with the second question. Did Samson engage in illicit sexual activity with a prostitute in Gaza? Most commentators answer "yes" to this question, and most translations leave little doubt in our minds.

However, the Hebrew text does not necessarily require that Samson engaged in this sort of activity. Verse one

states that “Samson went to Gaza, saw a prostitute there, *and he came to her.*” The last part of this verse, “and he came to her,” is translated a number of different ways. For example, the NIV translates the Hebrew as “he went in *to spend the night with her.*” The ESV and NASB go further by reading “and he went *into her.*” These euphemistic translations imply that Samson had sex with the prostitute.

Such renderings are certainly possible, and this expression does constitute one of the ways in which the Hebrew language can speak of sexual activity (see [Gen. 38:18](#); [Ezek. 23:44](#); [2 Sam. 12:24](#)). This expression, however, does not always carry the nuance of sexual innuendo. Perhaps the best example appears earlier in the book of Judges, in 4:22, where Barak enters the tent of Jael in pursuit of Sisera. The exact same expression that appeared in 16:1 also appears here in 4:22. But this time, notice how the translations handle the text. The ESV translates the expression, “So he went *in to her tent,*” and the NASB translates the same expression as “and he entered *with her.*”

It is clear from these examples that the various translations are rendering the same expression in different ways depending upon the context. The Judges 16 text is translated with sexual innuendo because of the presence of a prostitute and what we have been taught to expect of Samson. In Judges 4, however, the relationship between Barak and Jael does not appear to warrant this interpretation. The significant role of context for both translation and interpretation now leads us to ask our second question.

What Is Samson Doing Here?

What was Samson doing with a prostitute in Gaza? For most of us, this might seem like a naïve question. Isn't it obvious? But let's think from another perspective. If you were traveling in the ancient world, you may have stopped at night in a city on your way to a final destination. Upon entering the city, you would sit in the town square and, if you were fortunate, an elder or other upstanding citizen would invite you to stay with him for the evening (see [Judg. 19:11-21](#)). Thus your presence and your purpose for visiting would become immediately clear. If, however, you wanted to enter a town undetected, it would have been a good strategy to stay with a prostitute to mask your true intent.

If you think that this point may be a stretch, consider Joshua 2. When Joshua sent two spies to look over Jericho, where did the spies stay? They stayed with Rahab, the prostitute. There are, in fact, a number of elements that connect the activities of the spies in Jericho with what Samson was doing in Gaza. First, the designation for a female prostitute is the same in each account ([Josh. 2:1](#); [Judg. 16:1](#)). Second, in both accounts, the men “enter” or “go in” and stay with the prostitute (same verbs). But notice that no one ever suspects the spies in Joshua 2 of engaging in illicit sexual activity. However, we all suspect Samson of doing this very thing.

Third, the inhabitants of Jericho and Gaza discover the presence and intent of the foreign visitors and plan for their demise ([Josh. 2:2](#); [Judg. 16:2](#)). Fourth, and finally, the spies and Samson escape from the town in dramatic and memorable ways. The spies are hidden by Rahab and escape through her window during the night ([Josh. 2:15](#)). Samson also escaped during the night and took with him the city gates ([Judg. 16:3](#)).

Joshua, Gates, and the Promise of Conquest

The comparison of Joshua 2 and Judges 16 and the relationship that emerges suggests that Samson's night with a prostitute in Gaza is the author's way of preparing us for the eventual destruction of that town later in the chapter. We know that the two Israelite men stayed with a prostitute in Jericho to spy on the town before destroying it. Given the larger context of Judges 16, Samson appears to be doing the same thing in Gaza. This is also why the author of the book of Judges was careful to record that when Samson left Gaza, he took the city gates with him.

In the ancient world of the Bible, the gates of a city were crucial to its defenses. Their destruction symbolized the destruction of the city. Recall the lament of fall of Jerusalem in [Lamentations 2:9](#)—“Her *gates* have sunk into the ground; their *bars* he has broken and destroyed” (see also [Jer. 51:30](#); [Amos 1:5](#)).

But this is not the whole story. The real significance of the gates in this text is that God, through Samson, continues to be faithful to the promises he made to the Patriarchs. To Abraham, in [Genesis 22:17](#), God promises, “Your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” (see also [Gen. 44:60](#)). In this text, therefore, Samson is a picture of God's faithfulness to his covenant people to do for them what they repeatedly fail to do for themselves—to possess the land and all of God's good promises.

Samson in the Larger Biblical Story

It hardly seems reasonable to think of the events of [Judges 16:1-3](#) as a one-night stand in the life and adventures of Samson. What would be the point? Rather, we see God, working against the tide of *Israel's disobedience* to fulfill his promises. Samson goes to Gaza to do what Israel was failing to do—possess the land and eliminate its pagan inhabitants. Like all of the judges, Samson prepares us for the coming of a king.

In fact, you may be surprised to learn that Samson is styled as David's John the Baptist. There are a number of features that connect Samson and John the Baptist. Both are born to older, barren parents (significant birth

narratives), both are Nazirites for life (the only two in the Bible), and both are betrayed unto death by less-than-virtuous women. Most importantly, however, both men prepare for the arrival of a great king. Samson begins the final battle with the Philistines, but it is David in 1 Samuel 17 who slays their champion and finally eliminates the threat of the Philistines from the land.

If, however, we look at Samson and see only ourselves, then we have missed something. If we look at Samson and delight ourselves in what we wrongly think are his shortcomings, then we have misunderstood the text. With Samson, God does not repair my culturally deflated self-esteem. Rather, God shows me the beauty of his kingdom and demonstrates that I can believe his promises and, like Samson, “gain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35) and so “be made perfect” (Heb. 11:40).

C. The Effects of Israel’s Canaanization without a King (17:1–21:25)

1. Israel’s Religious Decay (17:1–18:31)
2. Israel’s Social Decay (19:1–21:25)
 - a. Judg 2:10 declares: “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.” While this text is not explicit that only *one* generation after Joshua, all went bad, the rest of the book makes this absolutely clear, as highlighted in the book’s conclusion, which is designed to show how bad it really got (Judg 17:1–21:25). Josh 24:33 told us that Eleazer, son of Aaron, was the high priest in the days of Joshua when all was going well, and Judg 20:28 highlights that it was only in the days of his son Phinehas that the sodomy of Gibeon detailed in the following episode reached its crisis. An entire nation can move from God-loving to God-despising in a single generation. May it not happen with us! What follows is adapted from D. I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC; Nashville: B&H, 1999), 532–34, 542–45.

Key: <u>Underline</u> : Verbatim quotations in the Hebrew (with grammatical adjustments) <i>Bold Italics</i> : Necessary contextual alterations Bold : Paraphrastic alterations Normal font: Unique features	
Genesis 19:4–8	Judges 19:22–24
<p>⁴Before they lay down</p> <p><u>the men of the city</u> <u>the men</u> of Sodom surrounded with reference to <u>the house</u></p> <p>both young and old all the men totally. ⁵And they called to Lot,</p> <p>and they said to him, “Where are <u>the men</u> <u>who have come</u> <u>to you?</u> Bring them out to us, that we may ‘know’ them.” ⁶And Lot</p> <p><u>went out</u> to them</p>	<p>²²While they were making merry, behold, <u>the men of the city</u> <u>men of the sons of belial</u> surrounded <u>the house</u> pounding on the door.</p> <p><u>And they said</u> to the old man, the owner of the house, saying, Bring out <u>the man</u> <u>who has come</u> to your house,</p> <p>that we may ‘know’ him.” ²³And the man the owner of the house <u>went out</u> to them.</p>

<p>at the doorway and shut the door behind him. ⁷<u>And he said,</u></p> <p><u>“Please,</u> <u>do not, my brothers,</u> <u>act wickedly.</u></p> <p>⁸<u>Please,</u> <u>behold</u> <i>I have two daughters</i> <i>who have never ‘known’ a man.</i></p> <p><u>Please,</u> <u>Let me bring them out</u></p> <p>to you. <u>Do to them</u> <u>according to what is good</u> <u>in your eyes.</u> <u>Only to these men</u> <u>do not commit</u></p> <p><u>an act,</u> <u>because</u> this man</p> <p>to my house, do not commit this folly.</p>	<p><u>And he said</u> to them,</p> <p><u>“Do not, my brothers,</u> <u>do not act wickedly</u> <u>please.</u> Because This man has come to my house, do not commit this folly.</p> <p>²⁴<u>Behold,</u> <i>my daughter</i> <i>a virgin</i> <i>and his concubine.</i></p> <p><u>Please,</u> <u>Let me bring them out.</u> Ravish them.</p> <p><u>Do to them</u> <u>what is good</u> <u>in your eyes.</u> <u>But to this man</u> <u>do not commit</u> this foolish <u>act.</u></p> <p><i>under the shelter of my roof.</i></p>
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- b. Notes:
- i. Each text has an identical 69 Hebrew words.
 - ii. ¼ of the words in the Genesis account (= 16) occur in the same form in Judges.
 - iii. An additional 24 expressions from Genesis find a close counterpart in Genesis, the variations being grammatical, stylistic, or such as are required by the new context.
 - iv. Occasionally, especially in opening lines, the Genesis 19 statements are recast by the new context (e.g. “Before they lay down” in Gen. 19:4 is roughly equivalent to “While they are making merry” in Judges 19:22, both statements identifying the temporal context for the events that follow.
 - v. What appears as a question and a command in Genesis 19:5 is conflated into a single command in Judges 19:22.
 - vi. The causal clause at the end of Genesis 19:8 is recast and brought forward to precede the first warning not to commit the evil deed in Judges 19:23.
 - vii. “I have two daughters” in Genesis 19:8 is answered with “my daughter and his concubine” in Judges 19:24.
- c. Conclusions and Theological Significance
- i. While the Levite had preferred Gibeah over Jebus in order to escape the corruption of the Canaanites, the account clearly suggests that

Israel has become like Canaan. “Whereas these travelers had thought they had come home, finding safety with their own countrymen, they have actually arrived in Sodom” (Block, 544).

- ii. Being like Sodom, the Israelites should expect the same fate. As stated in Deuteronomy 8:19–20: “And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.”
- iii. *As depicted here, Canaanization involves at least 4 heinous crimes: homosexuality, rape, adultery, and murder.*
- iv. In no way does this episode reflect acceptable treatment of women by men in any context. Sexual crimes by men against women are considered an “outrageous act” (Gen. 34:7 of Shechem’s rape of Dinah; 2 Sam. 13:12–13 of Ammon’s rape of his sister Tamar; Jer. 29:23 of adultery with a neighbor’s wife) and are always denounced in the Torah and beyond (Exod. 20:14; Lev. 18:19–25; 20:10–21; Deut. 22:22–30; cf. Jer. 9:1; Mal. 3:5; Job 24:14–15).
- v. The treatment of the virgin daughter and concubine directly counters the call of husbands and fathers to love their wives and children by providing for them and protecting them, even to the death, and to respect the right of others families to nurture such love in their own homes. Such commitment is seen first in Adam’s proclamation to God regarding Eve in Genesis 2:24—“This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” So it is that after meditating on this text Paul writes in Ephesians 5:28, “Husbands love your wives as your own bodies.” Such is also stressed by the community’s need to care for the widows and orphans, when husband and/or parents are non-existent (e.g., Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:20, 21; 26:12–13). Indeed, God says the community will be “cursed” if they fail to care for such as these. Finally, the biblical text always stresses that loving one’s neighbor includes recognizing that a neighbor’s wife is not mine to enjoy (e.g., Exod. 20:17; Lev 18:8, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20; 20:11, 20, 21; Deut. 5:21; 22:22–24; 27:20)
- vi. The Torah emphasizes that disrespect and abuse of family will characterize the curses of the covenant, re-stressing the point already made in Judges 2:15 that Israel is under God’s curse because they have turned aside from the covenant (cf. Judg. 2:20): Deuteronomy 28:30, 54 – “You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her.... The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns.”

IV. Judges and the Need for King Jesus

A. Examples of Israel's Degeneracy

1. Erosion of thought:
 - a. Barak's hesitance (4:8–9)
 - b. Gideon's idolatry (8:27)
 - c. Jephthah's foolish vow (11:30–31)
 - d. Samson's poor choice of women (chs. 14–16)
 - e. Benjamin's foolish defense of the immorality and brutality of those from Gibeah (20:13)
2. Erosion of relationships:
 - a. After the story of Caleb giving Achsah to Othniel for a wife (1:12–15), there are no satisfying relationships in the book.
 - b. A father sacrifices his daughter (11:39).
 - c. Samson has illicit relationships with pagan prostitutes (16:1–4).
 - d. There are brutal, superficial marriages (14:16–17, 19:4–30; 21:12–23).
3. Exploitation of women
 - a. *Positive*: Achsah, daughter of Caleb and wife of the judge Othniel (1:12–15) was blessed by her father (rather than killed by him), inspired a man to great acts of obedience (rather than seducing him into sin), and married within the covenant (rather than taking a Canaanite spouse).
 - b. Jael forced into the unlikely role of military her because Barak refused to accept his mission without the aid of a woman (4:9).
 - c. Jephthah's daughter becomes the innocent victim of her father's foolish decision (11:39).
 - d. Samson's wife and father-in-law are burned to death as a consequence of Samson's actions (15:6).
 - e. The Levites' unnamed concubine is denied personhood, brutalized, and dismembered (ch. 19).
 - f. All the women of Benjamin destroyed by civil war (20:48).
 - g. The women found from other tribes to replace them were either intentionally orphaned by brutal destruction of their immediate families (21:11–23) or simply kidnapped by desperate Benjaminite bachelors.
4. Erosion of rule
 - a. The powerful exploit the weak (18:14; 19:14–31)
 - b. Chaos prevails (17:6; 21:25; cf. 18:1; 19:1).
 - c. Conclusion—Israel needs a king!

B. Everyone Does What Is Evil in Yahweh's Eyes (at the head of each Judge-cycle):

1. Othniel cycle (3:7)
2. Ehud cycle (3:12)
3. Barak and Deborah cycle (4:1)
4. Gideon cycle (6:1)
5. Jephthah cycle (10:6)
6. Samson cycle (13:1)

C. What Was Evil in God’s Eyes Was Right in Israel’s Eyes Since “There Was No King in Israel” (14:1, 3, 7; 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

1. 14:1, 3, 7. Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines.... But his father and mother said to him, “Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes.” ... Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson’s eyes.
2. 17:6. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
3. 18:1. In those days there was no king in Israel.
4. 19:1. In those days, when there was no king in Israel.
5. 21:25. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

D. More to Come: We will have to continue reading through the remainder of the OT to see which king is able to change Israel so that what is good in their eyes is good in God’s eyes.

E. Jesus Is the Ultimate Judge Who Will Eradicate Evil.

1. John 17:31. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.
2. Acts 10:42–43. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Cf. Acts 17:31)
3. 2 Cor 5:10. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
4. Rev 19:11. Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

F. Jesus Is the Needed King Who Will Save and Bring Peace. When the people wanted to make Gideon king, he declared: “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you” (Judg 8:23). Hannah will highlight that Yahweh will ultimately reign through his anointed king (1 Sam 2:10).

1. Luke 2:10–11, 13–14. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”
2. Acts 34–36. [David] himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

V. Book Summary: After Joshua’s death and despite Yahweh’s recurring deliverances through the judges, Israel forgets God and becomes increasingly like the Canaanites by

doing what is right in their own eyes instead of what is right in Yahweh eyes, all because they do not yet have God’s messianic king reigning over them.

VI. Excursus: The Attractions of Idolatry

The authors of the Former Prophets often used irony to highlight the smallness of the gods of the nations. The narrator of Judges, for example, highlights that after Joshua’s death, the people “abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them” (Judg 2:12). How quickly Israel became forgetful of the true power and real victory they had experienced under Yahweh. He had proven both his ability and willingness to be Israel’s helper. He was the only one truly powerful, yet he was now being rejected. Another example comes later in the book. After the Danites stole the sculptured images belonging to Micah, he declared to them, “You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left?” (Judg 18:24). How shallow was this man’s religious foundation, who recognized his gods were made by him. Similarly, after the Philistines defeated Saul and his army and found the former king and his three sons dead on Mount Gilboa, they “sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people” (1 Sam 31:9). What ignorant gods, who are not even aware of the battles they were supposed to have won. Yet Israel continued to pursue that which was not God. Yahweh was at best paid lip service, but other affections and powers controlled the peoples’ hearts. What made idolatry so attractive in the ancient world? What makes it so attractive today?

Fig. 10.3. The Attractions of Idolatry

<p><u>Deut. 5:6–9.</u> “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <i>You shall have no other gods before me.</i> You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I Yahweh your God am a jealous God.”</p> <p><u>Judg. 2:1–12.</u> “And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and served the Baals. And they abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. <i>They went after other gods,</i> from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked Yahweh to anger.”</p> <p><u>Ps. 115:4–8.</u> “There idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. <i>Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.</i>”</p> <p><u>Eph. 5:5.</u> “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or <i>who is covetous (that is, an idolater),</i> has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”</p>		
	<i>Attraction</i>	<i>Description</i>
1.	Guaranteed (Idols; earthly powers)	<i>Do you ever pray and feel that God is not there?</i> An idol was a visible, tangible, physical representation that was considered to transmit the presence of a deity.
2.	Selfish & Works-Oriented (Materialism; legalism)	<i>Are you ever prone toward self-righteousness or tempted with materialism?</i> Through “feeding” offerings to an idol/god, people believed they obligated the god to multiply their crops, fertility, cattle, etc.; therefore, “worship” was driven by the pursuit of earthly profit or pleasure, and blessing was considered a wage earned (Hos. 2:12; 9:1; Mic. 1:7; Rom. 4:4; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).
3.	Easy (Ethical relativity; no covenant obligations)	<i>Do you ever find it easier to please men rather than God or to love yourself over others?</i> Idolatry called for frequent and generous outward sacrifices with no covenantal, heart-generated, ethical obligations to the gods or neighbors.
4.	Convenient (Anywhere;	<i>Do you ever find that following God gets in the way of your own agenda?</i> While the expectation for frequent and generous offerings was expected, such “worship” of

	anytime)	idols could be performed whenever and wherever one so chose—"on every hill and under every green tree" (1 Kgs. 14:23; 2 Kgs. 17:10).
5.	Normal (Everybody's doing it)	<i>Are you ever prone to follow the crowd, even when you know the majority is wrong?</i> Idolatry was <i>the</i> way of life in the ancient world and stood in direct contrast to Israel's minority view that there was a single God over all, who redeemed a people for relationship (Deut. 4:32–40). Three features characterized most ancient idolatry: (1) <i>polytheism</i> (believing in or worship of more than one god) (2 Kgs. 17:16); (2) <i>syncretism</i> (the [inconsistent] amalgamation of different religions / worldviews) (2 Kgs. 17:33); (3) <i>pantheism</i> (the belief that God and the universe are somehow one or that nature is a manifestation of the divine) (Jer. 8:2).
6.	Logical (Specialization system)	<i>When you are sick, would you rather see a specialist or a general practitioner?</i> Ancient people believed in three categories of gods: personal, family, and national. While all Israelites would have affirmed Yahweh as their national god (for he had created the nation, redeeming them from Egypt), many did not hesitate to pay homage to other deities in family or personal worship. National gods were considered regionalized, bearing oversight of specific geographical regions (see 1 Kgs. 20:23, 28; 2 Kgs. 5:15, 17; Jon. 1:3). Furthermore, in ancient idolatry, all "gods" were considered specialists in some aspect of world or nature. For example, Baal of Canaan was the young weather god (Judg. 2:11, 13); Ashtoreth his consort, the mother goddess of love and fertility (2:13); Chemosh of Moab, the god of war (11:24); and Dagon of Philistia, the god of grain (16:23). Others gods controlled life, death, light, evil, water, etc. Such specialization made it logical for people to seek "expert" help rather than go to Yahweh, who had to manage all things.
7.	Sensuous (If it feels good, do it!)	<i>Do you ever turn away from God toward worldly pleasures?</i> Focused on what is earthly, idolatry was gratifying to the physical senses and fleshly desires. It could include bowing down and kissing idols (1 Kgs. 19:18); an array of visual images and smells (Ezek. 8:10–12); cutting of the body, loud cries, and weeping (1 Kgs. 18:28; Ezek. 8:14); heavy feasting, drinking, and drunkenness (Amos 2:8; Acts 15:20–21; 21:25; 1 Cor. 8:4–13); and "sacred sex." The latter included temple prostitution, wherein it was believed that engaging in symbolic intercourse on the temple compound would stimulate the gods to produce fertility on earth (1 Kgs. 14:24; 22:46; 2 Kgs. 23:7; Jer. 5:7; Ezek. 23; Amos 2:7–8; Mic. 1:7; Job 36:14).
Some of the above material is adapted from Douglas K. Stuart, <i>Exodus</i> , NAC (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 450–54.		

THINK!

Craft a detailed biblical response (i.e., Yahwistic contrast) to each of the seven attractions of idolatry offered above; use Scripture throughout your response. (After wrestling on your own, read "The Attractions of Idolatry" in A.9.1. in the Appendix.)

VII. Guided Reading for Judges:

A. Points of Focus:

1. Key chapters: Judg. 1:1–3:6; chs. 19–21
2. Key persons: Yahweh, Ammonites, Asherah, Baal, Benjaminites, Chemosh, Danites, Deborah & Barak, Eglon, Ehud, Gideon, Jabin, Jephthah, Jotham, Manoah, Micah, Samson, Sisera
3. Key places: Ai, Ammon, Benjamin, Canaan, Dan, Ephraim, Gaza, Hazor, Laish, Philistia, Shiloh, Shittim

B. Questions:

1. Define in three words or less the term "judge" as it is used in the Book of Judges.
2. What is the historical time frame of the Book of Judges?

3. Summarize in your own words theme of the Book of Judges?
4. What had Israel failed to do at the initial stage of the conquest that ultimately caused her to lose her unique identity as God's people?
5. What four recurring motifs are present in the downward Israel's spiraling cycle of disobedience in the Book of Judges?
6. What refrain occurs at the front of each of the six cycles of disobedience, and what emphasis does this refrain make? In what way do these cycles stress the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh?
7. List the six major judges.
8. Where is faith evident in the lives of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, so as to gain them mention in Hebrews 11:32?
9. What refrain occurs in the concluding section of the book, and what emphasis does this refrain make? What tragic tale at the end of the book of Judges tells us how bad Israel had become?
10. Essay: Craft a detailed biblical response (i.e., Yahwistic contrast) to each of the seven attractions of idolatry offered above; use Scripture throughout your response (After wrestling on your own, read "The Attractions of Idolatry" in A.10.1. in the Appendix.)