

Promised Land 1 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Five: Jephthah, Samson, Consequences of Decline - Judges 10 – 21

Judges 10 – 12: Jephthah

- 1) According to Judges 10:6-16, how does the Lord feel about the sin of His people and about their resulting misery? **The Lord became angry because of Israel's idolatry and sold them into the hands of their enemies (10:7). However, after they repented and got rid of their idols, God "could bear Israel's misery no longer" (10:16).**
- 2) Read Judges 11:1, 28-40. Keep in mind the pagan attitudes in the culture of Israel in Jephthah's day. What adjectives would you use to describe his vow? If you are familiar with the Law of Moses, can you recall anything in it that should have influenced Jephthah's thinking about making that kind of vow? Was his vow even necessary? **Jephthah's vow may have demonstrated zeal, but it also indicates that he was attempting to negotiate with (or even manipulative) the Lord. Furthermore, the vow was rash and unnecessary. Other Judges successfully delivered Israel without making vows. The keeping of it reflected Jephthah's pagan mindset. Human sacrifice was an accepted practice among some pagans, but Jephthah should have known that the Law of Moses forbade it (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 18:10). The Law made provision for people who "belonged to the Lord" (or were dedicated to Him) to be redeemed by a monetary gift, not sacrificed, as were animals (Exodus 13:13, Leviticus 27:1-8). Sadly, Jephthah may have been fairly (or entirely) ignorant of the Law. (Note: Some scholars believe the passage implies that Jephthah commuted his daughter's death sentence to a life of virginity.)**
- 3) What cultural attitudes and influences do you see creeping into private and public worship of the Lord today? **In today's western world, there is tremendous cultural pressure for tolerance of all belief systems. Another example is the entertainment mentality, in which worshippers primarily seek emotional experiences or expect to be entertained and "spoon-fed" by speakers (and musicians), instead of exercising the disciplines of Bible reading, study, and prayer. The combined effect of these two prevalent attitudes is ignorance of many important Bible doctrines. Even professing believers often have a lower (less than Biblical) view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Their "Jesus" is a deity of their own imagination, contrived by mixing Scripture with cultural beliefs or personal ideas. A casual attitude toward sin (or complete denial of it) is yet another result. (Many other cultural attitudes and influences may be cited.)**

Judges 13 – 14: Samson

- 4) Read Judges 13:1-5, 24-25 with Numbers 6:1-8, 1 Samuel 1:10-11, 20, Luke 1:13-17, and Acts 18:18. What was the Nazirite vow and who besides Samson was a Nazirite or took a Nazirite vow? **A Nazirite vow was generally a temporary vow to set oneself apart for the Lord. The vow-maker was specifically restricted from cutting their hair, eating or drinking anything fermented or any product of the vine, and contact with a dead body. Samuel and John the Baptist were Nazirites. Paul seems to have taken a Nazirite vow on one occasion (reportedly, many early Christians did so).**
- 5) From Judges 14-16, give examples of ways the Lord worked through Israel's deliverer (Judge), Samson, despite Samson's unusual and even questionable choices and methods.
 - a) Judges 14:1-4 **Samson chose a pagan Philistine as his wife. Surprisingly, 14:4 says, "...this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines".**
 - b) Judges 14:10-19 **Samson killed thirty Philistines from Ashkelon in order to get their clothing (14:19).**
 - c) Judges 15:1-8 **When Samson's father-in-law gave his wife to his friend, Samson became angry and torched the Philistines' fields. After she and her father were murdered, Samson retaliated again, viciously slaughtering the Philistines who had burned them to death (15:8).**
 - d) Judges 15:11-15 **Samson killed 1,000 Philistines with a donkey's jawbone.**

- e) Judges 16:4-31 **Samson killed more Philistines in his death than he had in his life. He pushed down the supports of the Philistines' temple while it was full of the people who had come to see a blind man "perform."**
- 6) What does Samson's story teach you about whom the Lord can use to accomplish His purposes? How might this cause you to think differently about current, national and international events and leaders? Give specific examples, without slandering any one particular leader or group of leaders. **Unlike the other judges, Samson functioned more as a lone commando than as a battle commander. Even though Samson methods were very unorthodox, God worked through him to punish Israel's enemy. God can work through anyone or anything He chooses to accomplish His good purposes. Personal sharing**

Judges 17 – 18: Micah's Priest and the Danites

- 7) What signs of spiritual chaos can you find in the following verses?
- Judges 17:3-4 (see Exodus 20:4) **Silver that had been consecrated to the Lord was used to make an idol.**
 - Judges 17:1, 5 and 10-12 (see Exodus 40:12-15 and Numbers 18:1, 7. Note: Although Aaron and his sons descended from the line of Levi, under the Mosaic law, only Aaron's descendants had the right to be priests, not the Levites in general.) **The Israelites were not to have any idols. Furthermore, only Levites who descended from Aaron could serve as Israel's priests. Micah made idols and hired a Levite (but not an Aaronic Levite [18:30]) as his personal priest. He also installed one of his own sons (an Ephraimite [17:1]) as a priest.**
 - Judges 17:13 **Micah was so ignorant of the Law that he actually believed God would bless him for installing these men as his priests.**
 - Judges 18:1-6, 27, 30-31 **The entire tribe of Dan set up an idolatrous center of worship, rather than worshipping at the Lord's house in Shiloh. Moses' own grandson was too ignorant of the Law (or too careless) to refuse to be a priest (and serve an idol)!**
- 8) At first, we may find Israel's sins incomprehensible. They were God's own people! What does 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 say about this? What specific warning do you need to take from this period in Israel's history? **1 Corinthians 10 tells us that Israel's sins were recorded as an example to warn us against thinking we could never fall into sin as they did. Personal sharing**

Judges 19 – 21: Civil War in Israel

- 9) Read Judges 19. Which verses bear striking resemblance to Genesis 19:4-8? Since the writer of Judges almost certainly assumed his readers would be familiar with Genesis, what point about Israel's moral condition was he making? **Judges 19:22-24 bears a striking resemblance to the account that took place at Lot's doorstep on the eve of the Lord's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Both were the result of extreme wickedness. Apparently, the writer of Judges placed this particular episode near the end of the book to illustrate the depths to which Israel had plummeted morally.**
- 10) Why (apparently) did the Levite gruesomely cut his dead concubine's body into twelve pieces? **It seems that he wanted to shock all twelve tribes into taking action against those who killed his concubine.**
- 11) Judges 20 describes a very dark hour in Israel's history that resulted from the murder of the Levite's concubine (chapter 19).
- According to Judges 20:8-11, what verdict did Israel render upon the tribe of Benjamin? **Israel determined to unite (20:11) and wage war against Benjamin, giving them "what they deserved for all this vileness done in Israel" (20:10).**

- b) Summarize the events that followed (verses 20-21, 24-29, 35-36, and 48). After two days of fighting (in which Benjamin overran Israel), the Israelites wept before the Lord, fasted, made sacrifices and inquired of Him. Then, they set up an ambush and (as the Lord promised) defeated the Benjamites. Finally, they went to the towns of Benjamin, killed every living thing (including animals), and set the towns on fire.
- 12) According to Judges 21, how did Israel ensure the tribe of Benjamin was not altogether erased? One Israelite town failed to participate in Benjamin's judgment. The Israelites put to death all males and married women from this town and gave the unmarried girls to the few, remaining, male Benjamites. However, there were more male Benjamites than there were brides, so the remaining men were given the opportunity to "grab" a virgin from the unsuspecting families of a different town (Shiloh). This plan enabled the men of Israel (specifically, the men of Shiloh) to keep their vow against giving their daughters to the Benjamites, while still ensuring the continuation of the tribe.
- 13) Read Judges 17:6 and 21:25. How does this summary of Israel's condition compare to the moral climate in your own culture? What can you personally do to keep such thinking from prevailing among *believers* in your area? These verses say, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Personal sharing

Book of Judges

- 14) According to Judges 8:1, 12:1-4, and 20:18-48, what politically significant consequence resulted from Israel's spiritual decline? Spiritual decline resulted in civic and tribal disunity, and eventually, in a civil war that almost wiped out an entire tribe.
- 15) Read Romans 15:5-6. Are you in a relationship or group in which an absence of true spirituality is fostering disunity? If so, what can you do about it? Personal sharing