

Basic Training Bible Ministries

“Lessons on Liberty from an Age of Anarchy”

Contemporary Lessons from the Book of Judges



“And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Jos 24:15

Orange County, California Conference

August 24–26, 2012

Lessons on Liberty from an Age of Anarchy

Contemporary Lessons from the Book of Judges

Introduction:

The time frame of the book of Judges actually covers the time from the death of Joshua to the anointing of David (1Sa 16), Samuel being the last judge. This period of about 400 years is Israel's "Dark Ages."

Judges stands in contrast to Joshua as a dismal sequel to a time of sustained great and glorious victories. In comparing the experience of Israel in the two books we find valuable lessons for personal spiritual as well as national life.

I. A Contrast

The Scriptures are filled with the contrast of life and death, light and darkness, good and evil. All of these speak of spiritual states that result from the ultimate sources of truth and deception, faith versus unbelief. Whereas Joshua can be used to illustrate the victorious Christian life (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 6:10–18), Judges is a good picture of a life of reversion (Gal 5:19–21; Eph 4:17–19; 1Corinthians).

II. A Calling

The book of Judges shows God's ability to take weak instruments and win great victories in dark times. Along with frail men and women, God uses ox-goads, tent-pegs, pitchers, trumpets, lamps and a mill-stone. What is keeping each one of us from volunteering to be an instrument of God's deliverance to America?

III. A Caution

Any nation can go, in the space of one generation, from liberty and strength (America in WWII) to anarchy and defeat (which America today is rapidly spiraling into). If revival does not come to America, we will soon end up in a Judges-type scenario.

Ten contrasts between Joshua and Judges (*Wilmington's Guide to the Bible*, pg. 91):

	Joshua	Judges
1	Victory	Defeat
2	Freedom	Slavery
3	Faith	Unbelief
4	Progress	Declension
5	Obedience	Disobedience
6	Heavenly Vision	Earthly Emphasis
7	Joy	Sorrow
8	Strength	Weakness
9	Unity	Disunity
10	Strong Leader	No Leader

By application, the book of Joshua is an illustration of the victorious Christian life, as depicted in such passages as Rom 13:11–14; Gal 5:22–25; Eph 6:10–18. In contrast is the life of carnality and defeat pictured in Rom 7:13–24; Gal 3:1–4, 5:1–4, 19–21; Eph 4:17–19.

Judges Outline

- I. Disobedience and Defeat—Chapters 1–2
- II. Despair and Deliverance—Chapters 3–16
- III. Degeneracy and Decline—Chapters 17–21

The following quote is most commonly attributed to a passage from *The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic* by Alexander Fraser Tytler Lord Woodhouselee (1748–1813), (Scottish judge and historian at Edinburgh University):

The people go from bondage to spiritual faith
From spiritual faith to great courage
From courage to liberty
From liberty to abundance
From abundance to selfishness
From selfishness to complacency
From complacency to apathy
From apathy to dependence
From dependence back into bondage

The Wisdom of our Founding Fathers

The founding fathers of America were extremely wise in regard to liberty, having come out of tyranny, and having studied the history and the principles of freedom (cf., *The Five Thousand Year Leap*, W. Cleon Skousen). Specifically, the ideas and principles contained in our Declaration of Independence are built on timeless truths of the Bible. Consider this brief paragraph:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ...”

(Consider the similarities to Paul’s statement to the men of Athens, Act 17:24–28.)

From this one simple statement, several truths can be seen:

1. All men are created by a benevolent Creator.
2. It is from the Creator alone that unalienable rights are bestowed. It is implied that these rights are enjoyed only in a right relationship with the Creator.
3. The equality of men is based on their relationship to the Creator, and the rights derived from Him, not in regard to their race, station in life, or individual talents.

4. The first gift is life, then the liberty of how to live that life (an issue of volition), and then the right to pursue happiness (which is the test of our relation to God).
5. Since the fall of Adam, absolute liberty has been lost due to sin, fear, and death (Heb 2:14–15). The liberty to which all are heirs is freedom of choice, by which we pursue either the worldly or the heavenly vision of happiness.
6. If liberty of choice is used for the pursuit of self-gratification, liberty is lost and slavery results (Joh 8:34).
7. If we choose the way of faith, drawing near to God through Jesus Christ, we find both eternal life and happiness and, in living by faith, abundant life here and now (Joh 10:10b).
8. It is clear that the pursuit of happiness is not the guarantee of finding it. It is this pursuit that leads either to faith and self-denial, or unbelief and self-centeredness.
9. Because these gifts are “unalienable,” meaning no one is able to deny them, it is possible for even a man enslaved or imprisoned to reclaim them through faith.
10. In the book of Judges, we find “heroes,” common men and women who choose the path of faith even in the darkest period of Israel’s history, and in so doing lead others to spiritual liberation and a measure of physical liberty.

Note: The final challenge of Joshua to the children of Israel (Jos 24:15) is a repetition of those of Moses (Deu 11:16–17, 26; 12:8, etc.). It makes clear that the choice of faith is the foundation of freedom and blessing.

The Seven Cycles of National Discipline

1. Othniel, Jdg 3:7–11
Note the cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance/supplication, deliverance.
2. Ehud, Jdg 3:12–31 (includes the judge Shamgar, v. 31)
3. Deborah/Barak, Jdg 4:1–5:31 (a testament to courageous women in a generation of weak males!)
4. Gideon, Jdg 6:1–8:35
5. Abimelech, Jdg 9:1–57 (a false judge, picture of Antichrist)
6. Jephthah, Jdg 10:1–12:15. (includes Tola, v. 1, and Jair, v. 3)
7. Samson, Jdg 13:1–16:31 (significantly, the one judge not preceded by repentance)

Note: Psalm 107 is a testament to the fact that God always hears and responds to the repentant cry of His people, and delivers them. “... *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Joe 2:32; Rom 10:13) is true in both an eternal and a temporal sense.

Nine Principles of Liberty

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Psa 33:12

These principles demonstrate the only basis for freedom, the foundation and growth of anarchy, and the ultimate demise of liberty in any nation.

I. The Principle of Source:

Liberty is a gift of God, available to all, but claimed by faith alone, Jdg 2:1–6.

*“The tree of life was in the midst of the garden,
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Gen 2:9b*

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God
is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom 6:23*

Liberty is inherent in the nature of God. He who is the author of all that is cannot be constrained by anything that exists. This liberty was imparted to Adam and Eve in the Garden, with but one possibility of losing it—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

With the sin of Adam, perfect freedom was lost. Fear and death now enslaved mankind. The one form of freedom left to man was volitional freedom—the freedom of choice. Therefore as Adam was created free, with the volitional potential of sin and slavery, so now we are born slaves of sin, with one option for freedom—faith in Jesus Christ.

The Angel of the Lord, Jdg 2:1–6

- A. The five uses of “I” in vv. 1–3 reveal this to be God, in the person of Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate form, as seen often in the Old Testament (cf., Jdg 13:3–22).
- B. The five “I’s” reveal:
 - 1. His covenant,
 - 2. His promise,
 - 3. His faithfulness,
 - 4. His deliverances, and
 - 5. His discipline for unbelief.
- C. It is clear that liberation is of the Lord, and is given freely in response to faith.
- D. As Jesus declared, only He can set one truly free, Joh 8:36. He is the “*Angel of the LORD*” incarnate in human flesh.

Doctrine of Divine Liberation

- The prophetic mission of Jesus Christ to this world is one of liberation, Isa 61:1–3.
- The price of setting free the captives of Satan was the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, Heb 2:14–15.
- Slavery is the work of Satan, and Jesus Christ “*was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil,*” 1Jo 3:8.
- True freedom demands liberation from the power of sin, and is found only through faith in Jesus Christ, Joh 8:36.
- The scope of liberty expands as we saturate our souls and lives with the “water of life,” the Word of God, Joh 7:37–38, Joh 8:31–33.
- When the believers in a nation (the “*salt*” and “*light*”—Mat 5:13–14) fail to stand firm in the liberty which is in Christ, that nation will not long remain free, Gal 5:1, 13; 1Pe 4:17–18.

II. The Principle of Choice:

No nation can reject God’s Word and remain free, Jdg 1, 2:7–15.

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.” Deu 30:15

*“... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ...
but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* Jos 24:15

Both Moses and Joshua had repeatedly stressed the need for Israel to choose the way of faith and obedience and to shun the way of unbelief and disobedience.

The repeated phrase “*there was no king in Israel,*” (Jdg 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), prepares the way for the coming of David, while the phrase “*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” reveals the degeneration of the nation into anarchy (cf. Ezr 8:21–23). Moses had forewarned them of this very danger (Deu 12:8).

A. The Divine Option, Jdg 2:7–10

Under the strong leadership of Joshua and the elders of his generation, Israel “*served the Lord.*” This was the critical decision (Jos 24:15) and the chief component in the victorious campaigns of the book of Joshua. This is the option of every believer today (cf., Gal 5:16–25; Eph 6:10–18).

B. The Path of Defeat, Jdg 2:11–15

Note the string of phrases that highlight repeated wrong decisions: “*Israel did evil ... and served the Baals ... they provoked the LORD ... forsook the LORD,*” and the consequences of those decisions: “*... the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel ... He delivered them ... He sold them ... the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity.*”

C. The Road to Slavery, Jdg 1

In spite of the promises of God (Deu 31:6–8), note the repeated phrase “*but they could not drive them out,*” Jdg 1:19, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33. This is contrary to God’s declared will, therefore evidence of creeping unbelief. In Jdg 1:19, the reference to “*chariots of iron*” is ludicrous in light of Jos 11:6, 17:17 and Jdg 4:3, 13, 5:28. Israel chose, little by little (just as America is choosing today) to become a nation of slaves.

Doctrine of Decision Making

- The key to wise decision making is found in Pro 3:5–6.
- The final challenge of Joshua to his generation stressed the crucial decision, Jos 24:15.
- Wise decisions cannot be made without knowing the truth, Joh 8:31–32. To choose truth is the first step toward personal and national liberation.
- The foundation of all wise decisions is a reverent fear of God, Pro 1:7, 9:10.
- Failure to heed the Word of God leads to a self-induced destruction, Hos 4:6.
- God will give wisdom for right decision making to all who ask in faith, Jam 1:5.
- Decisions form the transition from inner condition of the “heart” to the outward direction of the life, ending in either cursing or blessing (cf., Deu 11:26).

		<u>Decisions</u>	<u>Actions</u>	<u>Results</u>
		Wise/	Good/	Blessing/
		Foolish	Evil	Cursing
<u>Motives</u>	<u>Priorities</u>	Eph 5:15	Heb 5:14	Deu 11:26
Humble/	Spiritual			Heb 6:7–8
Arrogant	Temporal			
1Pe 5:5b	Mat 6:19–20, 33			
	1Co 3:1			

III. The Principle of Conflict:

A state of war exists between liberty and slavery—the first is divine, the other satanic, Jdg 3:7–6:10.

“*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.*” Gal 5:1

“*Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.*” Joh 8:34

We note the immediate contrast between “*the children of Israel ... forgot the LORD their God*” (Jdg 3:7) and “*the children of Israel cried out to the Lord*” (v. 9). In this section we see “*Israel cried out to the Lord*” five times. This phrase is not found again until after Abimelech, the usurper, and just before Jephthah (Jdg 10:10). This is the last time it’s found in the book of Judges.

A. Volition is Always Tested, Jdg 2:16–3:7

The ultimate issue of human existence and history is the exercise of our volition, the greatest power God has given to man. In man’s likeness to God (Gen 1:26),

nothing is greater than the power of self-determination. There was only one prohibition in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:17), and it was a volitional test. Every moment of every day we are being tested by our response to providentially directed circumstances.

1. Testing is based on the teaching of God's grace and truth, Jdg 2:16–19.
2. Testing proves whether the teaching has been truly received by faith, Jdg 2:20–3:6.
3. It is impossible to reject the teaching and pass the test, Jdg 3:7 with Jdg 2:17.

B. Ingratitude to God's Goodness Makes His Discipline Inevitable, Jdg 3:7–31

1. Othniel—a heritage of courage, Jdg 3:7–11 (see Jos 15:13–17), a brother (nephew) of Caleb, and man of consistent courage
2. Ehud—a judge with a sense of humor, Jdg 3:12–30, “*I have a message from God for you*” (Jdg 3:20)
3. Shamgar—a heroic stand, Jdg 3:31.

*“Shamgar had an ox goad
David had a sling
Dorcas had a needle
Rahab had some string
Mary had some ointment
Moses had a rod
What small thing do you have
You'll dedicate to God?”*

Point: We often hear the appeal, “God bless America.” Yet no nation in history has been so blessed, and what have we done with it? We have outlawed prayer, scorned His Word, and used His blessings for self-indulgence. Surely the abuse of our God-given liberty will lead us into anarchy and slavery, under the just wrath of God!

C. Women Warriors and Wimpy Men, Jdg 4–6

In time of national decline, men become weak, soft, fearful, indecisive, complacent, and generally pathetic. In America today, our true heroes—from faithful men risking everything on truth from the pulpit, to missionaries serving in the world's most dangerous places, to our warriors fighting on foreign soil—our heroes are either mocked, maligned, or simply ignored. In a warrior-culture like ancient Sparta, or present-day Israel, the women were warriors, standing behind their men, and raising up future warriors. In a soft and flabby nation in decline, the women must become warriors so that they can lead their men. Such is often the case in America today.

D. The Effects of Anarchy on the State of Women

Note the trend of a nation given over to anarchy as depicted in the book of Judges. In a degenerate nation, the women and children always suffer most, if for no other reason than there are no men willing to suffer to protect them.

1. First we have Deborah, the prophetess (Jdg 4:4–5, a teacher and counselor of God’s Word).
2. Then we have Jael, a warrior-woman (Jdg 4:17–21).
3. Next we see Jephthah’s daughter, sacrificed to a foolish vow and a heathen culture (Jdg 11:29–40).
4. Then a faithful mother who raises up a willful son (Jdg 13:3–7).
5. Finally, a concubine who by her own unfaithfulness and her husband’s cowardice, becomes the victim of neglect, rape, and murder (Jdg 19:22–30).

E. Deborah, Barak, and Jael

God raises up Deborah as a teacher and counselor, who calls on Barak to respond to a direct command and promise from God (Jdg 4:6–7). Yet Barak will only go if Deborah will go with him and hold his hand. As a result, Deborah tells Barak that he will not receive any honor for the victory, but rather God would give it to a woman (Jdg 4:9). In the end, Sisera—the commander of the Canaanite army—flees from the battle and is given “refuge” by Jael, who then pins his head to the ground with a tent-peg (Jdg 4:21). Both Deborah and Jael are called to rise to the occasion due to the weakness of Barak. Still, since he is mentioned in Heb 11:32, God does recognize a measure of faith on his part, and reinforces the fact that He is able to use “weak vessels” for His glory. The narrative of Jdg 4 leads up to the song of Jdg 5, in which some valuable lessons are found.

F. The Song of Deborah and Barak, Jdg 5

1. Times of mass migration results in a dark and dismal time, Jdg 5:6. “*The days of Shamgar*” tell us more about this time than we find in Jdg 3:31. Historically this was at the time of the migration of the “Sea People” who became known as “*Philistines*” So dangerous was this time that “the highways were deserted.” A nation’s loss of liberty leads to rampant violence and bloodshed.
2. Liberty is won, not by slaves, but by free and faith-driven volunteers (Jdg 5:2–9). Both the people and the leaders “offered themselves willingly” to God. It is because of this that God goes forth to fight for them, vv. 3–5.
3. A time of great conflict produces “*great resolves of heart*” (v. 15), as well as “*great searchings of heart*” (v. 16). There are always some who “stand with the Lord at the gates” (v. 11), while others remain behind in fear, unwilling to take the risks of warfare (vv. 16–17).
4. Because of decisions made in time of trouble, some will be honored (Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar and part of Reuben), and those who are shamed (part of Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher).

5. There are also those who rise above even the other heroes, to stand as examples of great faith and courage (Zebulun and Naphtali, v. 18). Compare “*who jeopardized their lives to the point of death*” with Act 15:26; Rom 16:4; Phi 2:30.
6. All visible, physical conflict on earth is a manifestation of the unseen war being waged in the spiritual realm, vv. 20–21, “*O my soul, march on in strength!*” As Paul declares (Rom 8:31) “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*”
7. Decisions made in time of great conflict, whether for faith and courage or unbelief and cowardice, will receive appropriate blessing or cursing from God (vv. 23–27). The contrast is between men who “*did not come to the help of the LORD against the mighty*” (v. 23), and the courageous actions of one non-Israelite woman (vv. 24–27) who is “*most blessed among women*” by the Lord.
8. While the enemies of God continue to delude themselves (vv. 28–30), the song ends with a cry of victory and a prayer, that “*those who love Him be like the sun, when it shines out in full strength.*” I believe this is a promise of future glory in His eternal kingdom to those of faith and courage. May we be given grace to stand among them!

Doctrine of Spiritual War

- The spiritual war began with the rebellion of Lucifer against God, Isa 14:12–15; Eze 28:6–10.
- In his revolt, Satan drew one-third of the angels into his rebellion, Rev 12:4, 7–9.
- This fallen host now wages incessant war against the purpose of God, Dan 9:12–13, 20; Eph 6:10–12.
- By the devil’s deception in the Garden, mankind was drawn into this conflict, Gen 3:1–11; Heb 2:14–18.
- The only hope of victory in this age-old war is on the basis of the cross of Jesus Christ, where He defeated the devil, Joh 16:33, 19:30; 1Jo 3:8, 5:4–5.
- Those who believe in Jesus become co-workers and co-combatants in this spiritual struggle, Rom 13:11–14; 2Co 5:18–21, 6:1; Eph 6:10–18; 2Ti 2:1–3.
- The good soldier of Jesus Christ subordinates all personal interests to the will of God in the desire to win His ultimate approval, 2Ti 2:4, 4:7–8.

IV. The Principle of Power:

God chooses and uses weak instruments to win mighty victories, Jdg 6:11–8:35 (cf., Zec 4:6, 10; 1Co 1:26–31).

“The battle is the Lord’s.” 1Sa 17:47

“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will raise up a standard against him.” Isa 59:19b

“[who] ...out of weakness were made strong.” Heb 11:34b

Gideon: A Type of Christ at His Return

Though the story of Gideon is not often given this description, it is a matter of biblical revelation, as we shall see. Though he was a meek and weak man, yet God used Gideon in a mighty way, perhaps a foretaste of how the “Lamb of God” will come again as “the Lion of Judah” (Rev 5:5–6). Note the highlights of his story.

A. The Darkness Before the Dawn, Jdg 6:1–6

If it was bad in the days of Shamgar, when “*the highways were deserted*” (Jdg 5:6), it is much worse now, as the children of Israel live in the “*dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains*” (Jdg 6:2, see Heb 11:38). Because of their willful sins (Jdg 6:1), they are plundered by the Midianites to the point of famine (Jdg 6:3–5). These dark days are but a shadow of the coming Tribulation.

B. The Prophetic Rebuke, Jdg 6:7–10

There comes a time when God withholds His deliverance and allows us to reap the consequences of our willful ways (see Pro 1:24–33, read it). Throughout history, to each and every man and nation, the truth remains, “*Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal 6:7).

C. The Call of Gideon, Jdg 6:11–20

Once again we see that “*the Angel of the LORD*” (v. 11) is none other than “*the LORD*” (v. 14). He finds Gideon hiding, fearful, hungry and calls him “*mighty man of valor*” (v. 12). It is a wonderful truth that God chooses to see us, not as we are, but as we shall be through His grace. When Gideon is told “*Go in this might of yours,*” the Lord is referring to His own foreknowledge of what He will accomplish through this timid man. To Gideon the situation is hopeless (v. 13), and he is helpless (v. 15) but all that means nothing because the promise is “*I will be with you*” (v. 16).

D. A New Name for God, Jdg 6:21–24

Realizing that he has seen God, Gideon is fearful he will die, because God said to Moses “*no man shall see Me and live*” (Exo 33:20). Yet God condescends to veil His glory and make Himself manifest, first as the Angel of the Lord, then as the Son of Man. Gideon calls Him Jehovah Shalom—the Lord is Peace (v. 24).

Principle: All of Gideon’s courage and power come from a deeper knowledge of God. Only in the person of Jesus Christ can “the God of peace” be known! (Rom 5:1, 15:33).

E. Gideon’s First Mission and New Name, Jdg 6:25–35

The work of God always begins at home. The missionary mandate begins “first in Jerusalem,” and “judgment begins at the house of God” (1Pe 4:17). How often our first step in sanctification is departing “*from the aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers*” (1Pe 1:18). God’s plan for us begins in small ways close at hand. In the destruction of his father’s idol, Gideon inspires some courage

in his father (Jdg 6:31–32) and gains his warrior-name “Jerubbaal—let Baal contend.”

Point: Gideon’s war is first and foremost a spiritual war against the hosts of the devil. At the Second Advent, the Lord Jesus Christ will personally wage war against Satan, in the person of the antichrist, another type foreshadowed by Gideon.

F. The Gracious Condescension of God, Jdg 6:36–40

This is not the way to know the will of God! It is in fact an expression of doubt in the face of the word of God (Jdg 6:12, 14, 16, 23, 34). Gideon’s constant need for “*a sign*” (Jdg 6:17) and “putting out the fleece” are excuses for unbelief. Yet, as God so often does for us, He stoops to aid the weakness of the man He will make mighty. The true guidance comes from the revealed word of God (Jdg 6:14–16) and the presence of the Spirit of God (Jdg 6:34). To these no cheap sign can compare.

G. The Battle with Midian, Preview of Armageddon, Jdg 7–8

The prophetic value of this battle is tremendous in looking forward to the victory of the forces of Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts (armies) at the Second Advent. Having neither time nor space to do a detailed exegesis, let me point out some of the highlights.

1. The war is won by a handful, Jdg 7:1–8.
The “*remnant*” will be very small for the final battle. Gideon’s “*three hundred*” will make the three hundred Spartans seem mild by comparison. The time of tribulation will purge the forces of Israel as Gideon’s forces were purged. Yet what an army! In the final battle, the “*lame ... outcast ... afflicted*” of Israel (Mic 4:6) will be as mighty as David (Zec 12:8), and the remnant of Israel will fight “like a lion among flocks of sheep” (Mic 5:8).
2. God will use miraculous means to victory, Jdg 7:9–25.
First of all, a “dream” in the enemy camp is used to strengthen Gideon (Jdg 7:11–14). During the time of tribulation, Joe 2:28–29 will be fulfilled, and God will guide His people through dreams and visions appropriate to their time. As in this battle, God will use miraculous means to “*set every man’s sword against his companion*” (Jdg 7:22) in the Battle of Armageddon. That means will be the army of resurrected saints who return with Christ (Rev 19:11–16) will confound His enemies, “[lunging] *between the weapons, [yet] they are not cut down*” (read Joe 2:1–11 carefully). An army “*great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them.*” Believer, you are reading your future part in the final victory!
3. The victory over Midian has specific prophetic implications, Jdg 8:1–21.
A coalition of Midianites, headed by princes “*Oreb and Zeeb*” (Jdg 7:25) and led by two kings “*Zebah and Zalmunna*” (Jdg 8:5) are ultimately slaughtered, and the “*crescent ornaments*” representing their god are taken (v. 21). Now carefully read Psalm 83. Here Asaph prays for God’s deliverance from a coalition of nations (vv. 5–12) who “consulted against Your sheltered ones” (v. 3), saying “*Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of*

Israel may be remembered no more” (v. 4), and, “*Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession*” (v. 12). This is the present boast of Iran, and all her proxies. Yet they will end like “*Sisera and Jabin ... like Oreb and Zeeb ... like Zebah and Zalmunna.*” This predicts Israel’s final battle, the names of her enemies, and the final outcome. We are living in exciting times!

Note: As an evidence of God’s gracious plan for recovery, we see that Asher joins the fight (Jdg 7:23), though under Deborah and Barak they “*stayed by the seashore*” (Jdg 5:17). With our God, failure is never final! Until our last breath, His mercies are daily renewed (Lam 3:22–23).

Doctrine of the Will of God

- To know and do the will of God is the highest aspiration of the believer, Mat 6:10.
 - Jesus’ prayer in the Garden, surrendering to the cross, is the greatest example of submission to the will of God in history or Scripture, Mat 26:39; Mar 14:36.
 - There is a constant conflict between the will of man and the will of God, Joh 1:13.
 - Therefore, the first step in knowing the will of God is to surrender our own will, Mat 16:24; Luk 9:23.
 - By offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, we begin the process of learning and doing the will of God, Rom 12:1–2.
 - The entire will of God is summarized in one word: sanctification—that is, being set apart for God’s purpose in conformity to Christ, 1Th 4:3, 7, 5:23.
 - God has promised to reveal His plan to those who pray for wisdom with the intent to do it, Joh 7:17; Jam 1:5–8.
 - The will of God may be said to include three areas:
 - Motivational—being motivated by the love of Christ, 2Co 5:14–15
 - Operational—doing the specific thing God planned for your life, Joh 20:20–23
 - Geographical—doing the right thing in the right place, Act 16:6–10
- Therefore each believer should ask: What does He want me to do, why should I do it, and where shall it be done?
- In considering the will of God, we take it from Scripture that God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing. Why then do “bad” things happen to “good” people? A short answer might be: first, according to Jesus, there are no “good” people (Mat 7:11; Luk 18:19), and second, God works even bad things together for good (Rom 8:28). It is helpful, however, to know that God’s will is not the source of sin and evil. There are three aspects of the will of God:
 - The perfect will of God (His directive will)
For example, God desires the salvation of all men, Mat 18:14; 1Ti 2:3–6; 2Pe 3:9.
 - The permissive will of God
God allows the free expression of man’s volition, or free will, Mat 23:37; Joh 7:17. This is the source of all sin and evil in the world.
 - The overruling will of God
God knows the hearts of all men, and will turn all evil into good for those who love and trust Him (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28).

Point: In His perfect will, God gave man freedom to choose. In His permissive will, God allowed man to sin. In His overruling will, He used sin and evil

to bring about the cross, so that all who believe may be saved eternally (Gen 2:17, 3:1–8; Joh 19:1–30).

- Guidance into the will of God is assured to those who seek it rightly:
 - By the study of His Word,
 - By submission to His Spirit,
 - By praying to be guided,
 - By obedience to the known, revealed Word of God, and
 - By seeking the counsel of wise and spiritual believers.

V. The Principle of Reaping:

A culture of slaves will naturally gravitate to a government of tyranny, Jdg 9.

“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.” Hos 8:7

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Gal 6:7

One of the great mysteries of history is how a free people come in the course of time to willingly choose leaders who lead them into tyranny and slavery. One answer can be found in reviewing Tytler’s *“course of nations.”* But we have a more definitive answer provided in the context of Judges 9. In fact, in the last three verses of chapter 8 we find three reasons.

A. Three Steps into Slavery

1. Apostasy

“Israel did not remember the Lord their God who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies ...” Since God is the author of liberty, no person or nation can depart from Him and sustain freedom.

2. Idolatry

“Israel played the harlot with the Baals ...” Many things, including the trappings of prosperity, can become idols that take the rightful place of God. Since behind every idol there is a demon entity (1Co 10:20), and the hosts of Satan are dedicated to the enslavement of the human soul (Joh 8:34; 2Ti 2:26) it follows that devotion to demons leads inevitably to slavery. Christ alone can liberate slaves (Isa 61:1; Luk 4:18).

3. Ingratitude

“Nor did they show kindness to the house of ... Gideon.” When a nation despises those who fight for its liberty, they will develop an affinity for slavery. It is evident in America today that the so called “liberal” mindset prefers slavery to freedom. This ingratitude will be matched by immorality, as we will see in the final section of Jdg 17–21.

B. Abimelech: the Self-Made Judge, Jdg 9:1–6

Two things stand out from the start:

1. Here we see no cry from Israel to God for a deliverer.
2. There is no call from God or empowerment by His Spirit. Furthermore, nowhere do we read that he “judged Israel” or that He “delivered Israel,” or that “*the land had rest from their enemies.*” Totally apart from any leading of God, Abimelech (“*father of the king*”) uses conniving and political savvy to promote himself. The lie in Jdg 9:2 is that none of Gideon’s sons were reigning over anyone. He creates a false threat, which he then proposes a solution for. Sound much like politics today! Using hired “*worthless and reckless men,*” he slaughters Gideon’s son and is made king by the men of Shechem.

C. Jotham: the Voice of Wisdom, Jdg 9:7–21

In a parable-like story, Jotham lays out the truth and a warning. The olive, fig, and vine are representative of the sons of Gideon—useful and productive. They did not desire rulership over anyone, following their father’s example (Jdg 8:22–23). The bramble represents Abimelech, a worthless and useless man, motivated by arrogance and power lust. A bramble has no “*shade*” of refreshment to offer, any more than Abimelech had any leadership skills or ability to care for others. But as a bramble quickly catches fire, then spreads it throughout a forest, so will Abimelech be to the men of Shechem.

The “*if*” in Jdg 9:16, 19 is rhetorical, Jotham knowing that they did not act in truth. This makes the outcome certain (v. 20). Jotham is simply declaring the principle stated by Paul in Gal 6:7–8, we reap what we sow, whether blessing or cursing.

D. The Destruction of Shechem, Jdg 9:22–45

Just as Abimelech betrayed the sons of Gideon, so he is betrayed by the men of Shechem, who turn to Gaal. This comes about as a judgment from God (Jdg 9:23). Even Zebul, who remains loyal to Abimelech (vv. 30–33), is apparently killed in the aftermath (vv. 42–45). The city is destroyed, and in a final act of contempt, Abimelech sows the ground with salt, turning it into a perpetual wasteland.

E. A Tale of Two Towers, Jdg 9:46–57

The “*fire*” from Abimelech had destroyed Shechem (Jdg 9:20a), now the “*fire*” from Shechem is about to devour Abimelech. Having destroyed the tower (stronghold) of Shechem, killing the thousand men and women (probably children too), Abimelech decides to extend his killing spree to Thebez, 11 miles northeast of Shechem. Now, however, it is his time to reap, and he is killed by a woman and

a millstone (v. 53), an incident that remained a military lesson into David's time (2Sa 11:21).

Take special note of the last two verses (vv. 56–57), where the outcome is attributed to the working of God, according to the law of sowing and reaping. This is a law God has interwoven into his creation, as sure as the law of gravity, and no one is able to escape its execution.

Doctrine of Reaping (Blessing or Cursing)

- Jesus foretold the welcome of the appearance of antichrist as follows: “*I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive,*” Joh 5:43.
- It is impossible to reject truth and escape enslavement to deception. Those who fall for false teaching have become inclined to “the lie” by rejecting some principle of the truth.
- Abimelech sowed deception, and was deceived. He sowed betrayal, and was betrayed. He sowed bloodshed, and was slain, but not before knowing the shameful way of his death (Jdg 9:54).
- The phrase “*God returned on their own heads*” (Jdg 9:57) speaks of the justice of God bringing just recompense for evil deeds back upon the evil-doers.
- Paul declares that “*the righteous judgment of God ... will render to each one according to his deeds,*” (Rom 2:5b–6).
- The only escape from this judgment is the deliverance that comes from faith in Jesus Christ and the attendant mercies of God (Jam 2:13; Mat 5:7, 9:13, 12:7).
- When we enter into the life of faith, we begin to reap what God has sown in our behalf (Hos 2:21–23).

VI. The Principle of Contamination:

Even heroes of the time are tainted by their culture, Jdg 10–16.

“A living dog is better than a dead lion.” Ecc 9:4

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumers ointment ... so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor” Ecc 10:1

All of us, to a degree, are affected by the times in which we live. It is always important to keep this in mind when evaluating the lives of believers living in other times and cultures. Generally speaking, we are usually very blind to our own areas of compromise, while being very critical of what we see as glaring faults in past generations. The only true standard for spiritual living is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the personal incarnation of the life of God in human flesh and daily circumstances. Yet we have a great advantage in being able to look back—via the Gospel accounts—which the saints of the Old Testament period did not have. Even with this great advantage, how far we fall from His ideal life!

A. The Cycle of Servitude, Jdg 10:1–5

Here we are introduced to two of the lesser known judges (see also Jdg 12:8–15):

1. “*Tola*” is interesting because his name means “worm.” This reinforces the theme that runs through Judges of God bringing deliverance through small instruments. However, “*Tola*” does not mean just any worm, but the crimson worm from which the purple die was made to dye the robes of royalty. It is this word that is used of Messiah in Psa 22:6 “*I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.*” The point is that while the Lord Jesus is despised by this world, as an insignificant worm, yet the Royal Family of God will come from His crushing (Isa 53:10–12).
2. Then we have “*Jair*,” whose name means “Jehovah enlightens.” His association as ruler of “*thirty towns which are called ‘Havoth Jair,’*” identifies him as a descendant of the original Jair (Num 32:41; Deu 3:14). The first Jair was quite a hero in his own time.

The mention of these lesser-known judges should be a reminder to us all that it is God’s record, not human fame or renown, that is eternally important. Taken together with the judges named in Jdg 12:8–15, these men represent a total of nearly eighty years of service in Israel. It also suggests that there were others who are not even named. One chief candidate for this is Boaz—the hero of the book of Ruth. It is evident that while Israel’s enemies were raiding during times of harvest (Jdg 6:3–6), the harvest in Bethlehem was bountiful and peaceful (Rut 2). I would suggest that “*Boaz*” (meaning “swift/strong”) was the local judge of that area and the reason for its safety and prosperity.

B. The Spiritual Component of Liberty, Jdg 10:6–18

While it is obvious all through the book, this brief interlude highlights the relationship between the spiritual condition of a nation and its freedom. This was a truth well known to our founding fathers. Consider the following quotes:

“We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion ... Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

—John Adams

“The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be had in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty ...”

—Benjamin Rush

“Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.”

—Benjamin Franklin

Note: All of the above three men were signers of the Declaration of Independence.

“The Christian religion, in its purity, is the basis, or rather the source of all genuine freedom in government ...”

—Noah Webster

“Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them or by a power without them; either by the word of God or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.”

—Robert Winthrop

22nd Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

These quotes are in complete agreement with the theme of both Joshua and Judges—that the liberty of any people will be in direct proportion to their spiritual liberation.

What we find in Jdg 10:6–18 is really a summary of the forces at play throughout the entire book:

1. There is the willful trend to evil and idolatry, v. 6. Again it is worth noting that when we forsake the God of freedom, we lose the freedom that only God can give! Since the Supreme Court rulings on prayer and Bible reading in schools in 1963, America has been on a steady slide into oppression and tyranny.
2. This apostasy is followed by the just anger and discipline of the Lord, vv. 7–9. The love of God is not compromised by the justice of God; they work together. In fact, where there is rebellion, discipline is the only proper expression of God’s love (Heb 12:3–11).
3. In time, slavery brings humility, repentance, and the cry for liberation, v. 10. Every generation, like adolescent children, thinks it will be the first to “throw off the old shackles.” Each generation has to learn again that God’s truth is absolute, and no individual or nation can escape the law of sowing and reaping.
4. In the face of repeated rebellion and deliverances, God intensifies His discipline, refusing for a time to deliver His people, vv. 11–14. This is in keeping with what we read in Pro 1:24–33. In the life of an individual it is the path that leads to the possible end of “the sin unto death” (1Jo 5:16), in which death becomes the ultimate discipline, and also the ultimate deliverance, for the persistently rebellious believer (as we will see with Samson, Jdg 16:28–31).
5. Finally, the intensified discipline does its work, there is genuine repentance, and the mercy of God undertakes to deliver His people, vv. 15–18.

The principles of this chapter are valuable as they set the stage for the next two judges. It shows just how far into degeneracy and idolatry Israel had fallen. It also gives a cultural context for the flaws that are so evident in these last two judges.

C. Jephthah and Samson: Men of Faith and Failure, Jdg 11–16

These last two major judges illustrate the effect of times of apostasy on even the greatest of men. In his book *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, author Gary Inrig brings this out very clearly. There are two things we must avoid when studying men like this. First, there is a danger of minimizing their failures. We like our heroes to be clean and honorable in all ways. The fact is, no man is always pure. The second danger is that of overlooking their greatness because of their flaws. Both extremes are contrary to God's evaluation of them.

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens ...”

Heb 11:32–34 (emphasis added)

God does not excuse their sins, but He sees them through the eyes of mercy, for they were after all men of faith. Once we become a child of God by faith, He will never impute our sins to us (Rom 4:3–8), for they have all been imputed to Jesus Christ (2Co 5:21). However, as our heavenly Father, He does hold us accountable for our disobedience and deals with us in loving discipline (Heb 12:3–11). We ought to ask ourselves, if God wrote an accurate record of my life, would I look that much purer than either of these men?

1. Jephthah: Foolish Vow, Fearless Victory, Jdg 11

The title contrasts the flaw and the faith of this man. Most of us learn to present a socially acceptable front, but within are a walking Jekyll and Hyde. We either deceive ourselves about our faults, blame them on circumstance, or learn to cover them over for the most part. Fortunately, God sees the heart, and looks for faith above all other things. By faith, we partake of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and God chooses to see His own Son in us (2Co 5:21; Eph 1:6).

a. His valor, vv. 1–11

By no fault of his own, Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. For this reason he was hated by his brothers. Yet, in spite of his misfortune, he was a “*mighty man of valor*.” So when the Ammonites threatened, the elders of Gilead (which would include some of his brothers) went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob and asked him to be their champion. Note that the scene had been set by the question of Jdg 10:18 “*Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon?*” We should not miss the fact that Jephthah's courage came from his evident faith in the Lord (vv. 9, 11).

b. His venture, vv. 12–28

This message was a venture in faith and self-restraint. He reminds the people of Ammon that they have no historical right to the lands they are contesting. In his brief history lesson, he reminds them four times (vv. 21, 23, 24, 27) that the LORD (Yahweh) had given those lands to Israel, and He would be the ultimate Judge and arbiter of their claims. Clearly, he was a man who trusted in the LORD.

c. His vow, vv. 29–31

Surely Jephthah is not the first believer who thought to manipulate or influence God’s favor by taking a vow. Many believers do it today. It is because of incidents like this that we are told ...

“Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few ... When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” Ecc 5:2, 4

“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ [be] ‘no,’ lest you fall into judgment.”
Jam 5:12 (a quote from Jesus in Mat 5:33–37)

Commentators have often attempted to blunt this vow any number of ways. It is clear that Jephthah expected a person—not a chicken or goat—to come out his door to meet him. Further, the phrase “burnt offering” is *olah*, which amazingly means “burnt offering.” This foolish vow merely shows how much the surrounding heathen culture had affected this man, in spite of his faith—much the same way as we are affected by our culture. Later, Saul was kept from carrying out a similar vow by his people (1Sa 14:24–46).

d. His victory, vv. 32–40

Jephthah’s vow did nothing to influence the outcome of the battle. God is not fickle in His will for us, so that we can manipulate His favor; it is freely given if we act in faith. All Jephthah did was bring sorrow on himself and his family, greatly affecting the joy of the victory. His faith is vividly seen reflected in the faith of his daughter (v. 36), who urged him to keep his word to the Lord. After two months of mourning her virginity, both for herself as his only child, and the fact that he would have no grandchildren, Jephthah fulfilled his vow. How easily foolish words can affect us—and others—for the rest of our lives. However, the sins of this judge do not cancel out his great faith, as the author of Hebrews 11 demonstrates.

The Doctrine of Carnality

- The Bible is filled with examples of the carnality of God’s people, and is very honest of the disastrous effects of carnality both to the sinner and to those around them:
 - Consider Abraham’s taking of Hagar and its continuing effects down to our time (Gen 16).
 - In the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38), we not only see the lust and sin, but out of it—due to faith—we see Tamar enter the lineage of Jesus Christ (Rut 4:12, 18–22; Mat 1:3). God is able to turn cursing into blessing where there is faith (Rom 8:28).
 - David’s sin with Bathsheba (2Sa 11–12) nearly resulted in the destruction of his kingdom, and brought misery and death to many, including Absalom. However, once again we see the overruling grace of God, in that by this, Solomon is born.
- Just as the unbeliever has two eternal options: to receive or reject Jesus Christ, so the believer has two options that affect both time and eternity: a life of spirituality or a life of carnality (Rom 7:13–24; 1Co 3:1–3, 5:1–8; Gal 4:8–11, 5:16–26; Eph 4:17–19, etc.).
- In every case of those mentioned in the “hall of faith” in Heb 11, we can see in those saints a mixture of carnal and spiritual living. This is the great battle for every believer during his/her time on this earth.
- The solution to carnality is not law, or rules, or trying harder. Victory is found only by surrender to the Spirit of God and living by His Word (Rom 6:1–14; 8:1–8, 12:1–2; Gal 5:16, 22–23; Eph 5:1–21).
- As with the Israelites, spiritual recovery begins with honest confession, and is followed by active correction (cf., Jdg 10:15–16 and 1Jo 1:5–2:6). Confession without correction is a farce, and becomes a gimmick by which we deceive ourselves (1Co 3:16–23, 15:33; Eph 5:1–7; 1Jo 1:8–10, 3:7–9).
- The Spirit of God permanently indwells every believer in order to provide the inner power to overcome the sin nature and the temptations of this world (Joh 14:15–18; Rom 8:9–11; 1Jo 4:7–13).
- Each day—moment by moment—each of us must choose whether we will “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16), or whether we will walk in the ways of this world (Eph 4:17–19). Only as we live by the power of God’s Spirit can we experience a life of power, victory, and freedom (Gal 5:1, 13).

2. Samson: The Strongest and the Weakest, Jdg 13–16

The book of Judges spends more time on Samson than any other judge. His life is filled with lessons and warnings for us all. In his acts of faith he stands unique, as we will see. In his carnal weakness, he is like each of us. Great men tend to have great flaws. We will look at four phases of his life:

a. The first Nazirite, Jdg 13

It was after 40 years of Philistine dominion that Samson was born. Yet we see no record of a cry of repentance from Israel. God often gives a nation leaders that reflect the character of the people. Just as Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was a picture of Israel’s harlotry, so the judge Samson revealed the constant tendency of Israel to spiritual fornication.

The law of the Nazirite had been laid down by God through Moses in Num 6:1–20. We have no record of any Nazirite before Samson. He is also first of only three life-long Nazirites recorded in Scripture; the others being Samuel (1Sa 1:11), and John the Baptizer (Luk 1:15–17). Most Nazirites took the vow for a limited time (Num 6:13–20). The three restrictions on the Nazirite were to demonstrate separation to God:

(1) Abstain from wine, grapes

Wine was seen in biblical times as a symbol of joy and celebration. The Nazirite was dedicated to God and was willing to give up things good and right in themselves, for the sake of his separation to God (see Paul's application of the Nazirite vow, 1Co 9:1–18).

(2) No razor on his head

According to Paul, long hair is a shame to a man (1Co 11:14). The long hair of the Nazirite was a public symbol of his willingness to bear shame for his dedication to God. The full head of hair of Samson was braided into seven locks (Jdg 16:13).

(3) No contact with the dead

Even for the funeral of a loved-one, the Nazirite was forbidden to attend (Num 6:6–8). Something of this is implied in Jesus' demand for separation to God in Mat 10:37–39; Luk 14:26–33.

Once again, the “*Angel of the LORD*” who appears to the wife of Manoah is the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. In response to Manoah's prayer, He returns. When Manoah asks if He is the same who appeared previously, He responds “*I am,*” which gives us His identity. This saying is also used over fifteen times by Jesus in the Gospel of John. After repeating the instructions regarding the child, Manoah asks His name, to which He replies “*it is wonderful,*” which is also prophetically used of Christ (cf., Isa 9:6). Then similar to what He did with Gideon (Jdg 6:21), the strange visitor ascended from the altar. In amazement, Manoah says they will surely die, “*because we have seen God*” (v. 22). The child is born and named “*Samson*” (distinguished for strength), and his development is marked by blessing of the Spirit of the Lord moving upon him. How we need men and women moved by the Spirit today!

b. “*He shall begin to deliver Israel,*” Jdg 14

The mission of Samson was clearly given (Jdg 13:5b). His was the beginning of a work that would be carried on by Saul, greatly advanced by David, and continued on into the reign of Uzziah (2Ch 26:1–15). To some, God gives the beginning of a work—who is to blame them for not finishing it?

It was his mission in life to be a warrior against one of the greatest warrior societies of the ancient world. Think of this: If you knew your mission for life was to be a warrior, would you not seek training for it? Would you not likely gather weapons and train with them diligently? In this, we see some of the

greatness of Samson's faith. He would wage war by the Spirit of God. He carried no weapon. And in himself, had no skills or abilities. Only when the Spirit of God came upon him could he win. Yet he was willing—again and again—to confront large armies of Philistines, trusting that at the critical moment God would grant him supernatural strength. It is this that sets Samson apart as a judge. He led no army, developed no skills, devised no strategy. He simply trusted God to fulfill His purpose through him.

The story of his marriage to the Philistine girl shows his headstrong nature (Jdg 14:1–3), but is couched in God's providential purpose, "*it was of the LORD*" (v. 4). Attacked by a lion on his way to his engagement, "*the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him*" (v. 6) and he slew the lion. It was on his second journey to Timnah that he first violated his Nazirite vow, eating honey out of the carcass. In time, Samson would violate every aspect of his vow.

At the wedding feast, he proposes a riddle, based on the honey from the lion's carcass. The stage is set to turn him into a Philistine killing machine. His "*thirty companions,*" desperate to win the bet, threaten his bride with burning if she does not get them the answer. Her pleas and ploys are but a preview of coming attractions with Delilah. But she is successful and, in anger, Samson—by the power of the Spirit—slays thirty Philistines (vv. 18–20). Going off in a rage, his bride is given to another man, which will provide grounds for future feuds.

c. The Jawbone Incident, Jdg 15

All through this story, we see the hand of God at work behind the scenes, using the Philistines' deceptions, and Samson's willfulness, to create strife between them. Samson's feud with the Philistines makes the Hatfield and McCoy feud seem like a schoolyard dust-up!

On being told his wife is now married to another, and not wanting her younger sister, Samson says, "*This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them*" (v. 3). He must have been quite a trapper, to catch three hundred foxes. Tying their tails together, two-by-two, he ties on torches and lets them go into the Philistines' fields, vineyards, and olive groves. The result is that they burn his supposed bride and father-in-law. What she hoped to escape came upon her anyway. When we forsake all virtue, we lose all hope of protection.

Samson responds by slaughtering a great number of them (vv. 7–8), supposedly willing to end the feud with that revenge, "*after that I will cease*" (v. 7b). The Philistines, however, have other plans. They deploy one thousand warriors, who so intimidate the three thousand men of Judah (v. 11) that they betray Samson. Samson allows himself to be bound and led to the Philistines (who could muster such faith?), then breaks his bonds and slaughters them all

with a jawbone. There is a bit of a play on words here, since “*Lehi*” (v. 9) means “jawbone,” “*Ramath Lehi*” means “jawbone height.”

In boasting of his victory, Samson takes credit for what the Spirit of God had done. God responds by overcoming him with dehydration (vv. 17–20), humbling him until he cries out to God, who then provides water out of the rock. Samson then calls it “*En Hakkore*” meaning “the spring of the caller,” to give glory to God for hearing his prayer in time of need.

Something we need to see—perhaps the greatest thing—about the life of Samson, is the faithfulness of God to an unfaithful servant. Samson is but a reflection of Israel. Yet every time he calls on God, God is faithful to undertake for him. Will God be any less faithful to us, in spite of our many faults and failings? I think not.

d. Samson’s Final End, Jdg 16

The story of Samson and Delilah is not only the best known story from Judges, but is a living parable of the defeat and destruction of many strong men throughout history. As David taught Solomon regarding the harlot, “*For she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men*” (Pro 7:26).

Instead of belaboring this well-known story, let’s take note of some simple principles that relate to personal victory and liberty:

1. There is a potential danger in God’s deliverance from our bad decisions, vv. 1–3. Often, when we are in the wrong place, or doing the wrong thing, God will yet graciously deliver us. The danger is that in our arrogance, we begin to think that He supports us in our wrong-doing. This always leads to a disastrous end.
2. God is faithful to give warning when we are heading toward destruction, vv. 4–9. You would think that this would bring to mind what had happened previously, with his Philistine wife (Jdg 14:15–18). Carnality brings with it a blindness, and continued sin injects its own anesthetic to deaden our conscience. Samson dumbly, like “*an ox to the slaughter*” (Pro 7:22), goes to his doom.
3. He who will not be warned cannot be saved from self-destruction, vv. 10–20. The game continues, from bowstrings to new ropes to braiding his hair. But gradually, Samson is getting to the secret Delilah seeks. How could he not know what would happen? He is drugged by his own arrogance and lust, and blind to the warnings of God. Finally the truth is out, his final link to his Nazirite vow is broken, and he is taken. No sadder verse can be found than this, “*But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him*” (v. 20). How many believers through history have followed the same path, always to the same end?

e. The Matchless Grace of God, Jdg 16:23–31

The sins of God’s people always work to highlight the unfathomable grace of God. Though we fail, He never does. When we are unfaithful, He remains

faithful “*for He cannot deny Himself*” (2Ti 2:13). If you learn nothing else from the story of Samson, get this lesson: As long as you are breathing, God has a plan for your life, and His grace is still available!

Blind, enslaved (one cannot depart from God and remain free), a shame to Israel and an object of mockery to his enemies, yet “*the hair of his head began to grow again ...*” (v. 22). This outward symbol of his vow is used here, I believe, to speak of his inner state. Humbled by his severe discipline, Samson begins the long return to the Lord in his own soul. God’s grace will never be withheld from a truly repentant and humble soul. By the time of the festival to Dagon, Samson knows that he is restored, though still blind and enslaved. God will not undo the consequences of our sins, but He is faithful to work even them to His glory (Rom 8:28).

As the Philistines boast and honor their demon-god, Dagon, Samson begins to pray. Three thousand Philistines crowd the roof of their temple, many more gather inside. His last prayer is answered, and by the power of the Spirit he ignored and dishonored, Samson is granted his final request. And so he dies among his enemies.

I cannot help but wonder if his faith at the end was not the greatest of his life. When one has failed miserably, knows the scorn and contempt of friend and enemy alike, and senses the heavy hand of God’s displeasure, it is no easy thing to recover. If you don’t believe it, look at how few there are in Scripture who have done it. The simple story of the prodigal as told by Jesus (Luk 15) is not only a tribute to the infinite love and mercy of God, it also speaks of the purifying power of affliction and chastening. So difficult is that path of recovery that the author of Hebrews gives a certain credit to those who endure it, “*if you endure chastening*” (Heb 12:7). Further, he speaks of “*those who have been trained by it*” (Heb 12:11), a long and painful process.

The sad story of Samson is yet a “*light shining in a dark place*” (2Pe 1:19) for all who have known the depths of failure and despair. I know, because I have been there. I know how hard the road of recovery can be. And I would take my stand with Samson, and with Jeremiah, to say that the mercies of the Lord never fail (Lam 3:22–23). I pray that God might use these lessons to lift and encourage someone who is near giving up in the fight. Remember, it is never over until you quit. As long as you are alive, God’s grace is available.

“Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be destroyed, but rather healed.” (Heb 12:12–13)

The Doctrine of Spiritual Recovery

One of the best passages showing the steps of spiritual recovery is found in Jam 4:5–10. These steps are well illustrated by the story of the prodigal son in Luk 15:

1. There must be recognition that God’s grace is available to the humble, Jam 4:6. We can never fall so low that we are beneath His everlasting arms, Deu 33:27.
2. There must be a determination to submit to God and resist the devil, Jam 4:7. Practically speaking, this would involve the confession and forsaking of all sin in our life, Pro 28:13; Luk 15:18; 1Jo 1:9.
3. This is followed by a determined “drawing near” to God by prayer, Bible study, and obedience, Jam 4:8a. Although restoration is immediate (1Jo 1:9), spiritual recovery is a process that takes time. Spiritual healing, like the healing of the body, is never immediate.
4. There is a process of purification, involving both outward actions (hands) and inner attitudes (heart), Jam 4:8:b.
5. There will be a transformation in values and priorities, so that what was cause for laughter in carnality, now becomes a cause for mourning and weeping, Jam 4:9.
6. This process gradually produces genuine humility in God’s sight, Jam 4:10a. False humility is a source of carnal pride, genuine humility is without any pride or pretense, defined as being “*poor in spirit*” (Mat 5:3; Mar 7:27–28).
7. The final step is God’s alone, when He lifts up, or exalts, the humbled spirit, Jam 4:10b.

VII. The Principle of Acceleration:

An increasingly degenerate people will produce increasingly turbulent and perilous times, Jdg 17–21.

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.” 2Ti 3:1

In these chapters, we see the spiraling idolatry and immorality which closes out the book of Judges. Any nation that begins the path of apostasy will accelerate its own demise, barring deep and genuine revival—beginning with the household of God. I urge each of you to read carefully these chapters, and see what lies ahead for America in the days ahead.

There is a trend in these chapters that both illuminates the entire time of the judges, and illustrates the inevitable end of any nation following the same spiritual trajectory. First, there is spiritual apostasy leading to idolatry (Jdg 17–18). As Bob Dylan stated in one of his songs, “You gotta serve somebody.” If man will not worship the true God, he will worship an idol. Then comes rampant immorality, which quickly turns to brutality (Jdg 19). We are witnessing all of this in America today. Pseudo-spirituality has an affinity to unrestrained immorality, because the biblical norm of marriage and family is destroyed. We cannot be unfaithful to God and be faithful to one another. And because immorality is anarchy against God, it will inevitably turn into brutality, as the hearts of individuals are hardened to the cares and needs of anyone except self. The horrendous rape and murder

of the Levites' concubine takes place in Jebus ("trodden down"), which became Jerusalem ("city of peace"). Even the change in names, and their meaning, tells the story of the transformation the Word of God brings into the world. From brutality, we move to civil war, leading to near extinction for the tribe of Benjamin.

Think carefully on this evil and destructive progression, and consider if we are not seeing the same developments in America today. First comes apostasy, then idolatry, then immorality, then brutality, and finally civil war. Anyone not blinded by the rationalism of our time cannot help but see the parallels. And as the spiral downward continues, there is an acceleration as the momentum into self-destruction intensifies. This trend is true whether dealing with a nation or an individual. It is well documented in the history of Israel and in the warning of Paul to the Christians of his time (Eph 4:17–19), where we see the same trend in the life of any believer who chooses to "*walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk.*" As a commentary on these passages, I offer a quote from British journalist, Steve Turner, as quoted by Ravi Zacharias:

"We today believe in Marx, Freud, and Darwin. We believe that everything is O.K. as long as you don't hurt anyone—to the best of your definition of hurt and to the best of your definition of knowledge. We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage. We believe in the therapy of sin. We believe that taboos are taboo. We believe everything is getting better despite evidence to the contrary. The evidence must be investigated and you can prove anything with evidence. We believe there is something in horoscopes, UFOs and bent spoons. Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Mohammad and ourselves; He was a good moral teacher, although we think His good morals were really bad. We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the ones we read were. They all believe in love and goodness, they only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation. We believe that after death comes nothing, because when you ask the dead what happens, they say nothing. If death is not the end and if the dead have lied, then its compulsory heaven for all, except perhaps for Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan. We believe in Masters and Johnson, what's selected is average, what's average is normal and what is normal is good. We believe in total disarmament. We believe there are direct links between warfare and bloodshed. Americans should beat their guns into tractors and the Russians would be sure to follow. We believe that man is essentially good, it's only his behavior that lets him down. This is the fault of society, society is the fault of conditions and conditions are the fault of society. We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him and reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust and history will alter. We believe that there is no absolute truth. We believe in the rejection of creeds and the flowering of individual thought. If chance be the father of all flesh, disaster is his rainbow in the sky and when you hear, 'State of emergency! ... sniper kills ten ... troops on rampage ... youths go looting ... bomb blasts school ...' it is but the sound of man worshipping his maker."

Doctrine of the Wrath of God

- God’s wrath is revealed against all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18).
- Believers have been delivered from all wrath, because of the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ (2Co 5:21; 1Th 1:10, 5:9). When we sin we are disciplined, but it is out of His infinite love (Heb 12:6).
- Those without Christ are called “*children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3), because we are born in sin due to Adam (Rom 5:12) and “*in Adam all die*” (1Co 15:22). Of one who rejects Christ it is said that “*the wrath of God abides on him*” (Joh 3:36).
- The Word often speaks of God’s righteous judgment on sin executed during this lifetime, as with the Exodus generation (Psa 95:11; Heb 3:11, 4:3).
- It is also used extensively for the judgments poured out at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Psa 2:5, 12; Eze 7:19; Zep 1:15, 18; Rev 6:17).
- It is the “*wrath*” at the Second Advent, that Paul tells us we will be delivered from, by the Rapture of the Church (1Th 1:10, 5:9, see also 1Th 4:13–18).
- At His return, the world will seek to hide from “*the wrath of the Lamb*” (Rev 6:16–17), as it will be the most fearful thing they will ever see.

VIII. The Principle of Faithfulness:

Even in the darkest hour, there is hope and blessing for the faithful, because God is faithful, Rut 1:1, 4:11–17.

“*He who has promised is faithful.*” Heb 10:23

This final principle comes from the book of Ruth, which takes place “*in the days when the judges ruled*” (Rut 1:1). It is essential that believers living today have hope during the growing gloom of our times. This we find in the book of Ruth. Here we have a love story, showing God’s protection, peace, and blessing, on a couple who chose to live for Him in those dark days. The faith of their lives impacted everyone around them, and they played a vital role in their generation to bring about the birth of Jesus Christ. Consider the providential working of God and the victory we call faith-rest in the four chapters of the book, with a few brief comments:

A. Faith Overcoming Failure, Rut 1

“*Elimelech*” (“my God is King”) failed by leaving the covenant-land in time of famine. His doubting of God’s promises led to much misery for his family. The chapter begins with two weddings, and three deaths. However much he and his sons may have failed, there was an obvious spiritual impact from the family on Ruth. Whatever information she gained about the true God of Israel, it was enough—a mustard seed (Mat 13:31–32)—to lead her to her own faith in the living God. Not only this, but her faith was such that she could not forsake Naomi in her aged and bereaved state. She would “*deny herself*” (Luk 9:23) to be a servant to her mother-in-law. Such is the humility she demonstrates and the beginning of her exaltation (Mat 23:12).

B. Hope Overcoming Hardship, Rut 2

Though her knowledge of Jewish laws may have been limited, she knew the law of gleaning (Lev 19:10; Deu 24:21). Since word had reached them in Moab that “*the Lord had visited his people by giving them bread*” (Rut 1:6), this law may have been explained by Naomi on their return journey.

Whatever the case, Ruth makes the priority of her life to serve Naomi, and in the hope of this provision, she goes into the fields to find food. The plight of these two women can scarcely be imagined today. One is a widow with no property, the other not only a widow, but a Moabitess at that. In view of the fact that the story of Ruth took place in the time of the judges, and that the Moabites were the chief enemies in the time of Ehud (Jdg 3:12–30) and that Moabite land was the cause of the conflict in the time of Jephthah (Jdg 11:13–28), what kind of reception do you suppose she received in Bethlehem? The prejudice against her would have been great, which is why Boaz gave strict instructions about how she was to be treated (Rut 2:15).

With the gracious watch-care of Boaz, Ruth begins to “*glean*” not only a larger than expected harvest (Rut 2:17–23), but a spiritual harvest as well. This was noted by Boaz when he said to her, “*The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge*” (Rut 2:12). His blessing, expressed in the form of a prayer request, would be fulfilled in ways that have impacted both time and eternity in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What “gleaning” might God have in store for you, if you choose the path of persistent faith?

C. Love Overcoming Legalism, Rut 3

We have all heard it said that “it takes money to make money.” But from a spiritual perspective what a poor substitute money, riches, wealth, or possessions are when compared to love. Love is of all things the most prized and most priceless, and no amount of money can buy it. But—and this must be remembered—it takes love to get love. Love must begin somewhere. Many lonely souls today deeply crave to be loved. Yet they do not understand that to be loved, the best thing is to love. All human love is polluted to a degree with self-love. Only the love of God is full and free and infinite. God demonstrated His love to the world on the cross, and “*we love Him because He first loved us*” (1Jo 4:9, 19).

Faith, coupled with hope, produces love (1Co 13:13)—the greatest gift of all. For the Church-Age believer, the love of God is the chief manifestation of the indwelling Spirit (Joh 15:12, 26; Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22). Further, Jesus declared that those who are forgiven much, love much (Luk 7:47). Ruth, out of gratitude for the forgiveness she has found, chooses to surrender her life to a service of love to

Naomi. And in doing so, she becomes an ancestor of the embodiment of the love of God—the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is important to see that her meeting with Boaz was the providential consequence of her decisions to act in faith and hope, and to her dedication to love Naomi. In return, Naomi, acting on the promises of the law, urges Ruth to be bold, and in essence, “propose” to Boaz, in the form of an appeal. When she went to Boaz at the threshing floor (there would have been men, women, and children sleeping there, to help guard the harvest (cf., Jdg 6:1–11), her appeal “*Take your maidservant under your wing,*” she was expressing not only obedience to Naomi and the laws of Israel, but faith in a far greater Lover (Psa 91:1, 17:8, 55:6, 57:1, 63:7, 91:4).

However, there was a catch, a “fly in the ointment,” which may explain why Boaz, who showed interest in her from the start, had delayed his attentions. There was “*a closer relative*” who, by the Law, had a prior claim. Throughout Scripture, there is a tension between law and grace. The Law of Moses was never given to save, but rather to condemn (Rom 3:19–20; Gal 3:21–25; 1Ti 1:8–10). Only the free grace of God can forgive and justify (Rom 3:21–26, 6:23; Eph 2:8). Under the Law, even Ruth was condemned as a Moabitess, for “*an Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation ...*” (Deu 23:3). However, the love of God always finds a way to satisfy the law, and offer His blessings freely, on the basis of the cross of Christ (Gal 3:10–14).

Boaz (a picture of Christ) will intervene for the believing Ruth. By the unnamed relative’s inability to redeem (a picture of the Law), Boaz is free to fulfill the Law in Ruth’s behalf and, by this, she becomes his bride (a picture of the Church). Dr. J. Vernon McGee rightly called the book of Ruth, “*the romance of Redemption.*” It is a true story having significance far beyond its own time. Isn’t it true that God’s plan for the life of every believer is to have a timeless impact as well?

IX. Resting in Faith’s Victory, Rut 4

The victorious life, which we call the faith-rest life, is not an immediate state of being for any believer. It comes through dedicated growth, victory over failures, hope in dark and difficult times, and the display of love in the face of prejudice, bigotry, and hostility.

A. The Theme of Faith, Hope and Love

This is why the theme of “faith, hope, and love” rings throughout the pages of the New Testament (Rom 5:1–5; 1Co 13:13; Gal 5: 5–6; Col 1:4–5; 1Th 1:3, 5:8; Heb 6:10–12; 1Pe 1:3, 5, 8).

Ruth, the Moabitess, with everything against her, is a beautiful demonstration that God’s plan of liberation is available for all who will claim it. But like the climbing of Mt. Everest, this spiritual mountain peak is not scaled by the lazy, the

doubting, or the grumbler. Faith fixes the eye of the soul on a faithful God. Hope claims the promises of His Word. Love demonstrates His spiritual power in a succession of victories that lead to resting in the place of His blessing.

It is interesting to consider that the book of Judges is sandwiched between Joshua and Ruth, both books demonstrating what God is able and willing to do, whether for the nation or the individual—who will trust Him in facing the spiritual conflict that rages in this world. Neither in Joshua nor in Ruth is the victory a one-shot success story. Theirs was the result of dedicated and persistent warfare in the spiritual realm, utilizing the armor and weaponry of faith (Rom 13:11–14; 2Co 10:3–6; Eph 6:10–18).

The theme of “faith, hope, and love” can be discerned in both books, and appears to be the perfect spiritual combination for victory over “*the wiles of the devil*” (Eph 6:11; 2Co 2:11). By the use of this “*cord of three strands*” (Ecc 4:12), Ruth climbs from being a child of a heathen society to entering into the lineage of the Messiah (Rut 4:18–22; Mat 1:5).

B. Faith is the Beginning and Rest is the End

In Rut 1:9, Naomi prays for “*rest*” from the Lord for both Orpah and Ruth. It was available to each, but only one found it. Ruth began her pursuit of rest by faith (Rut 1:16–17). Out of love for Naomi, and in the hope of God’s providential provisions (Lev 19:10; Deu 24:21), she went out to glean what she could. Then, in Rut 3:1, Naomi says, “*shall I not seek rest for you*” (same root word), in prompting her to appeal to Boaz, according to the law of Levirate marriage (Deu 25:5–10, 25–30). Because of her request, Boaz (a type of Christ) would “*not rest until he has concluded the matter*” (Rut 3:18). The author of Hebrews says, of the Lord Jesus, “*For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*” (Heb 2:18). The word translated “*aid*” is from *boetheo*. In *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* by Zondervan, the first definition of this word is “to run to the aid of those who cry for help.” As a further insight, the word *boetheo* is a compound of *boe*, which means “to call,” and *Theo*, which means (in the dative case) “to God.” Thus, when we cry out to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith—like Boaz—He “*will not rest until the matter is concluded.*” It is because of this that we have “faith-rest,” based on His faithfulness. Ultimately, the “*rest*” which Ruth finds is the place of abiding under the care, protection, and provision of Boaz, her “*kinsman-redeemer*” (“close relative,” in the Hebrew *goel*, Rut 2:20).

C. No Faith, No Rest

Two negative examples stand out in the story of Ruth. First there is Orpah who, having the same influences from the family of Elimelech as Ruth did, chose to “*go back to her gods*” (Rut 1:15). Having rejected the “faith,” she forfeited the “rest.” The second is the unnamed “*closer relative*” who had the initial right (and

responsibility) to redeem Ruth. When Boaz meets him (in the English version) we read “*Come aside, friend*” (Rut 4:1). This misses a crucial point of the Hebrew, which addresses him as *peloni almoni*. The word *peloni* means “to identify, to point out,” whereas the word *almoni* means “to conceal.” We would most closely catch the idiom by saying, “Mr. so-and-so,” or “Mr. what’s-his-name.” The Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament used the word *kruphie* which means “hidden one.” A point is clearly being made, and it is: Due to this man’s unwillingness to accept, in faith, the responsibility which unexpectedly fell on him, his shame (cf., Deu 25:9–10) is to have his name expunged from the record. What a shame to have an opportunity to enter into the lineage of Messiah, only to have your name “blotted out.” This man also—due to his lack of faith—missed his opportunity to enter into great spiritual rest! Like the Exodus generation, so many believers, refusing to mix the Word of God with faith (Heb 3:12, 4:2) also fail to “*enter into His rest*” (Heb 3:11, 19, 4:3, 5). Let’s not be among them! God is faithful!

Doctrine of the Faithfulness of God

- God is faithful to keep His Word, Mat 5:18, 24:35; Heb 6:17–20.
- God is faithful to save all who believe in Jesus Christ, 1Ti 1:15.
- God is faithful to keep saved those who believe, 2Ti 2:13.
- God is faithful to deliver us from temptations, 1Co 10:13.
- God is faithful to forgive our sins, 1Jo 1:9.
- God is faithful in fulfilling His plan for us, 1Th 5:24.
- God is faithful to us in time of suffering, 1Pe 4:19.
- God is faithful to keep His promises to us, Heb 10:23.

A Closing Plea

These notes were composed in less than two weeks between a mission to Peru and departure to Australia for another conference and youth camp. No doubt they are lacking in many ways, and for that I bear all responsibility. Whatever edification and encouragement may be found in them is totally due to the matchless grace of God, “[Who] *raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the dung-heap*” (Psa 113:7). May all glory, praise, and honor be given to our humble Savior and glorious King, the Lord Jesus Christ!

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” Isa 61:1–3