

The Book of Judges

Chapters 1, 2

After the death of Joshua,
the Israelites continued their campaign
to occupy all parts of the land of Canaan.

But as time went on,
the Israelites began to forget the Lord their God.

As a result, things went wrong for the Israelites.

To help them, the Lord appointed judges to lead them.
For a while the people followed the judges.

But as soon as a judge died,
the people again lapsed into idolatry.

Dear God, please don't let me forget you.
Please help me pray to you and love you every day

Chapter 3

Some of the Israelites forgot the Lord their God and worshipped false gods.

As a result, they were enslaved by the king of Edom for 8 years.

They cried to God for help and God raised up Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, to lead and rescue them.

Then the land enjoyed peace for 40 years.

But when Othniel died, the Israelites again began to do what displeases the Lord, and were again enslaved, this time by Eglon king of Moab, for 18 years.

Once more they cried to the Lord for help and he raised up Ehud, a left-hander.

As Ehud presented tribute to Eglon, he said to Eglon: "I have a secret message for you."

When they were alone, Eglon thought he was safe, because Ehud's knife was on his right thigh.

Ehud then used his left-hand to grab the knife unexpectedly and killed Eglon.

Ehud escaped from the king's quarters before the king's attendants knew Eglon was dead.

Ehud then roused the Israelites to fight and defeat the Moabites, after which the land enjoyed peace for 80 years.

Lord, please raise up good leaders in every country

Chapter 4

After Ehud died,
the Israelites again began to stray from the Lord
and therefore again lost their freedom and peace.

The Lord then used Deborah,
who was a judge and prophetess,
to rescue the people.

Deborah instructed Barak son of Abinoam
to go and do battle with Sisera, the people's oppressor.

Barak said he would go only if Deborah went with him.
She agreed but then said that
his hesitation would cause the Lord
to give battle victory to a woman, not Barak.

When Barak's forces routed those of Sisera,
Sisera fled and took refuge
in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber.

As Sisera slept from exhaustion,
Jael drove a tent peg into his head and he died.

So once again the Lord had rescued the Israelites.

Dear God, please give me more courage
in the battle of life,
(and please protect and bless *Barack* Obama!)

Chapters 4, 5, 6

After Sisera's forces were defeated,
the land enjoyed peace for 40 years.

But then the Israelites again lapsed into idolatry,
and so they were oppressed by the Midianites for 7 years.

The Lord then raised up Gideon to rescue the people.

Following the Lord's instructions,
Gideon at night time destroyed the altar to Baal
in his father's house.

When the Midianites heard what Gideon had done,
they prepared to attack the Israelites.

The spirit of the Lord came on Gideon
and he rallied the Israelites.

Gideon asked for a sign of success in battle,
and said to the Lord:

"See now, I spread out a fleece of wool on the ground;
tomorrow morning, if there is dew only on the fleece
and not on the surrounding ground,
then I know you will deliver Israel by my hand."

And so it happened the next morning:
the ground was dry but the fleece was drenched with dew.

Gideon asked for a second sign,
requesting that the fleece be dry
but the ground covered with dew.

And God did what Gideon asked:
the fleece stayed dry, and there was dew on the ground.

Dear Lord, thank you for hearing Gideon's prayer
(and please bless the work of the Gideon Society
which puts Bibles in hotels around the world!)

Chapter 7

Gideon prepared to go to war with the Midianites.
But God told him to reduce his number of soldiers.

The army was told

"Let anyone who is frightened or fearful go home."

22,000 men went home; 10,000 stayed.

The Lord said there were still too many.

"So many men might cause Israel to claim that
a victory had nothing to do with the Lord."

So Gideon got the men to go to the river to drink.

All those who lapped the water, like a dog,
he put on one side. These numbered 300.

The rest knelt down and used their hands to drink.
These were sent home.

Gideon divided his 300 men into 3 groups,
surrounding the Midianite camp.

To each man he gave a horn and an empty water container,
with a torch inside each container.

In the middle of the night, they attacked.

They sounded their horns and smashed their containers,
holding a horn in their right hand and a torch in their left.

The Midianites woke in terror,
thinking that the Israelites had a huge number of men.

In their panic, the Midianites attacked each other
as they fled the camp.

The Israelites drove the Midianites
from the Israelite homeland.

Dear God, thank you for the courage
and leadership of Gideon

Chapter 8

After Gideon defeated all the enemies of the Israelites, the Israelites asked him to be their ruler.

He replied: "It is not I who shall rule over you, nor my son; The Lord must be your ruler."

After Gideon's death, the people of Israel again began to worship the local idols. They no longer remembered the Lord who had so often rescued them.

The people were also ungrateful to Gideon's family despite all the good deeds that family had done for Israel.

Dear Lord, please don't let me
ever become an ungrateful person

Chapter 9

Gideon had seventy sons by his wives and concubines. One of his sons was Abimelech, son of a concubine.

Abimelech became king after murdering all but one of his 70 half-brothers.

The half-brother who escaped was Jotham.

Abimelech ruled over Israel for 3 years.

Then God sent a spirit of discord between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem.

The leaders of Shechem rebelled against Abimelech. Abimelech started attacking and destroying their towns.

Abimelech besieged the town of Thebez.

The people of the town took refuge in a tower.

When Abimelech tried to set fire to the tower, a woman in the tower threw down a large rock which crushed Abimelech's head.

Abimelech got his armor-bearer to kill him with a sword, so that no one could say he was killed by a woman.

Dear Lord, please stop evil people
from hurting other people

Chapters 10, 11

The Israelites yet again served false gods, and once more they were oppressed, this time by the Ammonites.

The Israelites appealed to Jephthah to help them. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. His brothers had driven him from home and would not give him a share of their father's inheritance.

Jephthah went into exile and became a famous soldier.

Jephthah agreed to help the Israelites after they agreed to make him their future leader.

Jephthah tried to reason with the Ammonite king, but the king refused to negotiate a peace agreement.

The spirit of the Lord then came on Jephthah and he led the Israelites to victory over the Ammonites.

Dear Lord, may your spirit give courage to all leaders

Chapters 12, 13

Jephthah was judge in Israel for 6 years. For the following 25 years, Ibzan (7 years), Elon (10 years) and Abdon (8 years) were judges.

After these judges,
the Israelites again were unfaithful to the Lord
and so they were oppressed by the Philistines for 40 years.

It was then that the angel of the Lord appeared to
Manoah's wife and said to her:

"You are barren and have had no child.
But you will soon conceive and bear a son.
No razor is to touch his head,
for he shall be dedicated to the Lord from his mother's womb.
It is he who will rescue Israel from the Philistines."

The woman gave birth to a son and called him Samson.
The child grew and the Lord blessed him.

Dear Lord, please bless all barren women

Chapter 14

Samson wanted to marry a Philistine woman,
even though custom required he marry an Israelite.

On his way to visit the woman in Philistine territory,
Samson was confronted by a young lion.

The spirit of the Lord filled Samson
and he tore the lion to pieces with his bare hands.

On his next visit to the woman's home,
Samson saw that in the carcass of the dead lion
there was a swarm of bees, and honey.

The people of the village made a wedding feast for 7 days.
But they were scared of Samson
so they assigned 30 men to stay with him.

Samson challenged them to answer a riddle:
if they got the right answer before the 7 days were over,
he would give them 30 pieces of silver and 30 festal robes.

But if they failed to get the right answer,
they had to give Samson 30 pieces of silver and 30 robes.
They agreed to the challenge.

Samson stated his riddle:

"Out of the eater came what is eaten,
out of the strong came what is sweet."

Three days went by and they could not solve the riddle.
So they asked Samson's wife to find out the answer.

Day after day she pestered Samson with pleading and tears
until, on the 7th day, he told her. She then told the men.

The men then said to Samson:

"What is sweeter than honey,
and what is stronger than a lion?"

Samson then went to a nearby Philistine town
and killed 30 men there.

He took their robes and gave them
to the 30 wedding feast guests.

Full of anger, he stormed out of the village
and returned to his parents' house.

His wife was then given to the companion
who had been his best man.

Dear God, please help me control my anger

Chapter 15

When Samson found out his wife had been given to someone else he took his revenge on the Philistines by setting fire to their crops.

The Philistines then attacked the land of Judah, trying to capture Samson.

To avoid war with the Philistines, the men of Judah bound Samson with ropes and handed him over to the Philistines.

But as the Philistines approached him, Samson was filled with the spirit of the Lord and broke free from the ropes.

He saw a dead donkey's jawbone on the ground and used this to strike down many Philistines before making his escape.

Samson was judge in Israel for 20 years.

Dear Lord, you once gave strength to Samson.
Please give me strength to face the battles of life

Chapter 16

Samson went to Gaza and entered the house of a prostitute. The men of Gaza tried to capture Samson but he eluded them.

Samson then fell in love with a woman called Delilah. The Philistine leaders pressured Delilah to find out the secret of Samson's great strength.

Day after day Delilah pestered Samson until he told her his secret:

"A razor has never touched my head,
because I have been specially dedicated
to God from my birth.

If my hair is cut, I will lose my strength."

Delilah then cut Samson's hair while he was asleep
and called the Philistines to capture him.

The Philistines bound Samson, put out his eyes
and chained him in a prison in Gaza.

But in prison, Samson's hair began to grow again.

The Philistines held a special ceremony in a large building
to celebrate the capture of Samson.

They paraded Samson at the ceremony
and then made him stand between two pillars.

Samson prayed to God for strength one more time
and the Lord heard his prayer.

He then used his great strength
to pull down the main pillars supporting the building.

In this way, at his death, Samson killed more Philistines
than before he went to prison.

Dear Lord, you once gave special strength to Samson.
Please give me strength to face the battles of life

Chapters 17 – 21

After Samson's death, there was no leader in Israel
and everyone did as they pleased
as lawlessness and anarchy became widespread.

Dear Lord, please don't let lawlessness
increase in our world