

JUDGES BIBLE READING PLAN

Reading and applying the Bible is one of the keys to knowing God, following Jesus, growing spiritually, and finding freedom in life.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND:

For every passage you read, here's a process we suggest for your reading:

- Take a moment to pray and ask God to help you understand and apply what you read.
- Read the passage.
- Ask, "Say What?" -- Go back through your reading and ask questions like: What did it say?
- What did I learn about God? About myself? About life? What insights do I gain?
- Then ask, "So What?" -- Imagine someone read that same passage and asked you, "So what? What does this have to do with life today?" What's the answer? What universal lesson or life teaching does God communicate through this passage?
- Finally, ask "Now What?" -- Ask God what He wants you to do with what you read. This goes beyond the universal lesson to your specific application. How should your life be changed? In what way do you need to live different based on what you read? Ask God for the wisdom and strength to live out what He's shown you.

READING PLAN:

Intro to Judges- Monday June 27th

Judges 1- Tuesday June 28th

Judges 2- Wednesday June 29th

Judges 3- Thursday June 30th

Judges 4- Friday July 1st

Judges 5- Tuesday July 5th

Judges 6- Wednesday July 6th

Judges 7- Thursday July 7th

Judges 8- Friday July 8th

Judges 9- Monday July 11th

Judges 10- Tuesday July 12th

Judges 11- Wednesday July 13th

Judges 12- Thursday July 14th

Judges 13- Friday July 15th

Judges 14- Monday July 18th

Judges 15- Tuesday July 19th

Judges 16- Wednesday July 20th

Judges 17- Thursday July 21st

Judges 18- Friday July 22nd

Judges 19- Monday July 25th

Judges 20- Tuesday July 26th

Judges 21- Wednesday July 27th

Reflection- Thursday July 28th

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES- Monday June 27 2016

Timeline



Author and Date

Nowhere in Scripture is an author of this book named. The events in Judges took place in the period between Joshua's death and the rise of Samuel and Saul. Most of the book was likely written by David's time (1010–970 b.c.). Samuel is however considered to be one of the potential authors of this book.

Theme

The theme of Judges is the downward spiral of Israel's national and spiritual life into chaos and rebellion against God, showing the need for a godly king (17:6; 21:25).

Purpose and Pattern

The book of Judges was written to show the consequences of religious unfaithfulness and to point the way to a king who, if righteous, would lead the people to God. In the book of Joshua, the people of Israel seemed to want to follow the Lord and obey his commands. The book of Judges reveals, however, that the people had been rebelling even in Joshua's time. This disobedience continued and grew more serious throughout the period of the judges. As summarized in Judges 2:16–23, time and again Israel turned its back on God and embraced the gods and ways of the Canaanites. Israel's history unfolds in a repetitive way, with each cycle taking Israel further away from God. By the end of the book, Israel had violated its covenant with God in almost every way imaginable.

Key Themes

1. Israel's existence in the land, which had been promised by God, was threatened by its continuing rebellion. Israel had not conquered the land completely (ch. 1), because of its unfaithfulness (2:1–3, 20–22). Therefore, the day would come when the nation would be taken captive, and away from the land (18:30).

2. The oppressions, chaos, and generally negative picture in the book are due to Israel's repeated sin. Time and again the Israelites broke the covenant, turning to the Canaanite gods and "doing evil" (2:3, 11–13, 17, 19; 3:6, 7, 12; 4:1; 6:1, 10; 8:24–27, 33; 10:6; 13:1; 17:6; 21:25), and they repeatedly suffered the consequences.
3. Despite Israel's repeated falling away, God in His faithfulness continually delivered them. This was not due to Israel's merits or its repentance. Instead it was because of God's compassion and pity (2:16, 18) and his faithfulness to his promises to Abraham (Deut. 6:10–11; compare Gen. 12:7; 15:7, 18–21; 26:2–3; 35:12).
4. The judges were not able to stop the peoples' unfaithfulness. If anything, they made it worse. Major judges such as Gideon (8:24–27), Jephthah (11:30–31, 34–40), and Samson (chs. 14–16) were guilty of significant sin. The shining exception was Deborah (chs. 4–5).
5. Israel needed a godly king to lead it in doing right *in the Lord's eyes* rather than a leader who "did what was right in his own eyes" (compare 17:6; 21:25). God had promised from the beginning that there would be kings (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; 49:10), and had explained what a godly king would look like (Deut. 17:14–20). The book of Judges shows the depths to which the people of Israel descended in the absence of a godly king.

Outline

1. The Roots of Israel's Unfaithfulness (1:1–3:6)
2. The Downward Spiral of Israel's Unfaithfulness (3:7–16:31)
3. The Depths of Israel's Unfaithfulness (17:1–21:25)

The Setting of Judges

c. 1375 b.c.

The book of Joshua told the story of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. But the conquest was not complete. The book of Judges tells of the various leaders raised up to deliver Israel from the enemies remaining in the land.



Day 1, Judges 1- Tuesday June 28th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 1](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- The book of Judges continues the story of the Israelites entering and taking control of the land (Canaan) God promised to their ancestors.
- During this time, the Israelites had no king. Instead, God raised up a series of leaders, called "judges." They would call God's people back to the one true God and help them overcome their oppressors. They oversaw both religious and military affairs.
- As you read through Judges, you'll notice whenever a judge died, the people would return to their sinful ways. In spite of their sin, God showed them love and mercy and delivered them from their enemies.
- God had commanded the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites from the promised land. In chapter one, we read of the Israelites fighting the remaining Canaanites, but they failed to fully obey God's command and drive them out of the land. Instead, they enslaved them.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Why did God order the Israelites to drive the Canaanites from the land? At first this command seems cruel. However, God was punishing the Canaanites for their wickedness and sin. God wasn't playing favorites, as the Israelites had experienced, and would experience more punishment for turning their back on God. God uses punishment to help bring people to a point of repentance. All people - Canaanites and Israelites - are eligible for God's forgiveness if they'll turn back to Him.
- Compromise deteriorates our relationship with God. For whatever reason, the Israelites failed to obey God by completely driving out the Canaanites from the land. They thought they could work with and live amongst the Canaanites without it affecting their relationship with God. As we'll read in later chapters this led to disaster.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- When we fail to obey God, it impacts our relationship with God. Often we know what to do, we just don't follow through. Is there a sin in your life that you know is wrong but you continue to rationalize? God can see through the act. What can you do today to turn away from that sin and live in complete surrender and obedience to God?

Day 2, Judges 2- Wednesday June 29th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 2](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Due to the Israelites' disobedience, God stopped helping them drive the Canaanites out of the region.
- Joshua's generation served the Lord, but the next generation did not know God nor what He had done for the nation of Israel. As a result, this generation worshiped other gods and did evil in the eyes of the Lord.
- God used the oppression by the Canaanites in hopes that His people would repent and return to Him.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Joshua's generation failed to effectively teach the next generation to love and follow God. As a result, the next generation did not know God.
- When we fail to pursue God, we fill our lives with "other gods" (verse 17).
- Despite the Israelites' disobedience, God showed mercy by raising up judges to warn His people and save them from their oppressors. God, in His love, is always seeking to save us from those things that seek to destroy us.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This passage speaks of the importance of sharing your faith with your children. What are some practical and daily ways you can help your children love God and follow Him?
- Someone has said, "God has no grandchildren." A parent's faith cannot substitute for a child's need to encounter God directly. Every generation must find God for itself. Are you a child of God? Have you made a personal decision to have a relationship with Jesus? What steps can you take to pursue God and to grow your relationship with Jesus?

Day 3, Judges 3- Thursday June 30th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 3](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- God used the remaining nations in Canaan to test the Israelites to see if they would be faithful to Him.
- Though they had been forbidden to do so (Deuteronomy 7:1-4), the Israelites intermarried with the surrounding nations.
- As a result, they turned their backs on God and served the foreign gods. Baal was the most worshiped god of the Canaanites. Most often cast in the form of a bull, he symbolized strength and fertility and was considered the god of agriculture.
- We then begin reading of the recurring cycle of the Israelites forgetting God, being oppressed by their enemies, crying out and repenting to God, and being delivered by a divinely appointed judge.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- How you handle obstacles says a lot about your faith or lack thereof. The Israelites had many obstacles to overcome in the new land. God used these challenges to test their faith.
- Relationships affect faith. When the Israelites intermarried, they soon began accepting pagan gods. While we are not forbidden to intermarry with other nations, Paul warns us to not marry those who do not share our faith in 2 Corinthians 6:14 where he writes, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers."
- God uses us just the way He made us. The story about the left-handed judge named Ehud is a bit strange. Being left-handed in Ehud's day was considered a handicap. But God used Ehud's perceived weakness to give the Israelites victory.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Perhaps you are facing some obstacles or challenges in your life currently. Relational struggles. Difficult situations at work. Health challenges. What can you do to keep your eyes on Jesus and to continue being obedient to Him in the midst of your difficulties? Read James 1:2-5 for encouragement.
- While we want to befriend and love those who don't know God, we must be careful to not let our relationships weaken our commitment and devotion to God. We must accept people without compromising or adopting their patterns of behavior. Do you currently have any relationships that are affecting your faith in a negative way? What do you need to do about it?
- Let God use you the way He has uniquely made you to accomplish His work. Whatever weakness you may see yourself as having, God can use it to accomplish great things.

Day 4, Judges 4- Friday July 1st 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 4](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Once again, after a judge dies (in this case, Ehud), Israel turns away from God again.
- They are taken captive by Jabin, king of Canaan, who owned 900 iron chariots. Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. Pulled by one or two horses, chariots were the most feared and powerful weapons of the day.
- After 20 years of oppression, the Israelites finally cry out to God.
- God appoints the first woman judge, Deborah, to lead his people. Deborah devises a plan that frees the Israelites.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- God should be the first person we turn to when we are facing difficulty. The Israelites chose to go their own way and were taken captive. Twenty years passed before they cried to God for help.
- Victory comes from God. Verse 23 says, "On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites." Earlier (verse 9) Deborah reminded Barak that the Lord would deliver the victory.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- When we face difficulties we often try to control our own lives. But that only leads to more struggle and confusion. When struggles come our way, God wants us to come to Him first, seeking His strength and guidance. Just like with the Israelites, when you seek God's help, He answers the call.
- While Deborah, Barak, and Jael all played a role, ultimately it was the power of God that accomplished the victory for Israel. Oftentimes we are tempted to take credit for our success. We were smarter. We worked harder. We made strategic decisions. But at the end of the day, credit goes to our Creator. What victories and successes have you experienced in life? Take some time to thank God for those victories.

Day 5, Judges 5- Tuesday July 5th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 5](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Music and singing were an important part of Israel's culture. This is a song of victory, which may have been written by Deborah. It was a song expressing gratitude to God and giving Him credit for the victory we read about in chapter 4.
- In verses 15-17 we read of 4 tribes of Israel that did not participate in the war against Sisera: Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher.
- After the battle in chapter 4, the Israelites experienced peace for 40 years.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Celebration should always include an expression of gratitude to God. It is healthy to celebrate the great things that take place in our lives - whether through song or some other form. Expressing gratitude gives God the credit He is due, and it reminds us of God's faithfulness and love.
- We have a choice in whether or not to be a part of God's work in this world. Perhaps the saddest words in the chapter are those in verses 15-17. We read that rather than engage in what God was up to, Reuben stayed around the campfire, Dan lingered by the ships, and Asher stayed in his coves. While the rest of Israel celebrated, these tribes missed out on being a part.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Reflect on some ways God has been at work in your life recently - in good times or bad. Take some time to express gratitude for His presence and activity in your life
- We don't know why the four tribes didn't participate in the war. Perhaps they were just busy or distracted. Maybe they lacked faith in God. Or maybe they feared the enemy. What holds you back from fully walking with God? What keeps you from enthusiastically living life fully with God? Where can you become more engaged with God in your life?

Day 6, Judges 6- Wednesday July 6th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 6](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Once again, Israel turned their back on God and found themselves being oppressed by the Midianites.
- Again, the Israelites cried out to God for help, and He appoints a fifth judge, Gideon.
- After God calls Gideon to be Israel's leader, He asks him to tear down the altar of the pagan god. At that time, an attack on a god was often seen as an attack on the local government supporting that god. Gideon could have faced serious social problems and potentially physical attack. Gideon took a great risk in tearing down the altar, but in doing so, demonstrated his faith and commitment to God.
- Even though Gideon had faith, he also demonstrated doubt and fear. He delays in obeying God and delivering Israel because he wanted more proof that God would indeed save Israel.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- When problems arise, first look within. In verse 13, Gideon questioned God about the problems Israel faced and about God's apparent lack of help. What he didn't acknowledge was how Israel had brought those problems on themselves through their disobedience and neglect of God.
- God's power is often displayed through weak people. Seeing his own limitations and weaknesses, Gideon can't see how God could work through him and instead makes excuses (vs. 15). But Gideon was not on his own. God promises to be with Gideon and to work with him to defeat the Midianites.
- Demanding signs from God can be an indication of unbelief or fear. Gideon waits for confirmation when he should have been taking action. God had already told Gideon what he needed to do.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- It's easy to blame our problems on God and others and overlook our own role in it. However, this never solves the problem and never brings us closer to God. It typically causes us to continue rebelling against God. When problems come, the first place to look is within. Take time today to confess to God any sins that may have created the problems you are currently experiencing.
- The fact that God's power is often displayed through weak people should give us courage. It's good to acknowledge our limitations but don't forget that we can rely on God's strength and power. We must rely on God for our effectiveness rather than our own energy and talent. Only His

power will make us effective for Him and help us to do work that has lasting value.

- Where are you holding back from obeying God due to fear or because you want more proof? How can you trust and obey God by taking action today?

Day 7, Judges 7- Thursday July 7th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 7](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- In preparation for their battle against the Midianites, God reduces Gideon's army from 32,000 men to 300.
- God assures Gideon of victory by having him hear of a dream and its interpretation in the Midianite camp.
- While Gideon's army surrounded the Midianite camp, God caused the Midianites to turn against one another, and they fled.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Self-sufficiency gets in the way of our dependence on God. Self-sufficiency is believing we can always do what needs to be done in our own strength. To prevent this attitude among Gideon and his soldiers, God reduced the number of his army. With an army of 300, rather than 32,000, there could be no doubt that their victory was from God.
- Victory depends not on strength or numbers, but on obedience and commitment to God. Gideon's army didn't have to draw a sword to defeat the Midianites. Obeying God's plan, they just watched as the Midianites fell into panic, confusion, and retreat.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- When we face challenges or when God calls us to a difficult task, we cannot look at ourselves as the source of power to accomplish these things. If we do, we'll never walk by faith. Take some time today to ask yourself these questions: Do I walk by faith? Am I saying "No" to God's leading because I am afraid and don't believe I can do it? Do I need to learn to place my trust in God's power, not in my own abilities?

- Is there anything God has been prompting you to do recently, but you have failed to do it because of feelings of inadequacy or a lack of faith? What step can you take today to demonstrate faith and obedience to God by obeying this prompting?

Day 8, Judges 8- Friday July 8th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 8](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Ephraim's leaders felt left out because Gideon had not called them to join in the initial stages of the battle. But Gideon explained the vital and important role they played in capturing the Midianite leaders.
- The leaders of Succoth and Peniel refuse to help Gideon, probably fearing Midian's revenge, should he fail. Gideon carries out the threat he made by getting revenge on them for not helping him.
- The Israelite people want to make Gideon king, but Gideon reminds them that the Lord is to rule over them.
- While Gideon probably had good motives in making the ephod to remember the Israelites victory, the people began to worship it as an idol.
- The last days of Gideon and the time shortly after his death saw the Israelites once again turn their backs on God.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Pride causes us to want recognition. Ephraim wanted more recognition in the battle against Midian. But not every necessary job is a highly visible leadership role. Even small tasks are vital to getting any big task done.
- We should do what's right regardless of the fears we have. The officials of Succoth and Peniel refused to help Gideon because they feared the enemy. Yet this showed a lack of respect for God and the man God had chosen to save them. We should help others because it is right, regardless of whether or not we will benefit personally.
- Sometimes good motives produce negative results. Gideon created an ephod as a visible reminder of the victory God gave them over the Israelites. Unfortunately, the people began to worship the ephod instead of God.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Are you content to perform your role (at work and in the church) without a lot of attention and recognition? Or do you resent the work God has given you? What would it look like for you to live out Colossians 3:23-24? "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."
- In your plans and decisions, always take time to anticipate how a good idea might lead to a potential problem. Consider negative consequences before taking action.

Day 9, Judges 9- Monday July 11th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 9](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- With Gideon dead, Abimelech takes over leadership and becomes king. In his pursuit to become king, Abimelech attempts to kill his 70 brothers. He succeeded with one exception: Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, escaped.
- Jotham tells a parable to the people of Shechem to discourage them from having Abimelech as their leader. He calls down a curse on Abimelech and the people of Shechem.
- Three years later, God fulfills Jotham's curse by sending an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem.
- As a result, the city of Shechem was destroyed and Abimelech died.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Israel's king was to be God and not a man. In his arrogance, Abimelech wanted to take over the position reserved for God alone. Oftentimes, our goals control our actions. In his selfish quest, Abimelech killed all but one of his 70 brothers. People with selfish desires often seek to fulfill them in sinful ways.
- God deals with evil in His time. Abimelech was far from what God wanted as a judge of His people. However, it was three years before God moved against him. We often wonder why evil seems to prevail for so long. God promises to deal with sin and evil, but in His time, not ours.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- What are you hoping to accomplish in the next year? In your lifetime? Examine your motives to see if they are self-centered or God-centered. Beyond that, be sure to always fulfill your desires in a way that would honor and please God.
- It's good news that God doesn't punish sin and evil immediately because we have all sinned and deserve God's punishment. God, in his love, often spares us from immediate punishment and allows us time to repent and turn from our sins back to Him. Is there any area of regular disobedience in your life that you need to repent from? In your repentance, thank God for His patience with you.

Day 10, Judges 10- Tuesday July 12th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 10](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- After the turbulent reign of Abimelech in chapter 9, we read of a period of peace under the leadership of two judges: Tola and Jair. Between them, they served as judges for a total of 45 years.
- Jair had 30 sons who rode 30 donkeys. While that is a humorous picture to us, it is evidence of Jair's prominence and prosperity. The donkey was highly regarded as a riding beast in those days and carried with it special recognition.
- The Israelites once again fail to look back and learn from their past. After a period of peace, they once again wander away from the one true God and toward idols and false gods. And once again, the Lord gives them over to be oppressed by the nations around them.
- After 18 years, the Israelites cry out to God for help. After initially refusing to help, God stepped in to rescue His people.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Sin always brings pain. Even the sin that looks the most attractive and seems "safe" leads to pain. Every time the Israelites turned their back on

God, they experienced the pain of being attacked and oppressed by other nations.

- God should be our first resort. The Israelites suffer for 18 years before turning back and asking God for help. Their pagan gods couldn't help them. Only God could really help them. They could have saved themselves so much suffering if they had humbly come back to God sooner rather than waiting so long.
- It can be difficult to follow God over the long haul. The Israelites always seemed to forget God when all was well. But God, in his love and mercy, never failed to rescue them when they called out to Him.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Is God your last resort? So much unnecessary pain and suffering takes place because we don't call on God until we have used up all of our own resources. Rather than waiting until your situation becomes desperate, turn to God first. He has all that is needed to help you face whatever problem you have.
- When life is going well for us, it is easy to put God outside our daily events instead of at the center of them. As a result, we sometimes begin to adopt habits and practices that are unhealthy and negatively impact our relationship with God. And oftentimes, we don't even notice it's happening until much later. What habits can you adopt - daily and weekly - to stay close to God even when times are good?

Day 11, Judges 11- Wednesday 13th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 11](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Looking for a leader to help them lead an attack against the Ammonites, the Israelites select Jephthah. This was an interesting selection considering the fact that Jephthah was an illegitimate son of Gilead and had been chased out of the country by his half brothers.
- Jephthah's first act as the leader was not to launch an attack on the Ammonites, but rather to negotiate for peace. He asks the Ammonite king what they have against Israel. The king suggests that Israel has no legitimate right to the territory.

- Jephthah responds by stating that the land was originally in the hands of the Amorites, not the Ammonites. But more importantly, God had given that land to Israel.
- Since the king of Ammon could not be reasoned with, Jephthah attacked the Ammonites and the Lord gave the Israelites victory.
- Prior to the war, perhaps feeling the tension of the battle ahead, Jephthah makes a foolish vow to God. He promises to make an offering of whatever first comes out of his home when he returns from the battle.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- God uses the rejected. Circumstances beyond his control forced Jephthah away from his people and into life as an outcast. In spite of this, God used him. No one is beyond being used by God to do great things.
- In the heat of the moment it is easy to make foolish promises to God. These promises may sound spiritual when we make them, but they may produce guilt and frustration when we have to fulfill them. Making spiritual "deals" only brings disappointment. God does not want promises for the future, but obedience for today.
- There is disagreement among scholars as to what Jephthah did in fulfilling his vow. Some believe he sacrificed his daughter because his vow was to offer a burnt offering. Others point to verse 38 where it says "she would never marry", and suggest that he had his daughter take a vow of virginity. In a sense, she is set apart for the Lord, a kind of sacrifice.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- If you are suffering from unfair rejection, don't blame others and become discouraged. Remember how God used Jephthah despite his unjust circumstances. Realize that He is able to use you, even if you feel rejected by others.
- Do you know someone who feels rejected or is being left out due to factors beyond their control? What could you do to accept them and include them?
- Have you ever been in a tough spot and said, "God, if you get me out of this, I'll..." 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice." Rather than make rash promises to God seek to obey Him in all you do.

Day 12, Judges 12- Thursday July 14th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 12](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Israel had just won a great battle, but instead of celebrating there is quarreling. The tribe of Ephraim was angry and jealous that they were not invited to join in the fighting (although Jephthah said he invited them).
- Angry at the insults of the Ephraimites, Jephthah kills 42,000 men from Ephraim.
- Three more judges are mentioned at the end of the chapter. There is little else known about these three judges. The large number of children and cattle are an indication of the wealth of these men.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Patience with others is a virtue. Feeling left out from the battle, Ephraim responded poorly by insulting and threatening Jephthah. Jephthah responded to the insults by seeking revenge. A response that was just as wrong and very costly.
- The Ephraimites' anger was really unjust and childish. Interestingly, resentments that have the least reason are often the ones that result in the most rage.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Despite the constant rebellion of the Israelites, we've seen throughout the book of Judges the patience and compassion of God. While God hates sin, He has an unending compassion for the sinner. Who is someone who has wronged you or insulted you in the past? Rather than seeking revenge, as Jephthah did, what could you do to demonstrate patience and love towards them?
- In his anger, Jephthah kills 42,000 men. Ephesians 4:26 says, "In your anger, do not sin." While anger is a natural emotion, what steps can you take to avoid sin and resolve your anger in a godly way?

Day 13, Judges 13- Friday July 15th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 13](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- As the result of Israel turning their backs on Him again, God permits the Philistines to dominate them for 40 years.
- An angel of the Lord appears and promises Manoah and his barren wife that they will have a son. He is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God.
- Manoah's wife gives birth to Samson. God begins to prepare Samson for his role as judge and leader against the Philistines.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Oftentimes we bring suffering on ourselves. Once again, the cycle of sin, judgment, and repentance began for Israel. The Israelites would not turn to God unless they suffered and were oppressed. But this suffering wasn't caused by God. Rather, it was the result of the fact that the people ignored God.
- Samson was to be a Nazirite, one who took a vow to be set apart for God's service. A Nazirite had three restrictions placed on them. They could not cut their hair, touch a dead body, or drink anything containing alcohol (see Numbers 6:1-6).
- Manoah's wife was told that Samson would begin the deliverance of Israel from Philistine oppression. It wasn't until years later, after Samson was gone, that the Philistine opposition was completely defeated.
- There are some things beyond our understanding. Manoah requested the angel's name. The angel refused, saying that his name was a mystery beyond understanding.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- God gave Samson a task to begin. However, it would not be accomplished until after Samson was long gone. Be faithful in following God, even if you don't see instant results. You might be beginning an important job that others will finish.
- Like Manoah, sometimes we ask God questions and then receive no answer. This may not be because God is saying no. It may be because the answer is beyond our ability to understand or accept right now. What is a question you've been asking God recently? Will you trust and obey God even if He doesn't answer your question?

Day 14, Judges 14- Monday July 18th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 14](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following

notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Samson is attracted to a Philistine woman. His parents object because it was against God's law (Deuteronomy 7:1-4) and because the Philistines were Israel's greatest enemy. This marriage would be a disgrace to Samson's family. What Samson's parents didn't realize was, at least in this instance, God was behind the possible marriage.
- God gives Samson increased physical strength to kill a lion with his hands.
- Samson breaks one, possibly two, of the requirements for a Nazirite. First, he touched the dead body of the lion. Second, Samson throws a party. Nothing wrong with that, except that the original language seems to indicate that the feast was a drinking feast. So it's possible that Samson also breaks his Nazarite vow of never drinking alcohol.
- Samson kills 30 Philistine men to pay off his debt to those who solved his riddle. But he loses his wife to another man.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- God works His perfect plan even in our disobedience. We can trace God's work in Samson's life even in his weaknesses and evil acts. The marriage between Samson and the Philistine woman will result in the destruction of many of Israel's enemies.
- God calls us to keep our promises. Samson takes his vows lightly. We live in a time when people think nothing of breaking vows. The words "I do" become "I don't" more and more quickly. Breaking promises negatively affects our relationship with God. We must do everything we can to keep our promises to God, family members, employers, and our church.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- What promises are you tempted to break right now? A promise to God? To your spouse? God has called us to live a different way, to reflect deeply on the promises we have made to God and others, and to keep our word! Seek help from God and others to help you keep your commitments.
- What promises have you broken in your past? Take time to thank God for his grace and forgiveness. Also, thank God that He works through your weaknesses and failures. He has the power to bring good out of evil.

Day 15, Judges 15- Tuesday July 19th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 15](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Angered at losing his wife, Samson burns up the Philistines fields, vineyards, and olive groves.
- The Philistines retaliate by killing Samson's wife and her father. Samson responds by killing many Philistines, but is captured.
- While being turned over to the Philistines, Samson uses his God-given strength and killed one thousand Philistine men.
- Samson served as a judge for Israel for 20 years.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Revenge is an uncontrollable monster. Samson's rationale for his treatment of the Philistines was, "I merely did them to them what they did to me" (verse 11). Yet each act of retaliation led to another act of retaliation. It never solves anything and only hurts others and ourselves. Revenge can only be dealt with by forgiveness.
- We can use God's gifts for selfish purposes. God gave Samson a special gift, incredible strength, yet we watch him at times use them for ungodly and selfish purposes.
- There is often a let-down after a great achievement. Coming off a great personal victory, Samson's attitude quickly declined into self-pity, "Must I now die of thirst...?" It was God who gave Samson victory, but Samson acts like God owes him. When we experience personal victory, we must remember that God gave us the strength for that personal achievement.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Who in your life has hurt you that you need to forgive? Who have you been taking revenge on - maybe through your actions or perhaps with your words? Will you break the cycle of revenge and forgive? What can you do this week to grant forgiveness? Meet with them one-on-one? Call them or write them a note? Don't put it off. Forgive so that you can be healed of that hurt and pain.
- The Bible says that God distributes abilities and skills and gifts to His people (1 Corinthians 12). Paul, an apostle, writes that these gifts from God are to be used "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12). Take time to think about the gifts God has given you. Consider how you can use them to help others, not just yourself. If

you're not already serving at The Ridge, sign up [here](#) to schedule a First Serve and discover how you can use your gifts to build up others.

- We are often vulnerable after a great spiritual victory or defining moment. During those times of vulnerability, avoid the temptation to think that God owes you for your efforts. Concentrate on keeping your attitude, actions, and words focused on God instead of yourself.

Day 16, Judges 16- Wednesday July 20th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 16](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- Samson had great power, but he couldn't control his own lust and passion. In this chapter we see him spend the night with a prostitute and fall in love with an untrustworthy woman.
- Motivated by greed, Delilah uses her persistence to wear down Samson. Due to his infatuation with her, Samson gave in to her and revealed the secret of his strength. In doing so, Samson was disobedient to God and in complete violation of the Nazirite vow.
- Samson's uncontrolled pride and sinful passion lead to his downfall as the Philistines captured him and made him their slave.
- God answers Samson's cry for help by giving him the strength to destroy the temple of the Philistines and those gathered inside. This last heroic act brought an end to Samson's life.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Trouble is inevitable when we let our desires and impulses begin to rule our lives, rather than God. Samson was a walking impulse machine. If he wanted it, he took it. This was a pattern in his life. He is driven by his personal passions more than the Spirit of God. This cost Samson and the Israelite people greatly.
- Our choices have consequences. Verse 20 says that the Lord had left Samson. Why? Because Samson chose to go his own way rather than be close to God. Although God didn't completely abandon Samson (verses 28-30), He allowed Samson's decision to stand, and the consequences of his decision followed naturally. Samson didn't choose to be captured, but he chose to be with Delilah, and he could not escape the consequences of his decision.

- In spite of our past, God loves us. In spite of Samson's past, God still answered his final prayer and destroyed the pagan temple and worshipers. God was willing to hear Samson's prayer of confession and repentance and use him this final time.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Before we judge Samson too quickly, we must realize that we can be driven by our desires and impulses just as he was. For you, maybe it's lust. Perhaps it's the impulse to gossip and speak negatively about others. It could be anger, greed, or any other sin. All of us can be driven by our desires. Ask yourself this question: Is there any area in my life where I am driven by my impulses? Is there a repeating sin that keeps getting the best of me?
- As you acknowledge areas of struggle, ask God to give you the strength to overcome those sinful desires and impulses. Confide in a friend you can trust to help you overcome the struggle and hold you accountable.
- One of the effects of sin in our lives is to keep us from feeling like praying. But perfect moral behavior is not a condition for prayer. Don't let guilt feelings over sin keep you from seeking God's help. No matter how long you have been away from God, He is ready to hear from you and restore you to a right relationship with Him. If God could still work in Samson's situation, He can certainly make something worthwhile out of yours.

Day 17, Judges 17- Thursday July 21st 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 17](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- We see an example of God's people, Israel, falling into idolatry through the life of one individual, Micah, and his family.
- Verse 6 summarizes the attitude of the Israelites through the time of the judges, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."
- Israel's failure to follow God even affected their priests and Levites. The Levite in this chapter accepted money, idols, and position in a way that was inconsistent with God's laws. While Micah revealed the religious downfall of individual Israelites, this priest illustrated the religious downfall of priests and Levites.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Israel's attitude reflects the attitude of many today. Micah and his mother seemed to be good and moral and may have sincerely desired to worship God, but they disobeyed God by following their own desires instead of doing what God wanted. As verse 6 says, "Everyone did as they saw fit." But God hasn't left our conduct up to us and our opinions. God has given us standards to live by. Standards that honor God and bring about the freedom and life we all really desire. But sadly, still today, many pay no attention to God's standards and instead live as they see fit.
- Ignoring God's direction leads to confusion and destruction. The Israelites continually found themselves in trouble and captivity due to rejecting God's right way of living.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- We are often tempted to use our personal feelings to determine right from wrong. This is what was happening in Israel: "Everyone did as they saw fit." We see this same mentality in the saying, "If it feels good, do it." But a drug addict feels good after getting high. The gossip gets a rush from spreading rumors. The Bible says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). Our feelings can betray us. God has given us a standard to live by that goes beyond personal feelings. Spending time in God's Word each day helps you distinguish between what you feel and what is right and true.
- Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." We can avoid conforming to society's low standards by taking God's commands seriously and applying them to our life. Where are you currently conforming to society's standards? What can you do to start living out God's will for your life?

Day 18, Judges 18- Friday July 22nd 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 18](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- The Danites sent out a spy contingent to search out new territories in which they could live safely.

- Along the way, they came to the house of Micah (who we met in chapter 17), and sought counsel from the Levite priest.
- On their way to battle for the new land, they robbed Micah of his idol and household gods. The Levite, attracted by the possibility of serving a tribe rather than one household, joins the Danites.
- The Danites attacked the people at Laish, burned down their city, rebuilt it, and settled there. From that point on, the city of Dan (formerly Laish) became a center of idolatry.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Success does not mean our actions are right. Just because the Danites successfully defeated Laish doesn't mean they were right in doing so. God had commanded Israel to clean out and destroy certain cities because of their idolatry and wickedness. Laish was not one of those. But the tribe of Dan had no regard for God's law. God was not guiding them in this battle.
- Micah had made his own idol and hired a priest to run his personal religion. When the Danites took his idols and priest, he had nothing. An idol is anything that takes God's place in our lives. Some people invest all their energy in pursuit of money, success, possessions, or a career. When those idols are taken away, we have nothing. The only way to protect yourself against such loss is to invest your life in the living God, whom you can never lose.
- Although 300 years had passed since the Israelites had entered the Promised Land, they had not destroyed all of the idolatry and evil practices within it as God has called them to. As a result, they eventually turned their back on God and were drawn into the idolatrous practices of the pagan people in the land.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- We are often tempted to justify our wrong actions by outward signs of success. We think wealth, popularity, or lack of suffering is an indication of God's blessing and approval. But many stories in the Bible - such as this one - indicate that evil and earthly success can go hand in hand. Success doesn't indicate God's approval. Don't allow personal success to become a measurement of whether or not you are pleasing God.
- Even when one says "yes" to a relationship with God, there is a tendency in your life to allow "harmless" habits or idols to continue existing in our lives. But they can become dominating forces. If you let the values, attitudes, and practices of an unbelieving world continue to take up space in your life, they will affect your relationship with God. What habits or idols do you need to uproot from your life so you can grow in your relationship with God?

Day 19, Judges 19- Monday July 25th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 19](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- A Levite pursues his unfaithful concubine by going to her father's house in Bethlehem. Having a concubine was an accepted part of Israelite society, although this is not what God intended. A concubine had most of the duties, but only some of the privileges, of a wife. Although she was legally attached to one man, she and her children usually didn't enjoy the inheritance rights of the legal wife and her children. Her primary purpose was giving the man sexual pleasure and contributing more help to the household.
- After persuading his concubine to return, they set out to return home. They stopped in Gibeah for the night, where a man invites them to stay at his home.
- While there, some wicked men demanded to have sex with the Levite. While the host protected the Levite, he willingly offered his daughter and the concubine to the men.
- The concubine was raped and died.
- The Levite communicated the horror of the crime committed by cutting his concubine into 12 pieces and sending one to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. In doing so, he demanded a response.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- Sexual perversion and chaos are a by-product of Israel's disobedience to God. Both chapters 18 and 19 begin with "In those days Israel had no king." Not only did they not have a literal king, but they also failed to see God as their true king. The result was that they drifted into a culture of sin.
- Sin blinds us. Ironically, the Levite who alerted Israel to the murder of his concubine was just as guilty for her death as the men who actually killed her. He protected himself when the men demanded to have sex with him, but he didn't have the courage to protect his concubine. He then fails to see how he too was at fault in her death.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Whenever we get away from God and His Word, all sorts of evil can follow. When the Israelites stopped letting God lead them, they became no better than the evil people around them. Our drifting away from God may seem slow and almost unnoticeable, but you may be shocked at what you are capable of doing. Are there any aspects of your life that you are leaving God out of (i.e. relationships, sex life, work)? What can you do to begin honoring God in that area again?
- Sin is not a private matter. Our sin affects the lives of others. When you face temptation, consider what impact giving in to that temptation may have on your spouse, children, and friends.

Day 20, Judges 20- Tuesday July 26th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 20](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- When word was received regarding the crime that had been committed in Gibeah (in chapter 19), the Israelite tribes gathered together and prepared their armies. This was the first time in many years the tribes were gathered together for a single purpose.
- All the tribes agreed that Gibeah should be punished. Prior to taking military action, messengers were sent to demand punishment of the guilty parties in Gibeah. But the Benjamites protected the guilty men.
- After three battles, the Israelites finally defeat the Benjamites and set their towns on fire. They nearly annihilated the tribe of Benjamin. However, 600 males fled to safety.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- The Benjamites were more loyal to their own tribe than to God's law. By covering for the evil men who raped and killed the concubine in chapter 19, the entire tribe of Benjamin sank to a level of immorality as low as the criminals.
- The time period of the judges ends in a bloody civil war that sets the stage for the spiritual renewal, which will come under Samuel in the book of 1 Samuel.

- This is the only place in Judges where the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned. This probably indicates how seldom the people consulted God.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Have you ever disobeyed God in an effort to be loyal or accepted by a friend? Never be ashamed to display your loyalty to God even if others object. God will reward you for being faithful to Him. He may also use your loyalty to draw others to Him.
- What difficulty or trial are you currently facing? We're not sure why God didn't give victory to the Israelites until the third battle. But the apparent setbacks did have a healthy effect on the spiritual outlook of the tribes. They were driven to fast and pray in an attempt to find the will of God. Let your current difficulty drive you to seek God and His will for your life.

Day 21, Judges 21- Wednesday July 27th 2016

Today's reading in our Judges plan is [Judges 21](#). Take a moment to pray, asking God to speak to you from this passage. Then read, using the following notes and questions to help you get everything out of the passage.

SAY WHAT? (What is the passage saying?)

- The Israelites gather to grieve for their own people, the tribe of Benjamin.
- The results of their victory over the tribe of Benjamin combined with their rash vow to not permit the marriage of any of their daughters to a Benjamite meant that Benjamin may not survive as a tribe in Israel.
- Needing to find wives for the 600 Benjamites that remained, they attacked Jabesh Gilead. The reason they chose Jabesh Gilead is that they had not helped in the recent battles. 400 virgins were spared and given to the surviving Benjamites, leaving 200 without wives.
- Apparently feeling like 400 wives was not sufficient to guarantee the survival of the tribe of Benjamin, the remaining 200 Benjamites were encouraged to take wives during the festival of Shiloh. This was a way around the Israelites oath since they were not "giving" these girls in marriage.

SO WHAT? (What are the underlying principles?)

- "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (verse 25). During the time of the judges, the people of Israel experienced trouble because everyone became his own authority and acted on his own opinions of right and wrong. The tribes became more interested in material wealth and political compatibility (with the people who already lived in the land God was giving them) than with obedience to the law. Through intermarriage and worshipping other gods, the strength of Israel began to decline. When people selfishly satisfy their personal desires at all costs, everyone pays a price.
- The book of Judges serves as both a challenge and a warning. It is a challenge because it illustrates the fact that God can and will work on behalf of men and women when they turn to Him. It is a warning in that God will not tolerate sin.

NOW WHAT? (How will you personally apply this passage?)

- Where in your life are you selfishly and sinfully satisfying your own personal desires instead of surrendering those desires in obedience to God? Take time to submit all your plans, desires, and motives to God.
- Memorize the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

JUDGES REFLECTION- Day 22, Thursday July 28th 2016

INTRODUCTION

What kind of person do you want to be? When people have to stand and talk about you when you're gone, what do you want them to say? Do you realize that's up to you? What if you decided to be . . . extraordinary?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing you haven't done that you want to do before you die? Have you taken any steps to do it? Why or why not?
2. Do you think our culture values being extraordinary at something or being an extraordinary person? Explain.
3. Why do you think most people believe they have to accept living an ordinary life?
4. Read Judges 6:11–16. In what ways do you find yourself holding God's plans for you life at arm's length? What causes you to do so?

5. What would you do if you were confident God was with you, in you, and for you? What would be different about your life?
6. In what area of your life do you need to ask, “What would an extraordinary person do?” How can this group help you to answer that question?

MOVING FORWARD

You can spend your life doing what you want, when you want, with whom you want like everybody else, but if you do, you'll never become the best version of you. You will never be extraordinary. A relationship with God isn't about staying out of trouble. It's about being extraordinary. Don't settle for ordinary. Don't settle for what everyone else is doing.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:32