

HANDOUT 1

THE ONGOING QUEST FOR VICTORY: JUDGES 1.1–2.5

Introduction

The book of Judges tells the struggles of the Israelites as they face new challenges in the Promised Land. The work of Joshua's generation is finished, but a new work remains for the new generation. The generation must go forward with new victories until every promise of God has been fulfilled and every enemy has been vanquished.

A Unified People (1.1)

- The first verse of Judges reveals the time period of the book.
- Change is always difficult, and it always presents both opportunities and dangers.
- The phrase 'children of Israel' refers to all of the people of Israel.
- The word 'LORD' in upper case letters is the English form of God's Hebrew name 'Yahweh'.
- Yahweh is sometimes translated 'Jehovah', and it is the name that signifies God as Israel's savior and deliverer. It is God's covenant name.
- The story of Judges centers on the relationship between God and God's people. This relationship is based on the covenant.
- We win our battles through prayer, through the demonstration of the Spirit, through love, and through our witness.
- If we expect to be victorious, we must be unified, and we must seek the Lord together.

New Leadership (1.2-3)

- Joshua's death was followed by a new model of leadership among the tribes of Israel.
- The exaltation of Judah undergirds the later choice of David (over Saul) as ideal king.

Judah Wins Many Victories (1.4-18)

- Judah's obedience leads to great victories.

From Victory to Defeat (1.19-36)

- Although 'the Lord was with Judah', he could not drive out the dwellers of the plain because they had iron chariots.

- Sometime after Dan had possessed his inheritance, the Amorites drive him out, leaving Dan without an inheritance.
- Chapter one does not mention Reuben and Gad because their inheritance was across the Jordan.
- Israel even made covenants with some of the Canaanites, covenants that were in clear violation of God's orders.

God's First Warning to Israel (2.1-5)

- Because of their failure to drive out the Canaanites, the Lord sends His angel to rebuke the Israelites and to call them to repentance.
- Gilgal is a location that represents Joshua and his victories.
- The reference to the exodus reminds Israel that the Lord is their savior.
- The crucial point of Judg. 2.1-5 is that while the Lord has been faithful to His covenant with the Israelites, they have been unfaithful to Him.
- The Lord promises that He will never break His covenant.
- God is incredulous in the face of Israel's disobedience.
- In Judges it is God who is injured, and it is God who has suffered injustice.
- The Lord will not break His covenant, but because of Israel's disobedience, He will discipline Israel by allowing some of the Canaanites to remain as thorns and snares.
- The Israelites respond to the angel's rebuke with weeping and sacrifice.
- The name of the place is then called Bochim, which in Hebrew means 'weepers'.
- 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is the greatest test of God's integrity.
- 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is God's passion for His people, His jealousy for their affection.
- 'I will not break my covenant forever'—It is God's loyalty to His people and His challenge to them to reciprocate.

HANDOUT 2

COMMITMENT THAT LEADS TO VICTORY: JUDGES 2.6-3.6

Introduction

The book of Judges begins with two versions of what happened after Joshua died. Judges chapter one tells us about the battles that ensued after Joshua's death and about the failure of Israel to drive out all of the Canaanites. Chapter two focuses on Israel's worship.

A Faithful Generation (2.6-7)

- Both the book of Joshua and the book of Judges emphasize the fact that Joshua's generation 'served the Lord' (Josh. 24.31; Judg. 2.7).
- Their personal experiences of God's grace and power gave them the confidence to endure faithfully in their service to God.

An Undisciplined Generation (2.8-10)

- The generation that followed after Joshua had not witnessed the mighty acts of God.
- Every new generation needs to experience God for themselves.
- We will always be tempted to rest in the victories of the past, forgetting that a new generation of Christians needs our witness, our teaching, and our example.

The Path to Apostasy (2.11-13)

- Israel's failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land meant that Israel would be continually tempted to worship the gods of their neighbors.
- When they discarded the Lord and adopted the gods of Canaan, the Israelites were demonstrating gross ingratitude.
- The Lord had every right to be angry. Israel was God's covenant people, His bride, His 'treasured possession' (Exod. 19.5-6 NIV).
- God's people will always be tempted to worship idols.

The Cycle of Discipline and Deliverance (2.14-19)

- The disobedience and idolatry of the Israelites called for strong disciplinary measures from the Lord.
- The judges were charismatic leaders who were chosen by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- Victory came because the Lord gave them special gifts, strategies, and supernatural power.
- Israel's backsliding grew progressively worse – each generation ‘corrupted themselves more than their fathers’ (v. 19).
- They refused to fulfill their obligation to keep the Lord's commandments and to be loyal to Him as their divine king.
- Judges 2.11-19 forecasts the downward spiral of the book of Judges.
- On an experiential level, this cycle can be reduced to two basic movements. First, Israel's sin leads to suffering. Second, Israel's cry brings deliverance.
- The Lord uses a variety of terms, but we can summarize God's moral attributes with two words: mercy and justice. God's every action is motivated either by mercy or by justice.

God's Warning Repeated (2.20-23)

- God had brought Israel into the Promised Land, but they had allowed the Canaanites to influence them and to draw them away from their savior.
- The Canaanites will remain in the land to provide the new generation with the opportunity to prove themselves faithful in the face of temptation (Judg. 2.22) and war (Judg. 3.1-6).
- The choice is ours: we can heed the voice of God, or we can listen to the voice of the crowds and capitulate to the world around us.

Testing and Failure (3.1-6)

- Although the Lord is very angry with Israel on account of their disobedience and unfaithfulness, His steadfast devotion to His people causes Him to provide opportunities for restoration.
- Judges 3.5-6 demonstrates that Israel's spiritual decline happened in three stages:
- (1) Careless accommodation (2) Irresponsible alliances (3) Reckless Embrace of idolatry.

Conclusion to Judges 2.6–3.6

According to the two introductions, therefore, the Israelites' root problem is their refusal to hear and obey God's Word.

HANDOUT 3

VICTORY THROUGH THE SPIRIT: OTHNIEL AND EHUD JUDGES 3.7–31

Introduction

God can use all kinds of people who come from varied and diverse backgrounds. Unlike us, God does not have a preconceived notion of the perfect leader, because He knows that every person has flaws. God is able to form and shape imperfect people.

Othniel: The Model Judge (3.7–11)

- Othniel is the first of twelve judges mentioned in the book of Judges.
- Baal was a storm god and warrior god, and Asherah was his wife. Asherah is referred to in some Bible translations as ‘the groves’.
- The fact that Israel is said to have ‘served’ Cushan-Rishathaim (3.8) teaches us that unfaithfulness to God leads to bondage.
- The pattern of deliverance in Judges teaches us that we should not underestimate the power of prayer.
- Sometimes, God chooses to use people who already have extensive experience.
- The anointing of the Holy Spirit is the necessary prerequisite for a position of leadership over God’s people.
- The Spirit gave them the wisdom that was needed to rule.
- In the case of the judges, the text emphasizes their role as saviors.
- In the book of Judges, the Holy Spirit is always called ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ rather than ‘the Spirit of God’ (i.e. ‘the Spirit of Elohim).
- The personal name ‘Yahweh’ claims priority in Judges because Yahweh is the name of Israel’s savior and King.
- After the Holy Spirit empowers Othniel, he goes to battle and wins the war, but the victory is attributed to the Lord, who ‘handed over’ (3.10) the king and his army to Othniel.

Ehud: The Left-Handed Judge (3.12–30)

- After Othniel dies, the cycle of rebellion begins again.
- The evil activity referred to here and throughout the book of Judges is idolatry.
- Because of Israel’s sin, the Lord once again turns them over to their enemy for punishment.

- Therefore, the sin of Israel caused them to lose control of territory that they had conquered earlier.
- The compassion of God moved Him to raise up a deliverer, Ehud, who would lead Israel out of bondage.
- Ehud may not have had training, and he may not have had weapons, but he had ingenuity.
- When Ehud was admitted into king Eglon's presence, he stated that he had a message from God for the king.
- Ehud's victory brought eighty years of peace to the land of Israel.
- Ehud was willing to surrender himself to God, even when striving against overwhelming opposition.
- The mission of the judges is not far from that of Jesus the Messiah.
- In too many cases, we fight among ourselves rather than fighting against the enemy.

Shamgar: The First Minor Judge (3.31)

- Out of the twelve judges named in the book of Judges, six are classified as 'minor' judges because their stories are very short, lacking in detail.
- Shamgar appears to have been a contemporary of Deborah.

Conclusion

- The power of the Holy Spirit does not come to us on account of our experience.
- We are empowered by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the people of God, not for our own personal gain.
- We need men and women who will stand up in the power of the Spirit and fight the spiritual battles, resisting the onslaught of darkness that is aimed at the church.
- God wants leaders who will serve rather than be served.
- Sometimes the Holy Spirit grants permanent endowments for service (David, the elders), but at other times the power of God is of a temporary nature (the judges).
- Let us remember that Jesus is the head of the church, and we are servants of the church.
- Every member of the Body needs the empowering work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.11-31).
- God does not limit the work of the Holy Spirit to particular places or times. He is always working, and He often works outside the accepted channels of power.

HANDOUT 4

VICTORY THROUGH PROPHETIC GUIDANCE: DEBORAH AND BARAK JUDGES 4.1–5.31

Introduction

- Israel's backsliding produced a repeat of the previous cycle of rebellion and punishment.
- This time, Israel is oppressed for 20 years by the Canaanite king Jabin of Hazor, a northern city that Joshua had conquered many years earlier (Josh. 11.10-11).

Deborah the Judge (4.1–5)

- The Israelites were oppressed terribly and lived in fear of Sisera's army because he had 900 chariots of iron.
- God decides to use a woman; and Deborah (whose name means 'bee') is introduced as a prophet who is already 'judging Israel' (4.4-5) in Ephraim.
- It was assumed that men would fulfill the role of judge, but apparently God works outside of our assumptions.
- The first person who is called a prophet after Deut. 18.15 is not a 'brother' but a 'sister'.
- The New Testament includes a number of women who are described as prophets.
- It is not from necessity that God uses Deborah but from His divine choice.
- The Bible tells us that God chooses whomsoever He will and that His gifts are dispensed according to His divine wisdom (1 Cor. 12.11).

Prophetic Leadership (4.6-10)

- Speaking as the messenger of the Lord, Deborah assures Barak of victory, declaring, 'I will give him into your hand' (4.7).
- Barak requires that Deborah accompany him to the battle; and because of his demand that she be physically present, he is deprived of the glory.

Barak's Victory over Sisera (4.11-16)

- Deborah commands Barak, 'Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?' (4.14).
- Why Deborah does not lead the army is left unstated, but I would suggest that it has something to do with her role as prophet.

- Deborah's recounting of her story in song may be compared to Moses' recording of the battle story in a scroll (Exod. 17.14).

Jael: An Unlikely Hero (4.17–24)

- It is appropriate that Jael should be the one to destroy the enemy, inasmuch as her husband is a relative of Caleb (1 Chron. 2.55) and Othniel, both of whom were considered heroes of faith.
- More than thirty different women are mentioned in Judges, and twelve of those are active participants in the narrative.
- The war is followed by a victory song that glorifies the Lord, Deborah, Barak, and Jael.

A Victory Song (5.1–31)

- It is appropriate, and even important, that God's people take the time to rejoice in their victories and to recognize the work of God in their midst.
- The Song of Deborah glorifies the Lord and gives Him full credit for the victory.
- The Song acknowledges the willingness of the Israelites to risk their lives as they enter into the battle.
- The Song celebrates the key roles played by Deborah, Barak, and Jael.

Conclusion to Judges 4.1–5.31

- The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and gave them liberty, but their liberty was forfeited when they rebelled against the Lord.
- It is important that we acknowledge our weakness – we cannot save ourselves.
- Just as God saved Israel from the bondage of her enemies, so also God can save our friends and loved ones from the bondage of sin.

HANDOUT 5

VICTORY OVER FEAR: GIDEON JUDGES 6.1–8.35

Introduction

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham who lived as nomads in the desert regions southeast of Israel. The father-in-law of Moses was a Midianite priest (Exod. 2.16-3.1; 18.1-12). The Amalekites were descendants of Esau who had been enemies of Israel from the time that Israel came out of Egypt (Exod. 17.8-10).

God's Second Warning (6.1–10)

- The Lord hears the Israelites' cry, but He does not immediately raise up a new judge to save them.
- Instead, God sends a prophet, who confronts Israel and calls them to repentance.

Gideon's Doubts and Questions (6.11–13)

- While other people are running away and hiding in caves, Gideon is working to put food on the table.
- Gideon lacked confidence. He was discouraged and afraid.
- Gideon is familiar with the story of the exodus, but he has not experienced the Lord's 'miracles' for himself.
- Gideon's response to the angel reveals that he unjustly blames God for his distressing circumstances, when in fact it is Israel who has abandoned God (6.1)!

The Lord's Encouragement of Gideon (6.14-16)

- Instead of complaining about what we lack, we must take courage and utilize whatever strength God has given us.

Gideon's Offering (6.17–24)

- Gideon asks for a 'sign' (6.17) that it is really the Lord who is talking with him.

Gideon's Fearful Start (6.25-32)

- Gideon goes out at night because he fears his father's household and the men of the city.
- Sadly, by building an altar to Baal, the elders of Israel had failed to live exemplary lives in front of the younger generation.

The Spirit Clothes Gideon (6.33-40)

- In Hebrew, the Scripture states that the Spirit ‘clothes’ Gideon, and the imagery of clothing is significant.
- Although the covering of the Spirit authorizes him as a judge and empowers him for leadership, Gideon is not immediately free from weakness.

The Fearful Recruits (7.1–3)

- In order for the Lord to get credit for the victory, He decided to reduce Gideon’s army to a small force.

An Army of ‘Calebs’ (7.4–8)

- It is also at the Fearful Spring that the Lord tests Gideon’s army the second time and chooses only the 300 who lap water like a dog (7.3-7).

A Revealing Dream (7.9-15)

- When Gideon hears the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bows in worship.

Victory Is Won (7.16–25)

- God called Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites, but Gideon did not feel qualified for the assignment.

The Ephraimites Complain (8.1-3)

- Gideon’s two responses to opposition represent God’s two approaches to His people. God can respond to us with mercy or with justice, and He knows which response is appropriate in every situation.

Gideon’s Error (8.22–35)

- Unfortunately, Gideon chooses to commemorate his victory by constructing a golden robe (called an ‘ephod’), which later becomes the object of idolatry.

HANDOUT 6

VICTORY OVER AN IMPOSTER: ABIMELECH JUDGES 9.1–10.5

Abimelech's Scheme (9.1–2)

- Gideon also had a secondary wife (concubine) who bore a son named Abimelech. Abimelech takes the initiative to establish himself as king of Shechem. Ironically, Abimelech's name means, 'My father is king'.

Abimelech's Violent Rise to Power (9.3–6)

- Abimelech's plan was to eliminate his competition by murdering his brothers.
- He killed them without mercy on a single altar stone in the manner of human sacrifice.
- The leaders of Shechem and the Beth-millo came together and installed Abimelech as king of Shechem.

Jotham's Prophetic Fable (9.7–21)

- From a safe distance on Mt. Gerazim, Jotham addressed the men of Shechem and told a story in which the trees decided to anoint a king over them.
- He utters a prophetic word, declaring that if they have been honorable, may they and Abimelech live in peace. However, if they have not acted honorably, may fire come out and destroy both Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

God Initiates Abimelech's Downfall (9.22–24)

- Abimelech reigned for three years without incident; then, God began to create dissension between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.
- Abimelech and the Shechemites were complicit in the murders of Gideon's 69 sons, and both of them must be punished for their heinous sins.

Abimelech's Friends Turn Against Him (9.25–33)

- By robbing travelers, the men of Shechem undermined Abimelech's authority, and they deprived him of the income that would issue from everyone who passed through Shechem.
- Gaal claimed that if he had the opportunity, he would remove Abimelech from power.

Abimelech's Cruel Plans (9.34-49)

- Abimelech attacked Shechem, killing all the inhabitants and sowing the city with salt. Sowing the city with salt made it unfit for growing crops. Even more important is that sowing with salt was an ancient Near Eastern ritual that invoked a curse upon the city.

Abimelech's Final Destruction (9.50-57)

- The defenses of Thebez were weak, and Abimelech conquered it with little effort. However, like Shechem, Thebez had a tower fortress into which a number of citizens fled for refuge.
- A woman on top of the tower saw Abimelech standing near the door, and she threw an upper millstone on his head and fractured his skull.
- Abimelech realized that he was dying, but he did not want to suffer the shame of being killed by a woman.
- The death of Abimelech was repayment for his crimes, particularly for his cold-blooded murder of his innocent brothers.
- The sins of Abimelech originated in his heart – the sins of pride, arrogance, selfishness, hatred, envy, and strife. Even if we do not commit murder, we may harbor the same attitudes within our hearts (Gal. 5.19-21).
- Every action has consequences according to the spiritual law that states, 'God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows' (Gal. 6.7-8).
- The story of Abimelech is a severe warning to anyone who thinks they can escape the consequences of wickedness.
- Just as Abimelech was repaid by means of a violent death, so also we may be subject to painful repercussions of our sinful acts and ungodly lifestyles.
- God's present judgment extends even into the church.

Tola and Jair, Minor Judges (10.1-5)

- The illegitimate rule of Abimelech is followed by two minor judges: Tola and Jair.
- The fact Tola rescues Israel assumes the existence of an enemy and a period of oppression from which Israel is saved.

HANDOUT 7

VICTORY TARNISHED BY TRAGEDY: JEPHTHAH JUDGES 10.6–12.15

God's Difficult Decision (10.6–16)

- When compared to the earlier cycles, the appearance of an array of foreign gods in Judg. 10.6 raises the intensity level of the Israelites' idolatry and heightens their guilt.
- It appears that the Israelites have strengthened their ties to the foreign gods, while at the same time they have drifted farther away from the Lord.
- Therefore, the Lord hands them over to the Philistines and the Ammonites.
- The Lord declares angrily that His patience with Israel has run out.
- He furiously rebukes them and announces that He will save them no more (10.13).
- God is not a human being, but He is a 'person', and His relationship with us is real.
- The Israelites' recurring cycle of rebellion demonstrates their attempts to use God, to abuse their relationship with God.
- God is angry, but He is moved with intense compassion.
- Every time we disregard God's Word, we grieve Him.

Israel's Choice of Jephthah (10.17–11.11)

- In light of God's refusal to save the Israelites, the elders of Gilead choose Jephthah.
- This is the only time in Judges that the Lord refuses to come to the aid of His people when they call upon Him.
- Jephthah had been driven out of his father's house and had become an outlaw.
- Jephthah is the only judge who is not raised up by the Lord.

Jephthah's Futile Diplomacy (11.12–28)

- Jephthah accepts the challenge; and he attempts diplomatic negotiation with the king of Ammon.
- Lord is the one to whom Jephthah looks for victory.
- Diplomacy does not work, so the war begins between Jephthah and the Ammonites.

Jephthah's Unfortunate Vow (11.29–40)

- The Lord shows Himself once again to be the God of surprising grace and sends His empowering Spirit upon Jephthah.
- God's concern for the safety of the community overrides any other considerations.

- At times, God's blessing is on the position not on the person.
- Jephthah vows to offer up as a whole burnt offering the first person (or thing?) that greets him upon his victorious return.
- Jephthah was apparently unaware of the provision in the Law of Moses that allowed a person to cancel a vow that might prove to be harmful.
- Jephthah's daughter grieved over the fact that she would die without providing an heir to her father's line.
- In ancient Israel, the primary goal of a woman was to have children; but because she would die a virgin, Jephthah's daughter would never fulfill the purpose of her existence.
- In early Pentecostal literature, prominent authors affirm that Jephthah did, indeed, sacrifice his daughter.
- In fact, none of the heroes of Hebrews 11 are praised for their moral purity.
- As examples of endurance, the Old Testament characters are acceptable; but as an example of victory over sin, only Jesus is sufficient.
- Jephthah's inclusion in the list of heroes is not a blanket approval of his every act, and it does not exonerate him from his sin.

The Ephraimites Complain – Again! (12.1–7)

- It is sad that neither Jephthah nor the Ephraimites seek for God's solution to their conflict.
- It is also a sad truth that God's people often fight among themselves; and when they fight, nothing good comes forth.
- Contentions and divisions are not the will of God for His church (see Jas 3.14–4.3).

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12.8–15)

- Ibzan's administration is marked by his forging of political alliances through intermarriage.
- All we know of Elon of Zebulun is that he judged Israel for ten years, and he was buried in Aijalon.
- Abdon's ability to provide seventy donkeys suggests that he was wealthy and successful.

HANDOUT 8

VICTORY BY GOD'S PLAN: SAMSON (PART 1) JUDGES 13.1–16.3

Israel's Rebellion Resumes (13.1)

- For the seventh time in the book of Judges, we read that the Israelites did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.
- The evil that is in view here consists of their forsaking the Lord in order to worship the idols of Canaan.
- God had been faithful to Israel, but Israel continued to forsake the Lord, to break their covenant with the Lord, and to serve the gods of Canaan.
- Here in chapter 13, the Philistines seem to exercise complete domination over the Israelites.

Samson's Birth Foretold (13.2-3)

- In this final cycle, however, the Israelites do not cry out for help.
- For the first time, the Lord chooses to raise up a leader from birth.
- The Angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife and surprises her with a promise from God.

Samson's Call to Be a Nazirite (13.4-5)

- The woman receives instructions from the angel, telling her not to drink any wine or strong drink and not to eat any unclean thing.
- A Nazirite was a person who had made a special vow of consecration to the Lord.
- The Nazirite vow was normally entered into for a certain temporary period of time by an adult who was willing to fulfill these requirements.
- The angel does not promise that Samson will bring complete deliverance; he will only 'begin' that deliverance.

Samson's Father Hears from God (13.6-14)

- The angel repeated to Manoah the same instructions that he had given to his wife earlier.
- Manoah offered up a burnt offering to the Lord; and the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flames.

The Angel Ascends in Sacrificial Fire (13.15–25)

- Samson is the only judge whom God prepares from before birth to fill the role of judge.

- The calling of Samson to be a Nazirite adds to the sense of his purpose and devotion.
- Except for the puzzling declaration that Samson will ‘begin’ to save Israel, everything in ch. 13 indicates that Samson is poised to be the greatest judge of them all.

The Spirit Moves upon Samson (13.1)

- Samson’s potential for greatness is affirmed by the statements, ‘the child grew, and the Lord blessed him’ (v. 24).
- The statement that the Spirit ‘moved upon’ Samson can signify (1) that the Spirit is the source of his great strength.
- It can also mean (2) that Samson was somewhat troubled by the Spirit’s work in his life.
- Is it possible that he is not altogether enthusiastic about or comfortable with the Spirit’s activity in his life?

Samson’s Marriage (14.1–20)

- The Spirit rests upon Samson and we expect him to assemble the army of Israel and engage the enemy; but no such action ensues.
- Each time the Spirit comes upon Samson, the Scripture uses the words, ‘the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power’ (Judg. 14.6, 19; 15.14 NIV).
- Samson is quite overwhelmed every time the Spirit comes upon him but he remains in control of his actions.

Samson’s Many Exploits (15.1–16.3)

- Samson’s unruly behavior persists as he breaks his Nazirite vows by touching the corpse of a dead lion.
- God is free to distribute power to whomsoever He will; and at times, He even empowers unbelievers (e.g. Balaam in Num. 24.2).
- The charismatic endowment of the Spirit in Judges is not always a sign of spiritual maturity or holy character.
- God never excuses sin; He never treats disobedience lightly, and idolatry never goes unpunished.
- God is ultimately concerned with the sanctification of the community as a whole.
- The Israelites actively oppose the work of Samson when they insist that he forego any further attacks upon the Philistines, who, the Israelites say, ‘rule over us’ (Judg. 15.9-13).

HANDOUT 9

VICTORY AFTER FAILURE: SAMSON (PART 2) JUDGES 16.4–31

Samson's Love for Delilah (16.4–5)

- Samson's love for Delilah was the perfect opportunity for the Philistines to entrap him.
- Because Delilah lived on the border, we are not certain whether she was a Philistine or an Israelite.
- The name 'Delilah' suggests weakness, which is an ironic contrast to the strength of Samson.
- Samson was prone to live on the edge and to test the boundaries of proper behavior.
- It is important to observe that Delilah is never criticized in the biblical text. She is never described as a wicked seducer or a prostitute.
- If Samson loved her, then why did he not marry her?

Samson's Test (16.6-15)

- Immediately, Delilah began to question Samson about the source of his great strength.
- First, Samson told Delilah that he would lose his strength if he were tied up with 'seven fresh bowstrings' (16.7 NIV).
- Second, he said that he could be restrained with 'new ropes' (16.11 NIV).
- Third, he said to Delilah, 'If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as any other man' (16.13 NIV).

Samson's Failure (16.16-20)

- Delilah argued that if he really loved her, then he would tell her the truth.
- Samson admitted that he was a Nazirite; and as such, he was not allowed to cut his hair at all.
- The cutting of his hair was the violation of the third Nazirite requirement.
- Samson fully expected to defeat his attackers just as he always had done in the past, but his strength was gone.
- There was no magic and no strength in Samson's hair, but his final act of disobedience caused the Lord to depart.
- Ultimately, Samson's surrender to Delilah is symbolic of Israel's surrender to the gods of Canaan.
- Just as Samson was separated as a Nazirite to God, Israel was separated to God.

- The Lord said to Israel, ‘And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine’ (Lev. 20.26).

Samson’s Bondage (16.21)

- Sin always leads to bondage (John 8.34), and Samson’s disobedience brought him to a place of servitude.
- According to Num. 6.12, Nazirites who have broken their vows, can rededicate themselves to the Lord and begin their consecration anew and afresh.

Samson’s Humiliation (16.22–27)

- It was not enough that they had captured and blinded Samson; they wanted to mock and abuse him further.
- Samson knew that even though he had lost his strength, God’s strength remained.

Samson’s Final Victory (16.28-31)

- Samson called out to the Lord and asked that his strength might return just once more.
- By destroying their central pagan temple, Samson won a great victory which was far more significant than any of his previous victories.
- At the end of the Samson story, we also are confronted with human frailty; and we are forced to cry out only to God.
- We should be thankful for the abilities, talents, training, and resources that God has given to us. However, we must remain humble and obedient, remembering that our effectiveness depends not on our strength but on God’s strength.
- It is clear that the endowment of the Spirit does not grant infallibility to humans.
- It is also clear that Spirit-filled leaders are not exempt from the demands of biblical holiness.
- The book of Judges corresponds to our present-day struggle with charismatic leaders – when leaders fail, we do not know what to do!
- It seems clear that Paul’s ultimate concern for those who have fallen is repentance, redemption, forgiveness, and then restoration.

HANDOUT 10

VICTORY THREATENED BY COMPROMISE: JUDGES 17.1–18.31

Introduction

- The first of the concluding narratives is concerned with idolatry, paralleling the message of the second introduction (2.6-3.6).
- The book of Judges concludes with the Israelites fighting against each, which parallels the first chapter of Judges in which Israel is fighting against their enemies.
- Furthermore, although Judges names twelve judges altogether, the book closes just as it opened—with no leader in Israel.

Micah's Compromise: False Worship (17.1–13)

- Although chs 17-21 come at the end of the book, the events narrated here are not in chronological order.
- The book is structured theologically to demonstrate Israel's spiritual decline.
- An Ephraimite named Micah builds his own sanctuary; and his mother, who has eleven hundred pieces of silver, commissions a silver idol and places it in Micah's shrine.
- Micah hires a Levite to be his personal priest, a move which Micah interprets as an assurance of divine favor.
- The making of an image and the building of a private sanctuary are in violation of God's commandments.
- Joshua had instructed the Israelites: 'do not rebel against the Lord, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the Lord our God' (Josh. 22.19).
- During the time of the judges, the Tabernacle resided in Shiloh (Judg. 18.31; 20.18, 26).
- Micah's illicit activities prompt the first occurrence of the refrain, 'In those days there was no king in Israel' (17.6).

The Danites Compromise: Leaving Their Inheritance (18.1–11)

- The Danites had been driven back by the Amorites (Judg. 1.34) and now must seek out a new location.
- The cooperation of the Levite in the idolatry of both Micah and the Danites is appalling.

- The Levite should have instructed Micah and the Danites regarding God's requirements for worship.

The Danites Further Compromise: False Worship (18.12–31)

- The Danites they took the images, the ephod, and the priest; and they established their own illegitimate shrine.
- The priest, motivated by money and prestige, saw the Danites' offer as a big promotion!
- That a descendant of Moses would serve at an idolatrous shrine indicates a shocking level of departure from the Lord and His commands (see Deut. 27.15).

The Importance of Genuine Worship

- Worship is the most crucial issue for our time.
- Jesus tells us that we cannot worship both God and money (Mt. 6.24), but many Christians are deceived by the allure of riches.
- Have we made an idol of our work, our occupation? Have we made idols of sports heroes, movie stars, and other entertainers?
- Paul says that the time would come when people would be 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God' (2 Tim. 3.1-4).
- When Jesus Christ was tempted in the wilderness, the devil offered to Jesus 'all the kingdoms' of the world if Jesus would only bow down and worship him (Mt. 4.9).
- We were created to worship God, our creator.
- It is important WHOM we worship!
- It is not only important WHOM we worship, but it is also important HOW we worship.
- Genuine worship, then, must be an offering of love to God.
- The worship of God is the highest occupation of the church, and worship fulfills the ultimate purpose for which the people of God are redeemed.
- We will worship something. We will love something. We will serve something.
- The church is the Body of Christ, and worship is the breath that fills the body with life and energy.
- Without genuine worship, the church is dead; however, when the church worships God truly, it is the living embodiment of Christ in the world.

HANDOUT 11

VICTORY THREATENED BY DISUNITY: JUDGES 19.1–21.25

A People without Leadership (19.1)

- The descendants of the tribe of Levi were charged with the spiritual leadership of the nation and were required to care for the tabernacle and perform all of its ceremonies.

A Dysfunctional Family (19.1–7)

- Concubines were not equal to a wife, but their relationship to their master was permanent. Some scholars refer to them as ‘secondary wives’.
- The woman left the Levite and returned to her father’s house in Bethlehem.
- The Levite spoke kindly to her, trying to reconcile with her.

A City without Kindness (19.8-15)

- On the fifth day, the Levite determined that he must be on his way.
- In ancient times, when there were very few inns, hospitality was a necessary and respected custom.

An Old Man with Hospitality (19.16–21)

- The travelers are approached by an old man who is coming in from working in the fields.
- The old man assures them of his good will by saying, ‘Peace be to you,’ and he insists on serving them and providing all of their needs.

A Murderous Mob (19.22–24)

- The old man welcomed his tired guests according to the accepted customs of hospitality.
- In an episode that reminds us of the story of Sodom in Gen. 19.4-8, certain men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the old man turn over the Levite to them.
- The old man appeals to their sense of decency and reminds them of the customs of hospitality.
- In order to protect his guest, the old man offers to hand over his own daughter along with the Levite’s concubine.

A Heinous Crime (19.25-28)

- The wickedness of Judges 19 has its roots in Israel’s refusal to hear God in Judges 2.
- The men of Gibeah ‘abused her all night’ (v. 25). At dawn, when they had tired of molesting her, they turned her loose.

- Without a word of apology, a caring comment, or a helping hand, he told her, ‘Get up; let’s go’ (19.28 NIV).

A Gruesome ‘Division’ (19.29–30)

- When the Levite finally reaches his home, he takes a knife and dismembers his concubine.
- The exodus brings to mind hopeful expectations of a future free of abuse and fear, expectations that apparently remain unfulfilled given the crimes against this helpless and unprotected woman.
- Israel’s exodus, the high point in its history, stands in stark contrast to this low point in Judges, when freedom is turned into anarchy and the oppressed become the oppressors.

A Divided Community (20.1–13)

- Chapter twenty has Israel assembled so that they might decide how to deal with disruption within their own tribes.
- Disunity and infighting are clear signs of spiritual decline.

Disunity and Discord (20.14–17)

- Without any system of accountability (no king), the Benjaminites are not inclined to hand over their people for punishment, no matter how evil their acts had been.

Disunity and Dreadful Results (20.18–44)

- The Israelites who once fought together against the Canaanites are now warring against one of their own tribes.

Disunity and the Destruction of Benjamin(20.45–48)

- The Benjaminites are decimated, and the other tribes mourn the aftermath of the civil war (21.1-7).

Disunity among a Lawless People (21.1–25)

- Israel’s decline happened through a downward spiral of unfaithfulness that began as far back as Judges chapter one.

Conclusion

- Whenever we take lightly our relationship to God, we begin the downward spiral that leads to despair, disunity, and death.