

THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES

by Christine Walton

**Grades 5-6
Year 1
Quarter 4**

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Bible Baseball

Singles

Who killed Eglon?
How did Ehud kill Eglon?
What prophetess told Barak to fight against the Canaanites?
How did the Canaanite general die?
Where did the angel of the Lord appear to Gideon?
Name one sign God gave Gideon.
What did the Lord tell Gideon to do that involved his family?
Name one “weapon” with which Gideon fought.
Who announced Samson’s birth?
Name one provision of the Nazirite vow.
What did Samson ask his wedding companions? (generally; a riddle)
What animal did Samson use to set fire to the Philistines’ fields?
What unusual weapon did Samson use to kill many Philistines?
What was the secret of Samson’s great strength?
Who got him to tell her this secret?
What physical punishment did the Philistines inflict on Samson?
How did Samson die?
What strange action did the Levite take when he discovered his concubine was dead?
What was Ruth’s husband’s name?

Doubles

Tell the four parts of the “cycle of sin” that occurs over and over in the book of Judges.
What advantage did the Canaanites have against Barak’s forces?
How did Barak win the battle against the Canaanites?
Who commanded the Canaanite army?
Where did the Canaanite army commander flee when the battle was lost?
Who was waiting for the Canaanite army commander to come home?
What judge sang a song?
What tribe did Gideon defeat?
Name one of Gideon’s enemies’ leaders or kings.
Name two signs God gave Gideon.
Name one way God cut down Gideon’s too-big army.
Name two weapons with which Gideon fought.
What dream did a man have about Gideon?
Name Abimelech’s father.
Name a plant in Jotham’s parable.
Name one bad thing Jephthah did.
Name two provisions of the Nazirite vow.
What was Samson’s father’s name?
What happened as Samson and his parents were going to get him a wife?
What was in the lion’s carcass?

Doubles (continued)

What bargain did Samson make with his wedding companions?
How many animals did Samson use to set fire to the Philistines' fields?
Name one lie Samson told about the secret of his great strength.
Name a sin Micah committed.
What tribe took Micah's priest with them?
What tribe did Israel fight after the incident with the Levite and his concubine?
What was Ruth's mother-in-law's name?
From what country was Ruth?
What does it mean to *glean*?
When Ruth told Naomi about her day gleaning, what did Naomi tell Ruth to do?
What is a *Kinsman-Redeemer*?

Triples

What Canaanite king had his big toes and thumbs cut off?
Who married Caleb's daughter?
Why did God leave enemy tribes in the land?
What judge defeated Cushan-Rishathaim?
Eglon was king of what nation?
What judge killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad?
How many chariots did Sisera have?
When Barak fought the Canaanites, who was their king?
What river was crucial in the battle?
For what did Sisera ask Jael, and what did she give him?
What was Gideon's father's name?
What else was Gideon called?
Name two people to whom the Angel of the Lord appeared.
Name two ways God cut down Gideon's too-big army.
How large was Gideon's army?
Name three "weapons" with which Gideon fought.
What did Gideon's men shout as they went into battle?
Name two leaders of Midian.
Name two kings of Midian.
Name a city Gideon punished for refusing to help his army.
What did Gideon ask his eldest son to do, which the son refused to do because he was afraid?
From what town was Abimelech's mother?
What was the name of Gideon's son who cursed Abimelech?
Name two plants in Jotham's parable.
Name the Shechemite leader who fought against Abimelech.
How did Abimelech die?
Name two bad things Jephthah did.
What did Manoah want the Angel of the Lord to tell him?
From what city did Samson wish to take a wife?
How many wedding companions did Samson have?
How many Philistines did Samson kill with an unusual weapon?
Samson walked away with the gates of what city?
Name two lies Samson told about the secret of his great strength.
What job did the Philistines make Samson do?

Triples (continued)

Name two of Micah's sins.
What was Ruth's sister-in-law's name?
What was Ruth's husband's name?
What was Orpah's husband's name?
What was Naomi's husband's name?
What grain did Ruth bring back to her mother-in-law?
What was Ruth's son's name?
What was Ruth's grandson's name?
What was Ruth's great-grandson's name?

Home Runs

What tribe fought Adoni-Bezek? (Judah)
What was Caleb's daughter's name? (Acsah)
What did one have to do to marry Acsah? (capture Kiriath-Sepher)
What favor did Caleb's daughter ask for? (springs of water)
The Angel of the Lord went from Gilgal to this place meaning *weeping*, where He spoke to Israel about their disobedience. (Bokim)
Where did King Jabin reign? (Hazor)
Name a tribe that helped Barak? (Naphtali and Zebulon)
Barak fought the Canaanites near what mountain? (Mount Tabor)
What was Jael's husband's name? (Heber)
From what tribe did Gideon come?
What did Gideon offer the Angel of the Lord?
Name two leaders and two kings of Midian.
What Israelite tribe was not pleased to be called late to battle against Midian?
Name two cities Gideon punished for refusing to help his army.
Name Gideon's youngest son.
Name the four plants in Jotham's parable.
From what mountain did Jotham shout his curse? (Mount Gerazim)
Name the governor who warned Abimelech of the Shechemite leader's treachery.
What symbolic action did Abimelech do to Shechem after he destroyed it? (sowed salt)
Name one good thing Jephthah did.
What kind of burnt offering did Manoah offer the Angel of the Lord?
What was Samson's riddle?
When he lost the bet, from where did Samson get clothes to pay the Philistines?
At what place did Samson kill Philistines with an unusual weapon?
Name three lies Samson told about the secret of his unusual strength.
What town did the Danites destroy?
In what city did a Levite and his concubine stay?
From where did the old man come who took in the Levite and his concubine?
What clan had not joined the Israelites in fighting Benjamin?
From what town did the Benjamites seize girls to be their wives?
Name Naomi's home town.
What does the name *Naomi* mean?
By what name did Naomi refer to herself when she returned to Bethlehem?
What does the word *Mara* mean?

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Judges Rap

In **days** long ago, according to His **plan**
God called out a **people**, and **brought** them to the **Land**
He'd **promised** to **give** them for their **very** own possession.
If they'd **heed** His **Word**, He'd **free** them from oppression.

God left **foes** in the **land** to **test** the Israelites:
Canaanites, **Philistines**, and **Moabites**,
Midianites, **Ammonites**, and **Amorites**, **too**,
Hittites and **Perizzites** to **mention** just a **few**.

“These **nations** full of **sin** and **immorality**
child sacrifice and **horrible** idolatry
must be **destroyed**,” thought God, “there **really** is no **choice**.”
But ‘**gainst** this decision God’s **people** raised their **voice**.”

“**Our** new **neighbors** **really** aren’t so **bad**.
Let’s **work** with them and **marry** them. Why **should** we make them **mad**?
‘**Live** and let **live**’ our **motto** now should **be**.
We’ll bow down to **their** gods and **then** they’ll worship **Thee**.”

But **God** is a **holy** God, **righteous** and **just**;
He **knows** what is **best**, **therefore** He **must**
punish our **sins** and **iniquities**.
Tribes **Israel** called **friend** were **really** enemies.

They **attacked** God’s **people** with **warfare** fierce and **long**.
Finally the **Israelites** **admitted** they were **wrong**.
They **cried** to the **Lord**, “**Please** forgive our **sin**!”
The **Lord** sent **judges** their **battles** to help them **win**.

Caleb’s nephew **Othniel** God gave **victory** that he **sought**.
Cushan-Rishathaim, king of **Aram**, **Othniel** **fought**.
Moab ruled o’er **Israel** **eighteen** cruel **years**.
Left-handed **Ehud** God **called** to calm their **fears**.

Ehud told King **Eglon** he’d a **message** from the **Lord**.
When **Eglon**’s servants left, **Ehud** **stabbed** him with a **sword**.
Shamgar son of **Anath** did **something** unforeseen.
‘**killed** with an **ox** goad six **hundred** **Philistine**.”

Again (and **again**) **Israel** **turned** away from **God**.
Again (and **again**) He **punished** with His **rod**.
“**Please**,” **Israel** **cried**, “forgive our ‘**niquity**.”
God **sent** more **judges** to **set** those people **free**.

Jabin, king of Canaan held Israel under **thumb**.
Twenty long years he **treated** them like **scum**.
Deborah a **prophetess** led Israel in that **day**;
God **spoke** through her to **Barak** this **message** to convey:

From **Naphtali** and **Zebulun** **take** 10,000 **men**.
To the Kishon **River** I'll **lure** your foes and **then**
into your **hand** I'll **give** the whole **lot**,
Sisera their **leader** and nine-**hundred** chariot.

"I'll **go** if you'll go **with** me," said Barak to Deborah.
"Yes," she said, "but **to** a girl God **will** give Sisera."
The **armies** came to **battle** and God **made** the river **flood**.
Sisera's fine **chariots** got **stuck** in the **mud**.

Israel killed their **enemies** and **Sisera** **fled**
To the tent of **Jael** and **this** is what he **said**:
"Give me some **water**." She **gave** him milk **instead**
and **while** he was **sleeping** drove a **tent** peg through his **head**.

Israel did **evil** in the **eyes** of the **Lord**.
The **Midianites** **came** a **rampaging** **hoard**.
"God **help** us!" Israel **cried**, so the **Angel** did **greet**
Gideon, son of **Joash**, in a **winepress** threshing **wheat**.

"The **LORD** is **with** you; Israel you will **save**."
The **Angel** then **burnt** the **of** ring **Gideon** **gave**.
"Tear **down** your dad's **altar**," God **said** to him that **night**.
Gideon **obeyed**, but **later** he took **fright**.

He **asked** for a **test** to **prove** God's word was **true**.
"Make this ground **dry** and **wet** a fleece with **dew**."
God **did** what **Gideon** **asked** and the **other** way **around**;
He **made** the fleece **dry** when **dew** was on the **ground**.

Gideon gathered **troops** to **fight** 'gainst **Midian**.
God said to **him**, "You **have** too many **men**;
send the fearful **home**; to the **water** take the **rest**;
those who lap like **dogs** are the **ones** who pass the **test**."

A **man** had a **dream** 'bout a **loaf** of barley **bread**.
Gideon **knew** Israel's **foes** would soon be **dead**.
He **armed** three-hundred **men** with **trumpet**, **torch**, and **jar**.
Their surprise attack had the **Midianite** running **far**.

God gave **Oreb** and **Zeeb** into **Ephraim's** **hand**.
Zebah and **Zalmunna**, **Gideon** **chased** across the **land**.
Succoth and **Peniel** **refused** to offer **aid**.
For **lack** of trust and **insolence** these **people** surely **paid**.

Gideon would not be **king**, but an **ephod** he did **make**;
Israel worshiped **it** and the **Lord** they did forsake.
Ungrateful also **to** their judge for **all** the good he'd **done**;
kindness Israel **failed** to show to **kin** of Gideon.

Gideon's son Abimelech was **not** a judge at **all**.
He **killed** his many **brothers**; in **Ophrah** they did **fall**.
The **youngest**, Jotham, **did** escape a **parable** to **tell**:
'**gainst** the "thornbush **king**" the men of **Shechem** would **rebel**.

Gaal was Shechem's **leader**, but **Zebul** foiled the **plan**.
Abimelech fought **Shechem** and **killed** many a **man**.
He **burned** down a **tower** where **citizens** had **fled**.
A **woman** in **Thebez** dropped a **millstone** on his **head**.

About some **judges**, **we** don't know a **lot**.
Tola ruled in **Ephraim**; **Jair** **thirty** sons begot.
Ibzan had as **many** sons and **thirty** daughters, **too**;
Forty sons had **Abdon**; 'bout **Elon** we've no **clue**.

Jephthah, mighty **warrior**, the **Ammonites** did **fight**.
He **bargained** with **God**; his **doctrine** wasn't **right**.
"If You'll **help** me win this **battle**, I'll **burn** as **sacrifice**
whate'er comes out my **door**." His **daughter** was the **price**.

The **Angel** of the **Lord** appeared to **tell** of Samson's **birth**.
Manoah asked what **work** and life would **be** his son's on **earth**.
The **boy** would be a **Nazirite**, **set** apart to **God**.
He **could** not touch the **dead** nor wine nor **cut** his hair, how **odd**!

In **Timnah**, Samson **saw** a girl he **wanted** for his **wife**,
but **marrying** this **Philistine** would **only** bring him **strife**.
On his way to **see** her, he **killed** a lion **strong**;
later he scooped **honey** from the **carcass**, which was **wrong**.

Samson bet the **Philistines** his **riddle** they'd not **get**;
thirty men in **Ashkelon** he **killed** to pay his **debt**.
When his **wife** was given **to** a friend, **Samson** took **revenge**;
three-**hundred** foxes **burned** some fields his **honor** to **avenge**.

Samson was made **prisoner**, but **broke** his bonds and **then**
with a donkey's **jawbone**, he **killed** 1000 **men**.
Samson, very **thirsty**, asked **God** a drink to **bring**.
God opened up the **ground**; En Hakkore they called the **spring**.

Samson was so **strong** he pulled **down** a city **gate**,
but his **self-control** was **weak**; he was **quite** profligate.
The **girl** he loved, **Delilah**, **asked** him one **day**
where the **secret** of his **great** strength **lay**.

“If **anyone ties** me with **seven fresh thongs**
or **with** some new **ropes**, I’ll no **longer** be **strong**.”
“The **Philistines** are ‘**pon** you,” Delilah **said**.
But **Samson** snapped the **ropes** as **if** they were **thread**.

“You **lied** to me **again**,” Delilah **complained**.
“Tie my **hair** in the **loom**; **then** I’ll be **restrained**.”
But **still** Samson **lied** ‘til the **game** was no **fun**,
‘said, “**Shave** my **head**; I’ll be as **weak** as **anyone**.”

But **it** was no **game**. Samson’s **foes** were really **there**.
They **gouged** out his **eyes** and **cut** off his **hair**.
Brought him to **Gaza** and **made** him a **slave**.
God **used** his imprisonment **Israel** to **save**.

To **praise** their god, **Dagon**, the **Philistines** **came**.
Thousands mocked **Samson**, **putting** him to **shame**.
God gave Samson **strength** to push **down** two columns **tall**.
The **roof** fell, the **building** crashed, they **died** one and **all**.

Micah stole some **money** and **returned** it to his **mom**.
They **bought** some **idols** and **called** a priest **from**
among his **sons**, **one** from **Levi**, **too**,
who had a **talk** with some **Danites** passing **through**.

The **Danites** **returned**; with **them** the **Levite** **went**.
Micah chased **after**, but he **had** to **relent**.
Unsuspecting **Laish**, the **Danites** put to **sword**.
They **called** the city **Dan**; **Micah**’s **idols** they **adored**.

Visiting his **dad-in-law**, a **Levite** stayed quite **late**.
He **traveled** far to **Gibeah** and **in** the square did **wait**
since **no** one offered **room** ‘til a **man** from **Ephraim**
opened up his **home** and **gladly** welcomed **him**.

While they **ate**, there came some **shouts** and **pounding** on the **door**.
Evil men **desired** to do **something** God **abhors**.
Instead they gave the **concubine**, ‘though **this** wasn’t **right**.
The **poor** young **woman** was **abused** throughout the **night**.

She **died** the next **morn** and the **Levite** did **send**
throughout all **Israel** the **limbs** he did **rend**.
Israel all **gathered** to **avenge** this heinous **sin**
but the **first** two days of **fighting** victory **went** to **Benjamin**.

They **inquired** of **God**, **fasted** and **wept**.
God said, “Keep on **fighting**,” and **then** they **slept**.
The **next** day ‘ set an **ambush**. The **foe** they did **repel**.
Twenty-five thousand **Benj**’mite swordsmen **fell**.

Israel met at **Mizpah**, but **one** tribe wasn't **there**,
so they **killed** the Jabesh **Gileadites**, only **virgin** girls were **spared**.
These they sent to **Benjamin** to **make** amends for **strife**;
'**advised** them too at **Shiloh**'s festival to seize a **wife**.

In **those** days, Israel **had** no king; all **did** as they saw **fit**.
Foes attacked; they **cried** to God, He **judgment** did **remit**.
We, **too**, must call on **God** most high and **turn** away from **sin**.
In great mercy, **He'll** forgive and **for** us battles **win**.

Conquest!

Purpose

This game is to be used with the Year I, Quarter 4 lessons on the Judges period as an activity to familiarize the students with Israelite geography and peoples of the time.

Materials

Game board (The curriculum contains a map of Israel and a large map of Israel printed so that one fourth of the country occupies an 8½" by 11" sheet of paper. Cut off the blank borders of these pages and tape the four parts of the map together. Color the water and different tribes if you desire. You may wish to back this with cardboard and cover it with contact paper); game markers (in two colors or types, such as small beads or pieces of dowel rod; you will need about 60 of each color); one die or homemade game spinner divided in six sections numbered one to six; game cards (construct about fifty from poster board or index cards; write on each card one of the advantages or penalties given below; note that the practices have no relation to their point value, e.g., praying does not have less value than living a holy life).

Object of the Game

To capture territory; the team that is able to control all the regions on the board wins the game.

Setup

This is two-player game (a class can form teams and make joint decisions for their team, or you may duplicate multiple games), one being the Canaanite alliance (Philistia, Ammon, Moab, and Edom) and the other the Israelite tribes. Each player is given thirty armies (markers) to begin and places them wherever he likes in his territory; he must keep at least one army in each of his territories, but the rest he can disperse as he wishes. Note that no lines are drawn separating Ammon, Moab, and Edom (they were nomadic people) nor Philistia, Judah and Simeon (many Simeonite towns were actually in the midst of Judah, and territory frequently changed hands between Judah and Philistia during the period of the Judges). For the purpose of the game, consider these individual entities, each requiring at least one army. Also note that the territories of Dan and Manasseh each have two sections separated by other territory. Consider each of these as one political entity, requiring only one army. Armies may move and attack areas contiguous to (touching) them, but may not leap across enemy countries or bodies of water. An exception to this is the Philistines, who, being a sea-faring people, may travel up the coast to attack Manasseh and Asher.

Play

Before each turn, a player gains two armies from a general supply, which he places where he desires in his territory. On a person's turn he may attack any territory adjacent to those he controls. He declares his intention to do so, and the armies fight by having the attacker roll the die. Results of the battle are as follows:

- 6- defender loses two armies
- 5 or 4 - defender loses one army
- 3 - each player loses one army
- 2 - attacker loses one army
- 1 - attacker loses two armies

On his turn, a player may engage in as many battles as he desires, attacking a country as many times as he wishes until it is conquered or attacking different countries. A country is conquered by losing all its armies, and the conqueror may move as many of his armies into his new possession as he desires (he must move at least one army into the region to take possession) as long as he leaves one army in each of his own territories. At the end of his turn, the player may move his armies around his territory as long as he has a free pathway to do so; he may not move through enemy territories or across the Dead Sea. He should also draw a game card at the end of his turn. The first player to capture all the other player's territory wins.

Game Cards

Make four of each of the following cards:

- Pray to Yahweh - gain one army*
- Thank God for victory - gain one army*
- People willingly fight - gain two armies*
- Stand up to idol worshipers - gain three armies*
- Soldiers live holy lives - gain four armies*
- Civil war - lose one army*
- Chariots stuck in mud - lose one army*
- People refuse to fight - lose two armies*
- Lack of wise leadership - lose three armies*
- Plague strikes - lose four armies*
- The Lord fights for you - keep this card to prevent one enemy attack*

Make two of each of the following cards:

- Intermarry with enemy - subtract one from first die thrown on next turn (6 counts as 5, etc.)*
- Worship idols - subtract two from first die thrown on next turn*
- Army praises Yahweh; enemy runs - opponent must lose one territory but keeps his armies*



C O N Q U E S T !

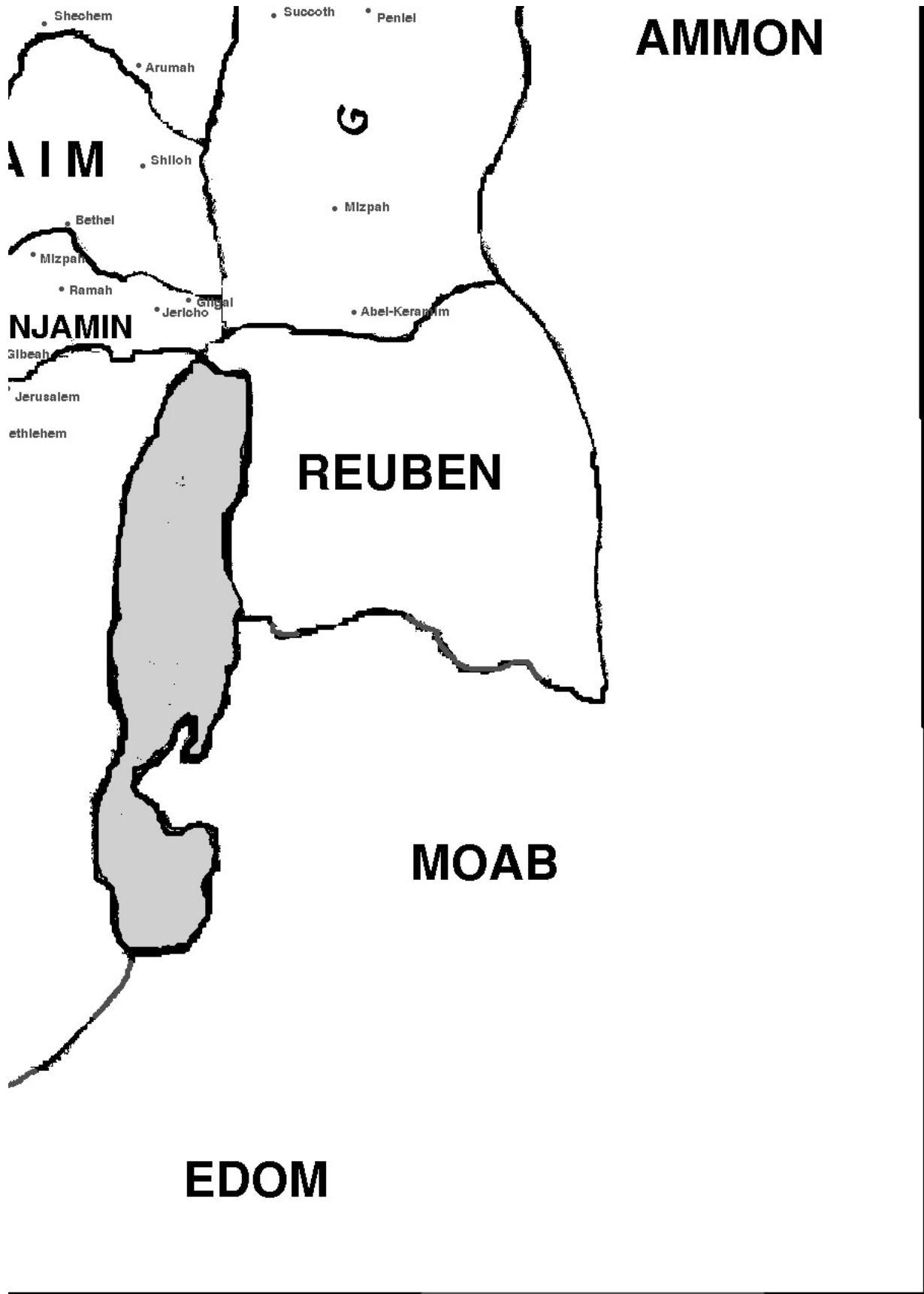
THE GREAT SEA
(MEDITERRANEAN SEA)

MANAS









BACKGROUND OF THE JUDGES

Judges 1-2

Lesson Aim

That your students will recognize the pattern of sin, judgment, repentance, and deliverance that characterized the lives of the Israelites, and our lives as well.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:11-12a - “Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt.”

Lesson Background

God is merciful. Over and over, He forgives the sin of His people and uses weak men to accomplish His purposes. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident than in the book of Judges. The Lord had brought the Israelites into the Promised Land of “milk and honey” but had allowed enemies to remain in the land in order to test them (Judges 3:1-2). Rather than being grateful for what God had done and following Him wholeheartedly, the Israelites rebelled against Him; therefore the righteous Lord sent judgment upon them, allowing the Israelites to be defeated by the wicked tribes in the land, the very ones they were supposed to conquer. In desperation, God’s chosen ones cried to Him to save them, which He did by raising up individuals called judges to lead them in battle. For a while there was peace, but before long hearts grew cold. The Israelites turned from Jehovah to idolatry, walking in the ways of their Canaanite neighbors rather than fighting against them. They “did evil in the eyes of the Lord,” and once again God had to punish them. In the book of Judges we see over and over a repetition of this pattern: sin, judgment, repentance, and (amazingly), deliverance. What a loving and forgiving God we have!

Many readers of Judges would deny this. “How can a loving God order the complete annihilation of peoples?” they query. It is difficult for us to see things from God’s perspective. We like to whitewash and accommodate things as being “not all that bad.” However, any sin is horrible, dreadful, loathsome and deserves God’s wrath. The Canaanites and other tribes living in Palestine were guilty of the most heinous iniquities and cruelties, including cult prostitution and child sacrifice. If our “small” lies and selfishness actions deserve hell, how much more were the offenses of the heathen nations an abomination to the holy God? The incredible thing is not that God brought judgment upon the Canaanites, but that He forgave the Israelites and used feeble, wicked individuals to lead them.

Judges were people God raised up to arbitrate disputes within Israelite tribes and to lead in combat with other nations. Probably several men judged during the same time period in different areas of Israel. God sovereignly chose these particular people to accomplish His purposes, even sending His Spirit upon them (at least in some cases) to enable them to do His will. Yet these men were far from perfect. Their unrighteousness showed itself in cowardice, idolatry, unbelief, and immorality, yet God used them mightily to deliver His people. What an encouragement to weak sinners that God can use us as well.

The book of Judges opens with an account of conflicts with various tribes living in Israel. God made merciful provision for cities Israel fought at a distance, but nearby peoples such as the Canaanites, Perizzites, Amorites, and Jebusites were to be utterly destroyed (see Deuteronomy 20:10-17). Judges opens with Judah’s attack on the Canaanites (the term is an inclusive one covering a number of tribes). The men of Judah asked for help from their brother tribe the Simeonites; the text does not indicate whether this was a good example of cooperation or a fearful lack of faith, but the Lord gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into Judah’s hands. This included the capture of Adoni-Bezek, who acknowledged his punishment (the severing of his thumbs and big toes) as God’s justice, since he had done the same to others.

The men of Judah continued their assault, setting Jerusalem on fire and attacking Canaanites in the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills, including an advance against Hebron and Debir (Kiriath Sepher). Kiriath Sepher was captured by Caleb’s nephew Othniel, who received Caleb’s daughter Acsah as a promised reward; the chapter includes a brief account of Acsah’s request to Caleb for springs of water and a verse about Kenite migration before continuing to recount Israelite military campaigns. Judah took Zarephath, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron and much of the hill country, but was unable to dislodge the people from the plains because they had iron chariots. A brief narrative about the taking of Bethel precedes a final extensive list of battles faced by different Israelite tribes, including many in which enemies were not driven out completely but were subject to forced labor.

Chapter 2 inaugurates the pattern of sin, judgment, repentance, and deliverance seen in the rest of the book and also introduces the concept of *covenant*. In Genesis 15, God had made a covenant (an agreement between two parties) with Abraham, promising to give the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates to Abraham’s descendants. This was at God’s initiative, and by passing along between the row of sacrificed animals the Lord signified that He was the one responsible for its fulfillment. The chapter opens with the Lord (the Angel of the Lord here is a *theophany*, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) grieving that the people had broken covenant with Him and even made covenant with the wicked people of the land. Therefore God told the people that their enemies would be thorns in their sides. At these words the people wept aloud and offered sacrifices to the Lord. However, whether or not their repentance was genuine at the time, the Israelites soon turned away from God, as the rest of the chapter reveals.

Before continuing to detail Israel’s unfaithfulness, the author recalls how the people had served God during the lifetime of Joshua. However, the next generation “knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel,” and so “forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt” (Judges 2:9-10). Faith does not automatically pass from one generation to the next, and it is well that we and our

children realize this. The new generation of Israelites served Baal, the god of storms and agriculture, and Ashtoreth, the mother-fertility goddess. How ironic that trusting these gods, who supposedly guaranteed a good harvest, was actually the cause of God's judgment and the destruction of Israelite crops by their enemies year after year. The Israelites forsook their true Husband to prostitute themselves (literally and figuratively) to Baal (2:17; Baal means "husband" or "lord"). The Lord became very angry that Israel had violated His covenant with them and said He would no longer drive out the nations before them, an appropriate punishment for a people so enamored with those nations (cf. Romans 1:18-32).

It is difficult for us to put ourselves in Israelite shoes. Most people would find the idea of bowing down to a statue ridiculous, but might fudge a tax form, tell a "harmless" lie for their boss, or neglect giving to their church in an attempt to gain financial prosperity. All these actions involve a trust in one's own effort for survival. We are removed from the immediate necessity of a good harvest to keep us from starvation and from a culture that recognizes spiritual intervention in human events, but we, just as surely as the Israelites, can devote our lives to idols rather than the one true God. God is holy and He wants His people to be holy as well. Like the Israelites, we have battles to fight against evil in ourselves and in the world. Our weapons are not the axe, bow, or chariot, but they have divine power to pull down strongholds (II Corinthians 10:3-5). There are still "enemies in the land," but, praise God, the war has been won. May He find us faithful and empower us for the daily battles.

During the second and third quarters your students engaged in inductive Bible study with the help of worksheets to **DIG IN** to the passage. This quarter's Bible stories lend themselves more to teacher explication and whole-passage rather than verse-by-verse study.

Lesson Procedure

Begin this week's lesson by giving a quick overview of Israelite history similar to the following (you may prefer to elicit this information in a question-and-answer format): "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He made people to take care of His beautiful creation, but the first man, Adam, rebelled against God and brought sin and death into the world. One day, however, the Lord would send His Son Jesus to pay the penalty for sin and death. As part of His plan God made a special agreement called a *covenant* with a man named Abram (also called Abraham) [read Genesis 15:5-6,18-20]. Abraham did have many grandchildren, just as God said. Abraham's son Isaac had a son named Jacob and he had twelve sons. Each of these sons had many children, and these became the twelve tribes of Israel or Israelites. You can find the names of Jacob's twelve sons in Genesis 49 [help your students find the names of these brothers or list them for them; have them write them down]. When Jacob was an old man there came a famine in the land where they were living, and the Israelites went to live in Egypt for a time. But God had not forgotten them. After many years He brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Before they could live peacefully in this land, the Israelites had to conquer enemy tribes. The book of Judges and the book of Ruth, which we will study this quarter, take place during this time period from about 1400 to 1050 years before Jesus Christ was born."

At this point read Deuteronomy 20:10-17 and discuss with your students why a loving God would have the Israelites destroy the nations around them. Emphasize the wickedness of those people (they deserved God's judgment, as do we all) and the dangers of living with such people (intermarriage, compromise, and idolatry).

Read Judges 1 aloud to your students. To increase interest, assign each student the name of a tribe listed in the chapter (Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, the tribes of Joseph - Ephraim and Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali). As his tribe conquers or fails to conquer a city, the student should place a marker on

the appropriate area in the large map that may be assembled from the map pages at the beginning of this quarter's lesson material. Use small blocks of wood, buttons, or folded paper for the markers. Indicate by how the markers are placed (flat or standing up, or top or bottom) whether or not Israel gained control of an area. To avoid confusion during the Scripture reading, it would be good to give each student a list of the cities his tribe attacked and have him find them on the map ahead of time.

Judah, Simeon - Bezek, Jerusalem, Hebron, Debir (Kiriath Sepher), Zarephath, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron
Benjamin - Jerusalem

Ephraim and Manasseh - Bethel, Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo

Ephraim - Gezer

Zebulun - Kitron, Hahalol

Asher - Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek, Rehob

Naphtali - Beth Shemesh, Beth Anath

Dan - [none]

Before reading Judges 2, explain the terms *theophany* and *covenant* (including God's covenant with Abraham) to your class. After reading the chapter, have your students each construct the following memory aid. Fasten a small and large paper plate together with a brass fastener. Divide the smaller plate into four quarters and write one of the following words in each of those sections: *sin*, *judgment*, *repentance*, and *deliverance*. Draw an arrow on the large plate that can point to the words as the smaller plate is turned. Alternately, you may use only one plate and fasten a small arrow cut from cardboard to point to the different words written on that plate. Have your students match the arrow with the appropriate words as you read the Bible stories this quarter.

OTHNIEL, EHUD, & MINOR JUDGES

Judges 3; 10:1-5; 12:8-15

Lesson Aim

To help students understand that God punishes sin but forgives His repentant people, as He did when He delivered Israel from their enemies by sending judges to help them.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:12b-13 - “They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.”

Lesson Background

The Lord left enemy tribes in Canaan to test His people and teach them warfare. They failed. Rather than conquering their enemies they lived among them, giving their children in marriage to heathen and even serving their gods (Judges 3:5-6). The Lord, angry at Israel’s deliberate rejection of Him, sold them into the dominion of foreign tyrants until they cried out to Him to save them. Then God sent judges to deliver His people, and they had peace many years until they again turned to evil. Your students study the deliverance God wrought through Othniel and Ehud in Judges 3 as well as learning about six lesser-known judges from chapters 10 and 12. The following notes should help you in your study.

3:1-7 - Sin: Why did God leave the nations in the land? The five rulers of Philistia (located along the Mediterranean) probably ruled their five major cities - Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The Sidonians, also called Phoenicians, lived in the northwest, while the Hivites were in north and central Israel. Perhaps verses 5-6 may be seen as a progression - they lived among the ungodly, intermarried with them, and finally worshiped their gods.

3:7-8 - Judgment: "The Israelites forgot the Lord their God." How could anyone forget their God? Yet they did. Do we? Baal was the Canaanite god of storms and agriculture. Asherah is the plural of Asheroth, who was a mother/fertility goddess. Note that God regards Israel as a unit, even though not all the tribes may have been involved in sinning in this area. Cushan-Rishathaim (literally Cushan of Double-Evil) was king of Aram Naharaim (Aram of the two rivers). The Lord *sold* Israel into his hands as one might sell a slave. Have your students consider how long "eight years" is to live in subjection to another nation. How might Cushan have made life difficult for the Israelites?

3:9 - Repentance

3:9-11 - Deliverance - The Spirit of the Lord came upon Caleb's nephew Othniel and he led Israel in war against Cushan-Rishathaim. The Lord gave Aram's king into the hands of Othniel, and the land had peace for forty years.

3:12 - Sin - Moab lay east of the Dead Sea between the Arnon and the Zered, which were wadis, or seasonal stream beds.

3:12-14 - Judgment - The Ammonites lived northeast of Moab; the Amalekites were nomads who lived in the south. The City of Palms was Jericho. This time Israel was subject to foreign domination for eighteen years (did it take this long for them to repent?).

3:15 - Repentance

3:15-30 - Deliverance - Benjamite territory was adjacent to Jericho. In verses 20-21, Eglon apparently had no suspicions. He stood in respect for the divine oracle he was about to be given (Ehud used *Elohim*, the generic word for God, in speaking with this foreign king). In verses 26-30, with their king dead, the Moabites were in a state of confusion, allowing Ehud time to gather forces. The Israelites took possession of the fords (explain this term to your students) of the Jordan, cutting off the Moabites' line of retreat. "And the land had peace for eighty years." Question: The Bible says that God gave Ehud to Israel to deliver them from the Moabites. Was Ehud justified in murdering Eglon?

Minor Judges (see Judges Chart)

Shamgar - Judges 3:31 [Shamgar is not an Israelite name]

Tola - Judges 10:1-2

Jair - Judges 10:3-5

Ibzan - Judges 12:8-10

Elon - Judges 12:11-12

Abdon - Judges 12:13-15

Lesson Procedure

Remind your students that this quarter they are studying Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. Pass out the *Israel's Enemies* chart and read it over with them. Have them place markers on the table map indicating the location of the various enemy tribes. Pass out the paper plate memory aids constructed last week and talk about our propensity to sin, God's righteous judgment, the need for repentance, and God's mercy in delivering those who turn to Him. Explain how the Lord sent judges to settle disputes and to lead in battle against Israel's enemies. Probably several men judged during the same time period in different areas of Israel. Today your students will learn about eight judges.

Read and discuss Judges 3 (use information from the Lesson Background). Have your students move the arrow on their plate to the appropriate section as you read the passage. Although it will not be mentioned again, you should use the plates for other lessons if they are found to be beneficial. Have your students begin to fill in their Judges chart. They should write in the information on different judges as they are studied this quarter. Assign different students to look up the verses on the minor judges listed in the Lesson Background section and have your class complete this section of their charts.

THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

Judge	Chap	Tribe	Enemy	Years	Facts	Lessons
Othniel	3	Judah	Aram	40	war vs. Cushan-Rishathaim	
Ehud	3	Benjamin	Moab	—	assassinated Eglon on roof with sword	
Shamgar	3	—	Philistia	—	killed 600 men with an ox goad	
Deborah	4-5	Ephraim	Jabin, king of Hazor (Canaan)	—	Barak led army; Jael killed Sisera with tent peg	
Gideon	6-8	Manasseh	Midian	—	Midian fled from 300 men; Gideon sinned with ephod	
Tola	10	Ephraim	—	23	—	
Jair	10	Gilead	—	22	30 sons, donkeys, towns	
Jephthah	11-12	Gilead	Ammon	6	sacrificed daughter; fought Ephraim	
Ibzan	12	Bethlehem	—	7	30 sons, daughters	
Elon	12	Zebulun	—	10	—	
Abdon	12	Ephraim	—	8	40 sons, 30 grandsons, 70 donkeys	
Samson	13-16	Dan	Philistia	20	birth; married Philistine; lion; riddle; foxes; jawbone; gate; Delilah; death	

ISRAEL'S ENEMIES

Enemy	Where Located	God	Judge	Other Facts
Canaanites	throughout Israel	Baal (storms) Asherah (fertility)	Deborah	human sacrifice prostitution
Philistines	west; near Mediterranean	Dagon (national; grain)	Shamgar Samson	
Moabites	east of Dead Sea	Chemosh (national; war)	Ehud	descendant of Lot
Midianites	nomads; south		Gideon	
Ammonites	near Jabbok	Molech	Jephthah	descendant of Lot
Amorites	highlands east of Jordan			

THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

Judge	Chap	Tribe	Enemy	Years	Facts	Lessons
Othniel	3					
Ehud	3					
Shamgar	3					
Deborah	4-5					
Gideon	6-8					
Tola	10					
Jair	10					
Jephthah	11-12					
Ibzan	12					
Elon	12					
Abdon	12					
Samson	13-16					

DEBORAH AND BARAK

Judges 4-5

Lesson Aim

To teach students how Israel rejoiced when God delivered them from their enemies, and to help them learn to do likewise.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:14 - “In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.”

Lesson Background

“After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor” (Judges 4:1-2). Hazor lay strategically on the principal trading route between Asia and the west. Joshua had defeated an earlier king of Hazor named Jabin (Joshua 11:1). Now Israel had again turned from the Lord and God allowed another king by the same name to oppress them cruelly for twenty years. Humanly speaking, Israel had no chance to rebel against his greatly superior force, which included 900 iron chariots. But the Israelites cried out to the Lord and, through the word of the prophetess Deborah, He commanded Barak to take ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun to Mount Tabor (a 1300-foot-high cone-shaped mountain in the northeast corner of the Esdraelon valley) where God would deliver Jabin’s army and its commander Sisera into Barak’s hands. Barak,

however, was unwilling to obey the Lord unless Deborah accompanied him. Deborah agreed to do so, but said that because of his refusal, the honor of the victory would go to a woman. God wants men in leadership, but can also use women for His purposes, especially when men abdicate their responsibilities.

Yet God was still willing to use Barak despite his lack of faith. Of course, it was God who ultimately won the battle (verse 14 - “the Lord gone ahead of you” is a term for a king marching at the head of his army). As we learn from chapter 5, God sent rain (presumably unusual for that time of year) to swell the usually placid Kishon River so that it flooded its banks, creating an impassible quagmire for Sisera’s chariots. The Lord’s control of nature demonstrated His superiority over the storm god Baal worshiped by the Canaanites.

In response to God’s deliverance, Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise recounting His mighty deeds. So should we be ever ready to praise the Lord for all He has done and is doing in our lives. The song divides into eight sections: An introduction calling people to listen to the song (1-3), how God acted (4-5), what life was like under Jabin’s oppression (6-12), those who were willing to fight and those who refused (13-18), the battle at the river (19-23), Jael’s killing of Sisera (24-27), Sisera’s mother’s wait for her son (28-30), and a coda hoping for continued victory (31).

Hebrew poetry does not rely on rhyme or metric feet as does English poetry, but rather uses several compact words per line and a technique called *parallelism*. Parallelism is where two consecutive lines repeat the same idea in different words (synonymous parallelism), express a contrast (antithetic parallelism), or where the second of two lines expands or builds on an idea expressed by the first (synthetic parallelism). For example, Judges 5:3 states: “I will sing to the Lord, I will sing”; and then repeats the almost identical idea, “I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel.” Verse 4 contains two examples of synonymous parallelism: “O Lord, when you went out from Seir/when you marched from the land of Seir” and “the earth shook, the heavens poured/the clouds poured down water.” Verse 26 demonstrates synthetic parallelism.

The sound of words is important in Hebrew and English poetry. Both languages use word repetition (verse 12 - “Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up . . .”; verse 22 - “galloping, galloping”), assonance (the repetition of vowel sounds seen in verse 26 with the Hebrew words *mahaqah* and *mahasah*), and onomatopoeia (words that sound like their meaning, as with the English words ooze, gush, splash, or the Hebrew word for *gallop* in verse 22: *daharot*). Personification (whereby an inanimate object acts like a person) can be found in verse 20 where stars fight. Finally, as in English, contrasting images, such as those seen here of flocks and peaceful towns in juxtaposition with the cacophony and chaos of war, help create a dynamic poem. The poignant image of Sisera’s mother waiting for her son adds pathos to the poem; she who anticipated a joyful reunion would soon trade the anticipated embroidered garments (note she cared more for clothing than the welfare of the captives) for sackcloth and ashes (Cundall).

A few more observations may help you as you teach Judges 4-5. God used men and women, leaders and common people, Israelites and one not of His chosen people to win a great victory. Unlike some of Israel’s tribes (Judges 5:15-17), we must be willing to do our part to fight God’s battles. Note the contrast between those tribes that fought and those that refused (5:13-19), and also between the cursed people of Meroz, located in the midst of the battle, who refused to fight and the foreigner Jael, called blessed for refusing to remain neutral in conflict. The treacherous nature of Jael’s deed in Judges 4:18-20 would be even more apparent to her own culture, which placed extremely high value on hospitality. One would never do anything to offend a guest, and no one would think to look for Sisera in a woman’s tent where men were forbidden. Putting up tents was a woman’s job, so Jael would have had much experience in using a hammer. As in the case of Ehud, this story presents a moral dilemma as to the validity of assassination in time of war. Deborah and Barak praise Jael, but the Lord does not indicate His approval (nor specific disapproval) of her action. We can say that God sovereignly brought good out of what occurred. As you and your students will

see in your future study of Judges, the Lord uses imperfect, sinful people to accomplish His purposes. God is in control of history and our lives as well. Like Deborah and Barak, may we fight His battles and praise Him for His mighty works.

Lesson Procedure

Read and discuss Judges 4 with your class, using the material from the Lesson Background. Talk about our response to God's victories in our lives and how Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise. Explain briefly how Hebrew and English poetry differ and read Judges 5. Explain Hebrew poetry in further detail and point out different poetic devices in the text (have your students try to find some themselves), as well as discussing its meaning and lessons we can learn from Judges 4-5.

Do one or more of the following activities:

- Individually or as a class, write a poem describing God's victories in your lives. The words needn't rhyme and you may write it in an English or Hebrew (using parallelism) style.
- Have your class draw a mural depicting the events of today's Bible story.
- Sing songs of praise to God for all He has done.

GIDEON'S CALL

Judges 6

Lesson Aim

That your students will understand that God can use weak, fearful people to accomplish mighty things for His glory.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:15 - “Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.”

Lesson Background

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:1). Descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:2), the Midianites lived south of Edom on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. Joined by the Amalekites, they swept down on camels upon wide areas inhabited by their old enemy Israel (Numbers 31:8-10). The Israelites took to the hills in justified terror as God sent His righteous judgment upon them. Like swarms of locusts the Midianites came, so impoverishing Israel that they finally cried out to the Lord for help.

The Lord sent a prophet to explain the reason for the great devastation. Israel had broken covenant with God. He had brought them up from slavery and driven out oppressors before them, giving Israel their land. However, His people had not listened to their Lord. Rather they had turned to other gods, and so judgment had come (Deuteronomy 28:15, 25-31). Once again, God looked upon His people with mercy and sent them a deliverer, a rather unlikely one at that.

We first meet Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress, a pit carved out of the ground. Usually threshing floors were in wide-open places so the wind could carry off the chaff, but in this extremity, the winepress had to do. One must not get the idea that Gideon was a complete wimp, cowering in fright. The danger from the Midianites was very real. On the other hand, neither did the appellation *mighty warrior* (6:12) seem to fit Gideon's character. The Angel of the Lord who called him this was actually a *theophany*, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. We cannot easily pinpoint when Gideon first recognized this fact. No surprise or outward reaction is seen until the Angel of the Lord disappears in verse 22 and Gideon realizes who he is. Yet why would Gideon demand a sign "that it is really you talking to me" if he did not suspect his visitor to be of supernatural origin (v 17; *offering* can also mean a gift given to a superior, so this is not conclusive)? The words for *Lord* and *sir* are the same in verses 13 and 15.

Whatever the case, we can learn several things from the conversation between the Angel of the Lord and Gideon. The Lord was patient with Gideon's doubts and accusations. What can hurt a father more than to have a child distrust his goodness? Yet how often do we question God in the manner of Gideon (6:13)? Although the Lord had already spoken to these issues through His prophet, He did not rebuke Gideon. Rather, God commissioned him to do a great work (6:14) and promised His presence and success in that work (6:16). What more could anyone want? Gideon asked his visitor to wait while he prepared food for him. It would have taken some time to do so, and his offering is quite substantial considering the time of famine (an ephah was about a half bushel). The Angel of the Lord consumed the offering with fire, and, as Gideon finally understood fully with Whom he was speaking, the Angel of the Lord calmed his fears, granting him peace, not death. In response, Gideon built an altar to the Lord, calling it "The Lord is Peace."

"That night the Lord said to him, 'Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on top of this pole that you cut down, and offer the second bull as a burnt offering'" (6:25-26 cf. Exodus 34:12-13; Deuteronomy 7:5). What a challenge! It is one thing to imagine gloriously battling a hated enemy someday, and quite another to be commanded to take decisive and immediate action against evil in one's own family. Sin in one's midst must be ruthlessly eradicated and true worship established before foreign enemies can be conquered. Make no mistake; tearing down the altar and pole used in Baal worship (the bull may also have been designated for this purpose) could easily have cost Gideon his life (6:30). Yet Gideon was willing to obey the Lord no matter what the consequences. God protected His servant. When the people of the town came for Gideon, his father Joash, a Baal-worshiper himself, supported him, saying if Baal were so strong he could take care of himself, thus earning Gideon the nickname *Jerubbaal* (meaning *let Baal contend*). If we stand as faithful witnesses, sometimes God will use those we least suspect to defend our cause.

After this Gideon, empowered by God's Spirit, summoned various Israelite tribes to face the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples as they descended upon Israel for the eighth straight year. Shortly before battle, however, Gideon started to have second thoughts. Was God really going to deliver Israel into his hands? Gideon devised a test to make sure (why did Gideon think that what God said/did at this time would be any more trustworthy than what He had said before?). Gideon would place a fleece on the threshing floor, and if the next morning there was dew on the fleece and not on the floor, he would believe that God would save Israel by his hand. The following morning when his request was granted, Gideon, perhaps realizing that such a thing could happen in the natural order of things since dew would evaporate more readily from the hard, open threshing floor than the thick fleece, asked that the reverse would occur. "That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew" (6:40).

There are times when God answers His people with signs (Isaiah 7:10-14; II Kings 19:20,29-31; Jeremiah 44:29; Luke 2:12). Gideon, however, asked for a sign to confirm something *God had already promised* (6:36; as did Hezekiah - II Kings 20:1-11). God is faithful and unchanging (James 1:17; Hebrews

13:8). He does not lie (I John 3:5; Titus 1:2). What He promises He will do. To question this is to doubt God's character. Gideon realized to some extent the audacity of his request, for he said to God, "Do not be angry with me" (6:39; why did Gideon think that what God said/did at this time would be any more trustworthy than at first?). Similar unbelief brought rebuke to other biblical characters (e.g., Sarah - Genesis 18:10-15; Zachariah - Luke 1:18-20), but God was compassionate and granted Gideon the assurance he desired. We, who can so easily identify with Gideon's frailty and fear, can be grateful that God does not always deal with us as our sin deserves, but according to His mercy.

Lesson Procedure

Begin your lesson with the following:

Joey threw the bottle hard into the recycling bin, where it crashed into dozens of pieces. "Take that, you dumb old stupid bottle."

Taking another glass from the plastic bag at his feet, Joey hurled it after the first. "Yeah, and you too! Go on. Break into a million pieces. See if I care."

He picked up an applesauce jar, started to throw it, and then stopped in mid-air, merely letting it fall from his hand into the bin.

"But I do care!" he moaned, "Oh, how I care! If I only wasn't so stupid!"

Words from his stepfather echoed in his brain. "Watch what you're doing, you clumsy little jerk!" and "Look at this report card; you're sure never going to amount to anything with grades like this."

His mom's comments didn't make him feel much better. "Joey, you forgot to take out the trash *again*" or "Clean your room. Pigs live neater than you do."

Why couldn't he do anything right? Sometimes Joey would imagine that he was tough like guys on TV, or brave like the heroes in the books he read. But he knew that was just imagination. It was hopeless. He oughta just eat worms and die or something. One day his Sunday School teacher had said, "Joey, I'm so glad for the interest you show in God's Word. I think that God is going to use you in a great way some day." Yeah, right. If only he could believe it. But how could God use a stupid little jerk like him?

Do you ever feel, like Joey, that everything's gone wrong and you can't do anything right? Even if things are not that bad, do you think that God doesn't really have anything significant for you to do? Today you will learn how God can use weak, fearful, sinful human beings - in other words, people like you and me.

Then move on to the Bible story; Judges 6 can be discussed under three headings: Gideon's Call (6:1-24), Gideon's Confrontation (6:25-32), and Gideon's Confidence (6:33-40). Consider the following as well as what you have gleaned from the Lesson Background as you teach your lesson.

- Gideon's Call - How do verses 1-16 remind you of other stories we have read in Judges? (Even after the Israelites again broke covenant with Him, God sent them deliverance when they turned to Him.) Do you ever feel like Gideon did in verse 13 or 15? Could Gideon trust God's word? What promises do we have in God's Word upon which we can rely?
- Gideon's Confrontation - How can we stand up for God in our families? God says to honor and obey our parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20). Is this true even if our parents are not Christians? (Yes, unless they tell us to do something that would cause us to sin.)
- Gideon's Confidence - Gideon had a difficult time trusting God even when God had spoken to him and met him in a miraculous way. We should not ask God to prove His love for us (He has already shown His love for His people by sending His Son to die for them), but by praying, reading the

Bible, and learning and worshiping at church, get to know Him better. We should ask Him to use us to accomplish His purposes, even though we are weak sinners.

What do we learn about God from this passage? (He is compassionate, patient, He calls weak people to do His work, He is trustworthy, He is stronger than our enemies.)

Next week we will see how God fulfilled His promise to Gideon and how Gideon responded to God.

Activity

As a class (brainstorm ideas) or individually, have your students finish Joey's story, answering the question Joey asks in the last sentence. In what ways does Joey seem to be living for God and not living for God according to the story as it is written so far?

GIDEON'S VICTORY

Judges 7-8

Lesson Aim

That your students will come to know that God keeps His promises and delights to use the weak to accomplish His purposes.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:16-17a - "Then the Lord raised up judges who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them."

Lesson Background

God keeps His promises. As He said (Judges 6:14,16), God delivered Israel from Midianite oppression by the hand of Gideon. Judges 7 opens with Gideon and his men by the spring of Harod preparing to attack the Midianites, who were encamped in the valley near Moreh (the valley of Jezreel). As they nervously considered encountering the vastly superior Midianite force, God made an amazing statement: "You have too many men." God wanted His people to know that He is the one who wins our battles. First God told Gideon to send home "anyone who trembles with fear" (7:3). Actually, previously the Lord had commanded that the fearful not accompany their brothers into battle lest they too become disheartened (Deuteronomy 20:8). Gideon did what the Lord said, but the remaining force of 10,000 was still too large, for the men would attribute victory to their own abilities. The text does not explain why God used the particular test of seeing how the men drank water, either kneeling or lapping water from their hands. The lapping men may have been seen as less anxious about their physical desires, more alert to the enemy and

ready for battle, or the test could have been much more arbitrary. So Gideon kept the three hundred and sent the rest home; those who stayed took over the provisions and trumpets of those who left.

That night God spoke to Gideon and repeated His command to attack the Midianites, then reaffirmed His promise to give them into Gideon's hands. In compassion for his fearful servant, God encouraged Gideon through the mouths of his very enemies. "Gideon arrived [at the outpost of the Midianite army] just as a man was telling a friend his dream. 'A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed'" (7:13). Barley was the common food of the poor Israelites, and a tent an apt representation of the nomadic Midianites. The verb "to tumble" is also used of the continual turning of flashing swords. The Midianite's friend accurately interpreted the dream, responding, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hand." Upon hearing this, in awe of the Lord, Gideon fell prostrate in worship and then returned to rouse his forces to defeat the Midianites.

The plan was brilliant: divide the Israelites into three companies and provide each man with a ram's horn trumpet, a torch, and a jar with which to hide the light from the torches. Silently surround the Midianites and, at Gideon's signal, smash the jars, blow the horns, and shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon." The strategy worked. One must imagine what it was like: pitch black except for possibly the moon and a few stars, the new guard drowsily beginning the middle watch while the rest of camp slept soundly. Suddenly chaos erupted as from all directions resounded battle cries and trumpet blasts (normally only group leaders would carry trumpets). Assuming that a large contingent of the enemy was among them, the Midianites turned on each other and eventually fled. Gideon called for help from the Ephraimites, who pursued the retreating Midianites, capturing and killing the two leaders, Oreb (meaning *raven*) and Zeeb (*wolf*).

The Ephraimites were not pleased at being called to battle so late. Of course, there is no evidence that they had ever tried to fight the Midianites previously on their own, but once victory seemed firmly in hand they wanted the glory and presumably the booty as well. Unlike fellow judge Jephthah, Gideon knew how to deal with the volatile Ephraimites. He mollified their anger by praising their accomplishments, thus avoiding conflict. We too need to learn that "a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

The Ephraimites may have been confident of Israelite victory, but the men of Succoth felt no such assurance. Fearful of Midianite reprisals if the tide of battle should turn, they refused to provide food for Gideon's exhausted men. The men of Peniel did likewise, and Gideon swore to take vengeance on these two towns when he defeated the Midianites. Gideon's treatment of these cities was harsh and seems unjustified, but one must remember that such behavior during a time of war was tantamount to treason, for in refusing to side with Gideon they were aiding the enemy, which would then have time to regroup. It was vital at this time for Gideon to capture Zebah and Zalmunna in order to deprive the Midianites of the leadership necessary to continue their invasion of Israel. Gideon considered showing mercy to these two rulers until they told him that they were responsible for his brothers' deaths. Upon hearing this, he commanded his eldest son Jether to kill them. Jether refused the honor offered to him, and Zebah and Zalmunna, loath to suffer the disgrace of being executed by a youngster and the physical pain of being killed by an inexperienced warrior, taunted Gideon into killing them himself.

The final event of Gideon's life recorded in Judges concerns his making an ephod. In the time of the exodus an ephod was part of the sacred garments the Lord commanded Moses to make for the high priest. It was "of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen" (Exodus 39:2; see Exodus 39:1-26). Some commentators think that Gideon's ephod may have been a garment made entirely of gold thread or perhaps a golden idol; or, of course, it could have been modeled after Aaron's ephod. Whatever the case, it led Israel into sin. "All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a

snare to Gideon and his family” (8:27) Gideon may have had good motives in making the ephod. Perhaps he saw it as a way to worship God or to ascertain His will. But God is a holy God. He will not tolerate syncretism or any sort of polluted worship. Gideon had set the stage for idolatry and the people readily played out their parts. The land had peace for forty years during Gideon’s lifetime, but “no sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith [a Canaanite god] as their god and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side” (8:33-34). The Israelites were also ungrateful, for “they also failed to show kindness to Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them” (8:35). Again the cycle of sin began as the Israelites failed to be grateful and turned away, not only from Gideon, but from Jehovah God.

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students the following: “You are the leader of an army. You have 32,000 men, but you estimate that your enemy, camped in a valley several miles away, has four times that number. What would your plans be? Can you imagine if someone told you to send some of your men home? Ridiculous! Well, maybe you could send home a few of the weak and sick or those scared to fight (they might cause the others to run from the fight). But what if you were told to send all but 300 men home? Does that seem absolutely, totally crazy? Yet that’s exactly what God told Gideon to do.”

Read and discuss the Bible story using the material from the Lesson Background above. It would probably be best to do this in sections (6:1-24; 6:25-32; 6:33-40; 7:1-15; 7:15-25; 8:1-3; 8:4-21; 8:22-27; 8:28-35).

Discuss the concept of spiritual battles. You may wish to concentrate more on the Gideon story and not go into the detail that follows, but your students need to know that, while we may not fight with horse and javelin (or tanks and bombs), the lessons of Judges have applicability to our lives. You may wish to have each of your students draw a picture of a soldier and write next to him the qualities of a good soldier (alternately, he could draw a soldier and label the parts of Ephesians 6). “The book of Judges is full of stories of fighting and battles, but did you know that you, too, are a soldier in the middle of a terrible war? No way, you think. You are only about twelve years old, and the last time you looked you were not wearing a uniform or toting an M-16. Realize, however, that all battles are not those we can see. God and Satan are engaged in a great war. The Lord will ultimately win, but, as in any war, some battles will be won and some will be lost; at times, there will be casualties and great pain. This analogy may still not seem to describe your life (perhaps you are like a soldier who has just arrived in boot camp), but the picture is true, nonetheless. You are in the army. But whose army? Which side are you on? God’s side or Satan’s side? If you are a Christian, if Jesus is your Lord and you have been born again by His Spirit, then you are in God’s “army.” If you have not repented of your sins and trusted the Lord to make you a new creature, then you are still rebelling against God; you are a member of Satan’s troops. The most important thing you can do is to desert your present leader and give you allegiance to God.”

“So, God calls us soldiers (Philippians 2:25; Philemon 2) and says we must fight the good fight of faith (I Timothy 1:18; 6:12; II Timothy 4:7). But what does a soldier do? Obviously a soldier fights the enemy, but it is even more important that he obey his Commander. A general in an army knows the whole picture and how best to attack and defeat the enemy. If a group of soldiers is not obeying the general’s instructions, it can change the battle plan for the entire army and many soldiers may be hurt. Even if one soldier disobeys his lieutenant, there can be terrible consequences. We must learn to obey God and those in authority over us (you could compare the lieutenant to your parents) instantly and completely. Immediate obedience without arguing is very important in an army and in life (think of examples where this is true).

A soldier will also want to encourage his fellow soldiers and help them in the fight, even to the point of offering his life in their behalf.”

What other qualities should a soldier have? He must be completely devoted to his Commander and the cause for which he is fighting. It certainly would not be right for him to join the Enemy’s side, even for a short time (yet how many Christians are willing to compromise and do “just a little bit wrong,” “just once”?). No, as it says in II Timothy 2:3-4, a soldier’s highest joy is to please his Commander. Read this passage and find out another characteristic of a good soldier. He is disciplined. There are some things that are fine to do in civilian life in which a soldier cannot participate. He might not have the time or energy for otherwise acceptable activities (can you imagine a soldier playing basketball or drawing a picture in the middle of an actual battle?). A soldier must do what he has to do whether he feels like it or not. He cannot say, “I don’t feel like getting up at 5:00 today; I don’t feel like walking ten miles, so I just won’t do it.” He must be diligent and work hard. He must persevere even when he is sick, tired, hungry, bored, or in pain; as II Timothy 2:3 says, he must “endure hardship.”

“There is one more important thing for a soldier to know - who is the enemy! A Christian battles on three fronts, the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and there are three Bible passages that specifically address these areas. The *world* in this case does not mean the big ball of land and water on which we live, but the non-Christian way of living and thinking, which is against God. Read II Corinthians 10:3-6 to see how we need to fight against ideas and thought patterns that deny God’s rule. The *flesh* means our sinful desires, something bad that we want or something we crave more than God. Can you imagine a soldier fighting against himself? I Peter 2:11 says that our sinful desires actually war against us (our soul/life). The Christian’s third enemy is the Devil himself. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Read this verse and more about our war in Ephesians 6:10-18. The Devil and his cohorts hate Christians and would like to harm them, but God is stronger than Satan and we can prevail against him. Ephesians 6 explains how God has provided Christians with armor to protect them and the weapon of prayer to fight him. Yes, Christians are in a war and the battle is desperate, with great consequences. We must not give in to the Enemy. Yet we have this assurance: God will be victorious.”

You may wish to sing songs about the spiritual battle such as: “II Corinthians 10:4”; “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #572); “Lead On, O King Eternal” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #580); “Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #571); “Soldiers of Christ Arise” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #575); “A Mighty Fortress” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #92); “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #573); “For All the Saints” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #358); “God is My Strong Salvation” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #667); “The Battle Belongs to the Lord” (Jamie Owens-Collins, *Maranatha Praise*, edition 3, #268), “I Will Call Upon the Lord” (Michael O’Shields, *Maranatha Praise*, #180).

Activity

Write on small pieces of posterboard the events of Gideon’s life listed below. You may make two copies of each and do this as a competition between two teams. It would also be helpful to draw a small simple picture on each card for easy recognition and to read the cards first to your students. Place the cards in a mixed-up order at one end of the room. Your students should then, one at a time, race to take the cards one at a time in the proper order (i.e., the first student runs to get “The Lord speaks to Gideon who is threshing wheat in a winepress” and runs back to his place, whereupon student #2 runs to get “Gideon prepares a sacrifice to the Lord . . .” and returns, etc.). This can, of course, be done as a sorting game at their seats if you prefer. After this, the students who picked the cards should explain how Gideon showed faith (and/or lack of faith) in the event listed, and how God showed His faithfulness.

Events of Gideon's life:

- The Lord speaks to Gideon, who is threshing wheat in a winepress.
- Gideon prepares a sacrifice to the Lord, and He consumes it.
- Gideon tears down his father's altar to Baal.
- Gideon asks God to confirm His word with the fleece.
- God tells Gideon to send some of his army home, and Gideon does so.
- God sends Gideon to the Midianite camp, where he hears a dream.
- Gideon and three hundred men defeat the Midianites with unusual weapons.
- Gideon calms the Ephraimites.
- Gideon treats Succoth and Peniel harshly and kills Zebah and Zalmunna.
- Gideon makes an ephod.
- Gideon has seventy-one sons; he dies and the people turn from God.

ABIMELECH

Judges 9

Lesson Aim

That your students would realize that ungodliness and trusting in wicked individuals only bring about self destruction.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:17b - “Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord’s commands.”

Lesson Background

Judges 9 describes a man who wielded political power over a section of Israel during this time but who was not actually a judge, since he was not called by God. Abimelech (“my father a king”), the son of Gideon and a Shechemite concubine, went to his mother’s people and asked if it would not be better for one man, a relative, to rule over them than for the seventy sons of Gideon to do so. There was a long history of uneasy relations between Canaanite Shechem (located at a trade crossroads in the fertile valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerazim) and Israel ever since Simeon and Levi slaughtered the Shechemites to avenge the rape of their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). Whether or not this influenced their decision, the men of Shechem felt they could trust Abimelech. In egregious ingratitude to Gideon who had risked his life for their benefit, they agreed to Abimelech’s offer, subsequently aiding him in the murder of his seventy brothers. The Shechemites’ security was misplaced, however, and, in accordance with Jotham’s curse, became the means of their destruction. In whom or in what do we and our students place our trust? The consequences can be significant.

Jotham was Gideon's youngest son, who hid to escape his half-brother's murderous actions. When he heard that the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo were gathered together to crown Abimelech king, he climbed Mount Gerazim and, using the natural acoustics of the valley, shouted a curse to the people below (years earlier Mount Gerazim had been the site of the pronouncement of blessings - Deuteronomy 27:12). Jotham's declaration began with a parable about trees. The olive tree (source of beautiful wood and oil for anointing, medicine, food, and lamps), the fig tree (source of food) and vine (source of wine) did not want to give up their valuable tasks to "hold sway over the trees," but the thornbush, which not only produced nothing of value but was actually destructive, was only too glad to do so. The parallel and insult to Abimelech was obvious. The Shechemites' attempt to find comfort and safety under his branches was as foolish as trying to find shade under the low-lying thornbush. Jotham called upon God to judge his case against Abimelech. He asked that Abimelech and the citizens of Beth Millo would destroy each other in the same way that scrub fires traveled at great speed along the carpet-like growth of the thornbush to destroy mighty cedars. This, indeed, was to be the case.

Abimelech governed Israel for three years, but then "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech" (9:23). The Shechemites began to ambush and rob those who passed through their territory, thus depriving Abimelech of revenue (both immediately and as word got out to other caravans to avoid this area) and the reputation for being the powerful ruler of a safe kingdom. Then Gaal son of Ebed gained the confidence of the Shechemites. He pointed out Abimelech's Israelite rather than Shechemite parentage (cf. 9:1-3) and they took his advice to rebel against their kinsman. Zebul, the governor of the city, heard of the plan and, under cover, sent word to Abimelech to ambush Shechem. This he did. Gaal came out to meet Abimelech in battle and was forced back to the gate of Shechem, from which Zebul drove him and his forces away. The next day some of the Shechemites, thinking their troubles were past, went out to their fields, where they were mercilessly slaughtered by a vengeful Abimelech. He then pressed his attack on the city itself and killed its inhabitants. Abimelech scattered salt over the city, a symbolic action dooming the city to perpetual desolation (Deuteronomy 29:23; Psalm 107:3). He set the stronghold of El-Berith on fire, killing the 1000 men and women who had fled inside. Not content with this destruction, Abimelech proceeded to Thebez, where he attempted the same strategy. However, this time as Abimelech approached the tower to which people had fled in order to set fire to it, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head, cracking his skull. Since it was considered disgraceful to die at the hand of a woman, Abimelech asked his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword. When the Israelites realized Abimelech was dead, they went home. Apparently they had followed Abimelech blindly. We need to realize ourselves and help our students to see the importance of choosing wise, godly leaders and the destructive effects of following those who are not.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by telling the students the story of *The Dare*. Discuss the story, or do so as part of the activity below.

Then read and discuss the Scripture passage, focusing on the necessity of obeying the Lord and the importance of following wise leadership. Why did the Shechemites choose Abimelech as their commander? What qualities in a ruler does Scripture commend (see 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:4-9; Proverbs 16:12-13; 20:26,28; 22:11; 25:2; 29:4,14; 31:4-5)?

The Dare

Sarah stared sideways through the screen of her long blond hair as she fumbled with the dial on her locker. There they were, laughing and talking, sauntering down the hall as if they had all the time in the world and the bell were not going to make them all late for Mr. Grissom's class in about thirty seconds. Carli, Lindsey, and Jennifer. "The awesome alliance," Sarah called them to herself. Why did they seem to do everything right while she always made a fool of herself? Of course they were pretty. Well, not exactly pretty, Sarah admitted thoughtfully, but there was something about their stylish clothes and makeup (and she'd be 100 before her mom even let her wear a little mascara) that made them the center of every group. Maybe it was the way they walked or the smart comebacks they gave. Sarah didn't know and gave up trying to figure it out as the girls walked toward her on the way to class.

"Hi, Sorry."

Sarah reddened at the hated nickname gained from its similarity to her own name and her habit of apologizing for everything. "Hi, Lindsey. Hi, guys," Sarah replied.

"Guys, are we," Carli taunted. "Huh, you'd think even Sorry would know the difference. Didn't your mommy ever teach you the facts of life?"

"Aw, cut it out, Carli. Leave her alone," said Jennifer.

"Oh, did I hurt da widdle girl's feelings? I'm *sorry*." Carli started to walk away, but then turned back. "Hey, tell you what. Just to show there're no hard feelings, why don't you come to my sleep-over Friday night."

"No thank you," said Sarah. "I have other things to do."

"No, I mean it," said Carli, "why don't you come?" The other girls chimed in their agreement.

"Well, okay, if you're really serious."

"Yeah, maybe we could fix your hair or something so you don't look like such a nerd. That outfit you've got on today really isn't that bad."

The bell rang and Sarah had still not opened her locker, but she didn't care. Today she could put up with Mr. Grissom's withering looks and the detention points he would hand her. She was going to Carli's party.

For a while it looked like she would not get to go at all. Although she had heard Sarah talk about them, Sarah's mother did not know Carli and her friends and did not want to let her go, especially overnight. However, Sarah begged and pleaded, telling her mom how important this was to her, and so, after a phone call and conversation with Carli's mother, who assured Sarah's mom that she would look after her, Sarah's mom gave her permission. At 6:00 Friday, Sarah's mother dropped her off (with the usual admonitions to be sure to thank Mrs. Jordan and to have a good time), and Sarah went inside. Two other girls Sarah knew slightly and "the awesome alliance" were already digging into the food.

"Hi, Sorry, uh, Sarah," said Jennifer. "Have some pizza."

"Thanks," said Sarah, and sat down with the others to watch the video they had just put on. The movie was funny in parts, but other parts and some of the language made Sarah very uncomfortable. At one point she asked Carli if she could use her bathroom just so she could get out of the room for awhile, but, not wanting to be ridiculed and wanting to see how the movie ended (it really had a dumb ending, Sarah thought later), she went back. After the video, the girls listened to music and talked some more, mostly about who were the cutest guys in their class. Sarah's one suggestion of a boy she thought was nice was greeted with hoots of laughter from the other girls, who dubbed him a real loser. Then Carli had a suggestion. "I know, she said, let's play Truth or Dare." The other girls agreed, some with more enthusiasm than others.

"How do you play?" said Sarah.

"Oh, you'll catch on," said Lindsey.

"Okay, Robyn, you're first," said Carli. "Truth or dare?"

"Uh, truth," Robyn replied.

“Alright, you were talking about all those guys. Which one do you really like? It’s ‘Truth or Dare’; you’ve got to tell the truth.”

“I don’t like anybody.”

“Yes, you do. Who is it? Who is it?”

“Oh, all right, Jeremy Parker,” Robyn finally answered.

“Hoo, I knew it,” said Carli. “Big basketball star, Jeremy Parker.”

“All right. Your turn, Carli,” said Jennifer. “Truth or dare?”

“Dare,” said Carli boldly.

“Dare: Go sneak us some more of those delicious brownies,” said Jennifer.

“No prob’. I’ll be right back.”

The questions and dares continued. It was a stupid game, thought Sarah, forcing people to do and say things they, in general, had no desire to do and say. She dreaded her turn, but it came soon enough.

“Okay, Sarah, we’ve got to think of a good one for you. Truth or dare?”

“Dare,” said Sarah quietly.

“Let’s see,” said Carli. “Let’s see. I know. Ooh, I know. You must write a love letter from Miss Lamoy to Mr. Grissom.”

Sarah stared at them aghast. How could she ever do such a thing? Jennifer echoed the words in her head out loud, but not the meaning behind them. “How could she do such a thing?” Jennifer asked. “She’d be sure to get caught. Mr. Grissom would never believe it. What does Sarah know about love letters? And he’d recognize her handwriting.”

“No prob’,” said Carli, “she can type it, and ‘little miss straight A’s in English’ should be able to write something good enough, even if it’s not from personal experience.”

“But, I can’t!” said Sarah, finally finding her voice. “It would be wrong. If Mr. Grissom does believe it and then finds out it’s a fake, which he will eventually, he’ll be terribly hurt and . . .”

“You can do it and you will do it, Miss Sorry-sorry, or you *will* be sorry. Sorry you were ever born. And don’t think we can’t make your life miserable if we want to, right, girls.”

“Yeah, right Carli,” they replied. Sarah believed them. She felt miserable right then, more miserable than she had ever felt in her life. What was she going to do?

Activity

If you desire, have your students, individually or as a class, write an ending for *The Dare*.

JEPHTHAH

Judges 11:1-12:7

Lesson Aim

That your students may, like Jephthah, fight God's battles, but, unlike Jephthah, that they will take their ideas of God from the Bible, not from the surrounding culture.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:18 - "Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them."

Lesson Background

A recent study arrived at the astounding statistic that fifty-seven percent of evangelical youth do not believe in an absolute standard of truth. Presumably most of these young people are associated with churches that preach the Bible; many may even be born again, but they are taking their worldview from the surrounding culture, not from God. This was Jephthah's problem.

Jephthah was the illegitimate son of a prostitute and a man called Gilead (the tribes in Gilead included Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh). When Jephthah's half brothers were grown, they threw him out of the house so they would not have to share their inheritance with him. Jephthah fled and became the chief of a group of adventurers in the land of Tob. Some time later, when the Ammonites attacked Israel, the Gileadite elders requested Jephthah's help to command their army, promising that he would be the head over all Gilead if he led them to victory against their enemies. Jephthah agreed. Before going to battle, Jephthah tried to make peace with the Ammonites by finding out the reasons for their attack.

The Ammonite king claimed that Israel, when they had come out of Egypt, had taken Ammonite land. Jephthah replied that Israel had not taken land from Ammon or nearby Moab, but had stayed in Kadesh and then traveled through the desert along the eastern side of Moab. God had forbidden Israel to fight Edom, Moab, and Ammon because they were related to Israel (Deuteronomy 2:4-9,19). No such prohibition pertained to the Amorites, however, and Israel had fought and defeated this tribe when King Sihon refused to grant the Israelites passage through his land. Jephthah pointed out that this was the territory under question, which Sihon had earlier taken from Moab (Numbers 21:23-26). Why was Ammon disputing these facts when for three hundred years no one had challenged Israel's right to the land? Besides, Israel would take the land Jehovah gave them just as the Ammonites took land their god Chemosh gave them. (Actually, Jephthah was mistaken here. Milcom was the Ammonite god and Chemosh the god of the Moabites, a tribe closely associated with the Ammonites. The significance of Jephthah's statement here will be discussed later. However, we can note that as confused as Jephthah's ideas were, he at least recognized God's intervention in human events, something to which our culture would do well to pay attention).

“The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah . . . and he advanced against the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: ‘If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.’” God gave Jephthah victory over his enemies, and he returned in triumph to his home in Mizpah. To his utter horror, however, who should come out to meet him but his only daughter! Jephthah had no intention of going back on his promise. His daughter agreed that he should keep his vow and asked if she could have two months to spend with her friends mourning the fact that she would never marry before her father killed her. Jephthah was, of course, completely unjustified in keeping his vow (Deuteronomy 18:9-10), but our society could learn much about the seriousness with which he viewed his promise (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-22).

The story of Jephthah's life concludes with the Ephraimite civil war. It is difficult to understand why Ephraim would complain of a victory given by God for the benefit of all the tribes, but they apparently wanted a share in the glory of the battle. The counter-charges of verses 1-2 could be explained if Jephthah had asked Ephraim for help on a number of occasions and then, when they refused, he had not asked them immediately before he actually went into battle. Imagine Jephthah's anguish at this censure after leading Israel to victory at such great cost (How often are we guilty of this sort of base ingratitude?). Jephthah called together the Gileadites and fought against Ephraim, killing them even as they tried to flee home across the fords of the Jordan. The Gileadites used the password *shibboleth* (meaning an ear of grain) to distinguish between their men and the retreating Ephraimites, whose dialect did not contain the “sh” sound, and so they killed 42,000 of their fellow Israelites. (For comparison, have your students attempt to pronounce a French or Spanish *r* or a German *ch*.)

The story of Jephthah seems barbaric to our culture, yet we can be just as much children of our times as he was. Jephthah seemed to regard God as a fearsome power to be placated in order to obtain favor. The Lord had specifically forbidden human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). To suggest that the Lord could desire such a thing is to malign His character and profane His name. The Lord had put His Spirit upon Jephthah (we see here, as in the case of Samson, that the Spirit's coming upon a person does not mean that all his actions were wise or righteous). He had all the resources necessary to win the battle; all he had to do was ask. Why, then, did Jephthah feel that he had to bargain with God?

A clue is given in Jephthah's peace entreaty to the king of Ammon. He argues, “Will you not take what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever the Lord our God has given us, we will possess” (Judges 11:24). War was regarded at this time not merely as a conflict between people, but as a dispute between territorial gods. Each god was responsible for a certain geographical area, and the people who lived

there had to meet his expectations in order to maintain favor. Like human beings, gods would sometimes have disagreements and would try to take over each other's territories through human agency. However, gods were notoriously capricious, and in order to ensure victory, people (who were greatly affected by the outcome of these battles!) felt they had to do all they could to maintain their god's favor, even if it meant human sacrifice. Jephthah had imbibed these ideas from the society around him as easily as a flower takes in water.

How easily do we do the same? We let the world squeeze us into its mold (cf. Romans 12:2), but, like the frog in gradually heated water, we are unaware that our environment is causing us great harm. Like Jephthah, those who do believe in God try to fashion Him in their own image. They devise a "loving" God Who would never punish anyone, or an absentee Father who allows His children to do what they want, making up their own minds as to what is right and wrong (if, our culture says, such a thing as right and wrong even exists!). A few people, like Jephthah, are afraid of God and try to buy His favor through good works (but no price is sufficient except the blood of His Son). Some "sacrifice" their families to the gods of success, security, pleasure, or even good works.

Like us, Jephthah was a sinner. As an "adventurer" (Judges 11:3), he was quite probably a thief and rogue. Apparently, he had no compunctions about sacrificing whoever would come out of his door when he returned home from battle until that person turned out to be his only child. He did sacrifice his daughter, and even blamed her for this woeful turn of events (Judges 11:35). He led his army to kill 42,000 of their brother Israelites. Yet God used this bandit and illegitimate son for His purposes to win mighty victories. He can use us as well. May we follow the God who has revealed Himself to us in His Word (not the God of our culture or imaginations), and serve Him with a whole heart.

Lesson Procedure

A day or two before class, put a carnation or stalk of celery in water tinted with food coloring. Show your students how the plant has absorbed the color, and use this as an illustration for how we can imbibe the ideas of the world around us. For further illustration, explain how a cold-blooded frog placed in gradually heated water will not leave, but gradually be cooked to death because he does not perceive how his environment has gradually changed. Tell your students that we must be discerning in evaluating our culture and its ideas about God, unlike Jephthah, the man in today's Bible story.

Read and discuss Judges 11:1-12:7, using the material from the Lesson Background and including the following ideas:

- Jephthah was correct in realizing that God sovereignly controls the outcome of wars, but His ideas about how this takes place were mixed up.
- God is not a God to be manipulated.
- We should keep our promises, but vows are not to be made hastily or lightly.
- Just because God uses a person does not mean that everything he does is right or honoring to God.
- We should not be ungrateful and hungry for glory like the Ephraimites.
- God used an adventurer and illegitimate son to serve Him. He can use you, too.
- We should not let the world squeeze us into its mold (Romans 12:2). What ideas about God and life do we take from the world around us? Some areas to consider: movies/TV, dress, use of time and money, sports, honesty, and response to "unfair" authority. See the activity below.

Activity

Have your students role-play situations in which they might be tempted to let the world squeeze them into its mold. Assign groups of two or three students one or more of the topics listed above; they should think of a situation in which a person would be likely to be influenced by the surrounding culture and then act it out. Be sure to bring out to your students how easily their thinking is affected by what goes on around them, even the lifestyles of Christians. Scripture must be our ultimate standard of behavior.

SAMSON'S BIRTH AND VICTORIES

Judges 13-15

Lesson Aim

That your students will understand that our character is more important than our accomplishments, but that God can use even sinful people for His glory.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:19 - "But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways."

Lesson Background

Samson was like no other judge. He sinned brazenly, repeatedly, and seemingly without repentance, yet God used him. Although he appears markedly lacking in leadership qualities (on the contrary, his countrymen readily turned him over to the enemy - 15:11-13), Samson, unlike Abimelech, is referred to by Scripture as a judge (15:20). In fact, the Bible more often mentions the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him than upon any other judge. Samson is even exalted in Hebrews 11:32 as a hero of faith. How do we reconcile these things with Samson's character? The task is difficult, but through our intellectual confusion shines God's sovereignty and abundant grace, giving hope that if He can bless and use Samson, He can work in and through us as well.

God revealed His plans to work through Samson even before his birth. The Angel of the Lord appeared to a barren woman and told her that she would have a son who would be a Nazirite. This meant

that, as an indication that he was set apart to God in a special way, he was to avoid dead bodies, not consume strong drink or any grape product, and never use a razor on his head (Numbers 6:1-21). Usually a person would take a Nazirite vow for a set period of time, but Samson was to be a Nazirite for his entire life. The woman's husband, Manoah, was not present for this announcement, and so he prayed to the Lord that the visitor would return and explain to them how to bring up the boy who was to be born. The Angel of the Lord returned, but rather than answering Manoah's question as to the boy's vocation, He reemphasized the instructions He had given to Manoah's wife. Obedience to God's commands and being set apart to Him is far more important than the actual work we accomplish. In fact, the Angel of the Lord had told Manoah's wife something of his life work, saying that "he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines," but either she did not tell her husband this or he wanted more specific details.

At this time, neither Manoah nor his wife realized the identity of their guest. They probably thought he was a prophet of some sort. Manoah asked him his name and was told that it was *beyond understanding*. This word comes from the same word translated *amazing* in 13:19 and could be translated *wonderful*, as in Isaiah 9:6. Manoah suggested he prepare a meal for his guest, who asked him instead to prepare a burnt offering to the Lord. Manoah did so and, while he and his wife looked on, the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. At this, Manoah and his wife fell face down on the ground. Manoah feared for their very lives, but his wife sensibly argued that, had the Lord been going to kill them, He would not have accepted their burnt offering nor shown and told them all the things He had.

A baby's birth foretold by the Lord Himself; the command that this child would be specially set apart to the Lord from birth and that he would be used by God to fulfill His purposes; what more could any God-fearing parent ask? How did a child of such seeming potential become a man who did so many things contrary to God's law? One can for the most part only speculate, but the text offers some clues. As is often the case with long-awaited sole offspring, Samson was likely a spoiled child. Manoah seemed unwilling to exercise strong leadership in the family. By the time Samson was a young man, his parents would deny him nothing. Marriages at the time were normally arranged by the parents, but Samson broke all proprieties, not merely requesting, but demanding the girl he deemed the right one for him (14:3 - literally "she is right in my eyes," the phrase that sums up the entire book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes" [21:25, KJV]). God had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry with the tribes around them (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3), but Samson chose a Philistine girl, and, after a feeble attempt to dissuade him, his parents assisted him in fulfilling his desires. The Lord, however, chose to use the situation created by the sinful choices of Samson and his parents to bring judgment on the Philistines.

As Samson and his parents approached the vineyards of the girl's town of Timnah, a lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, enabling Samson to tear apart the lion with his bare hands. Apparently Samson had gone ahead, lagged behind, or turned aside from the path for a while, for his parents were unaware of what had occurred. Had Samson been following the Lord's commandments, this incident may never have happened. As it was, God graciously protected him. Samson, however, rather than regarding this as an instance of the Lord's grace, may have regarded it as an occasion for pride. Some time later as he went toward Timnah to marry, he turned aside to examine the lion's carcass. He may have done so to remember God's mercy, but more likely it was to glory in his own accomplishment. Paying no attention to the restrictions of his Nazirite vow, he scooped honey out of the carcass and even gave some to his parents.

In Timnah, a wedding feast was held and Samson was given thirty companions to make merry with him, and also probably to act as bodyguards. He bet them that they could not solve his riddle, which would be practically impossible to do without additional knowledge. This they obtained from Samson's wife, threatening to burn her and her father's household to death if she would not tell them the solution. Samson

realized they could not have figured out the answer to his riddle unless they had “plowed with his heifer” (heifers, by the way, were not normally used in plowing). He went to Ashkelon twenty miles away (to avoid detection?) and struck down thirty men, stripping them of their belongings to pay the debt of his lost bet. Again, it is difficult to understand why the Spirit came upon Samson in power to accomplish such actions (14:19). Yet God, Who can even use the wrath of men to bring Himself praise, often uses imperfect or even evil men to accomplish His purposes (Isaiah 45:1; Acts 3:17-18).

After giving the clothes to those who had explained the riddle, Samson, burning with anger, went up to his father’s house. Later on, however, he wished to visit his wife, and, taking with him a young goat, went to see her. Their relationship may have been a *beena* marriage, in which the wife stayed with her father’s family, but which was in other respects like a conventional marriage. Even the Philistines regarded the girl as Samson’s wife (15:6), but the father gave her to Samson’s friend. Outraged, Samson caught three hundred foxes (possibly jackals) and, fastening a torch to each pair tied tail to tail, set fire to the Philistines’ standing grain. When the Philistines found out that Samson had done this, they, in revenge, burned his wife and her father to death. In turn, Samson slaughtered many Philistines. Three thousand men of Judah, fearful of further Philistine retaliation, went down to the cave where Samson was staying to tie him up and turn him over to their enemy. The Israelites had been tolerating the fairly mild Philistine subjugation, and Samson’s exploits rocked the boat of peaceful co-existence, bringing the Philistine menace out into the open. Samson offered no resistance when the men of Judah promised not to hurt him themselves. They bound him with new ropes and, as they approached the Philistines, the Spirit of God came upon him in power. He broke out of his bonds and killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey, which he found near at hand. The fresh or moist jawbone (15:15) would have been heavier and less brittle than one that had dried out. The place was then called *Lehi* (*jawbone*) because of what happened there. The second phrase in 15:16 has been variously translated, “I have made donkeys of them” and “I have made a heap, two heaps” because, in Hebrew, only the vowel points differ for the words *donkey* and *heap*.

Samson’s achievements may have been motivated more by personal revenge than for the glory of God, but the Lord used him to begin freeing His people from Philistine domination. God often works in ways that are difficult for us to understand, but we can trust Him to do what is best. God used Samson despite his sin, but Samson’s actions cost himself and others dearly. The Lord is a holy and righteous God who must judge sin. As we will see in our further study of Samson’s life next week, the idea is not to see how close one can get to the edge of a cliff without falling over or how much one can get away with without being judged by God. We should instead strive to obey the Lord and to love and serve Him with our whole hearts.

Lesson Procedure

Introduce the lesson approximately as follows: “Do you like to ask your friends riddles? The judge we will learn about today asked a riddle at a wedding. Riddles in that culture were somewhat different from ours, and taken more seriously. We will begin our Bible lesson learning about the birth of this judge, whose name was Samson, but first perhaps you would like to try to answer some riddles.” Ask your class some riddles from the list below (some of these are taken from chapter five of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*).

Riddles

What's black and white and re(a)d all over? [newspaper; embarrassed zebra; sunburned skunk]

What has four wheels and flies? [garbage truck]

What comes in on four legs, walks on two legs, and goes out on three legs? [man crawling, walking, and with cane]

Thirty white horses on a red hill,
First they champ,
Then they stamp,
Then they stand still. [teeth]

A box without hinges, key, or lid,
Yet golden treasure inside is hid. [egg]

This thing all things devours:
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays kings, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down. [time]

The man who made it didn't want it,
The man who bought it didn't use it,
The man who used it didn't know it. [coffin]

I am smaller than a cat, yet a house won't contain all that I can hold
Giants died for my creation yet things long dead will find life in what I've told
I bring gifts to make men wise, encourage them, nourish them and help them be bold
Sometimes I offer poison instead, soul twisting hate, sin making hearts cold
Men have burned me, thrown me out, but others have seen me as worth more than gold. [book]

Move on next to the Bible story, reading and discussing each chapter separately. Focus on God's sovereign working through sinful people and circumstances and the consequences of sin. As you explain the Nazirite vow, discuss how some things, though not wrong in themselves, may be avoided by someone who considers them encumbrances to his walk with God (see II Timothy 2:3-5). Conclude by emphasizing the potential for good that was in Samson's life and is in theirs if they follow the Lord in whole-hearted obedience.

Activity

This may be used both this week and next week. Dramatize the events of Judges 13:1-6 with your students as actors or using puppets (see Grade 5-6 activity instructions for how to construct puppets). This week have your students begin to construct their puppets (if being used) and plan their drama (further planning will be needed next week when you cover Judges 16). They should plan the action that will occur and any dialogue that they do not want to ad lib. Although they may not wish to write an entire play based on Samson's life, the more detailed the description and dialogue, the better the play is likely to be. Perhaps

pairs of students could each be responsible for writing a different part of the story (students will probably require a fair amount of help with this project). Some dialogue may be taken from Scripture itself. You may wish to include the following scenes (the scenes with an asterisk* and some others may be narrated rather than performed, if desired):

- The Angel of the Lord speaks to Manoah's wife.*
- Manoah's wife tells her husband about the man who spoke to her.
- The Angel of the Lord returns and ascends in flame.*
- Samson tells his parents to get the Philistine girl of Timnah for his wife.
- Samson and his parents go to Timnah and, on the way, Samson kills a lion.
- Samson returns to Timnah and, on the way, scoops honey from the lion carcass.
- Samson attends his bridal feast and tells a riddle; his wife finds out the riddle.
- Samson kills thirty Philistines of Ashkelon.*
- Samson goes to visit his wife and finds out she has been given to another man.
- Samson ties foxes' tails together and burns up Philistine grain.
- The Philistines burn Samson's wife and her father. He retaliates and kills Philistines.*
- When men of Judah turn Samson over to the Philistines, he breaks the bonds with which they tie him and kills a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey; God supplies him with water.

(Next week's lesson)

- Samson and Delilah (7 thongs, new ropes, hair in loom, Nazirite).
- Samson's death.

If you prefer, have your students draw a mural of the different events in Samson's life.

SAMSON’S DOWNFALL

Judges 16

Lesson Aim

That your students will understand the importance of unwaveringly obeying God, no matter how others try to influence them to go against His will.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week review Judges 2:11-19.

Lesson Background

Samson was a weak man. What? Samson was a weak man? The same Samson who killed a lion with his bare hands? The same Samson who caught 300 foxes and later killed 1000 men with the jawbone of a donkey? The same Samson who could snap rope as if it were thread? Yes, this Samson was a weak man, for he did not control his desires. Proverbs 16:31 states: “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” God gave Samson great physical strength, but he was mastered by his lusts.

Chapter 16 opens with an example of Samson’s physical prowess and moral degradation. In Gaza, a Philistine city forty miles west of Hebron, Samson spent the night with a prostitute. Hearing of this, the people of Gaza surrounded the city, intending to kill Samson at dawn. “But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron” (16:3). Some versions indicated that he carried the doors, post, and bar actually to Hebron,

but the NIV translation of the phrase *before the face of* Hebron makes more sense. Such an amazing feat of strength seems impossible outside the realm of animated cartoons, but Samson was a real human being, as the turpitude that got him into the predicament reveals. This weakness for women led to Samson's final downfall.

Delilah, who lived in the Valley of Sorek, may not have been a Philistine woman herself, but she was willing to betray Samson into their hands for 1100 shekels (about twenty-eight pounds of silver). Samson had become such a threat to the nation that the rulers of the Philistines themselves asked her to find the reason for his great strength while they waited in hiding to ambush him. Using all her feminine wiles, Delilah tried to extract Samson's secret. Three times Samson lied to her, telling her fresh thongs, new ropes, or weaving his hair in a loom would subdue him. Three times she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you," and each time Samson broke the bonds that held him. Finally he told her the truth.

To the casual reader, Samson's behavior seems unbelievably stupid, but although he was extremely foolish, his actions were not quite as ridiculous as they seem. The questions were asked over a period of days, and the whole story must be seen in the context of a sexual liaison. Also, by this time Samson was probably quite proud of his physical prowess, conveniently "forgetting" that it was God who enabled him to accomplish what he did (note in 16:20 he thought he would shake himself free as easily as before). He, of course, had no idea that the Philistines were actually present. As Samson toyed with Delilah for his own amusement, he came closer and closer to the truth. Like a person who sees how close he can stand near a fire without getting burned, or as close as he can to the "edge of the cliff" morally without actually falling, Samson acted foolishly. This led to his downfall, as the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him to Gaza, the city whose doors he had pulled down. Here he was put to the humiliating work of grinding grain, a task usually reserved for women or donkeys (the Philistines had now made a donkey of him! - cf. 15:16).

"Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god [the god of the grain that Samson had torched] and to celebrate, saying, 'Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.'" The temple where they met was probably two-storeyed with an open central courtyard surrounded by wooden pillars set in stone bases to support the roof. Dignitaries would sit behind the wooden pillars; the rest of the people, in this case about 3000 men and women, would look down into the courtyard from the roof. Samson was brought forth to entertain the Philistines. Samson asked God to give him strength one more time to avenge himself on his enemies. Grasping the supporting pillars of the temple, he pushed with all his might and the temple collapsed, killing many more people in his death than he had when he was living.

Samson was a man of contrasts. He was used by God to subdue the Philistines, he prayed to the Lord, called himself a servant of the Lord, and is listed with such luminaries as Abraham and Moses as a man of faith (Hebrews 11:32). Yet he succumbed to sexual immorality, rage, lying, pride, and disobedience. God used him, but he and others suffered for his sin. God can use us too, in spite of our failures, but we should never take sin lightly. God hates sin. A carpenter may choose to use a rusty, dull adze if nothing else is available, but how much more could be accomplished if the tool were sharp and clean? May we be instruments fit for the Master's use.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by placing a twelve-inch ruler on a block or book so that about six and one half inches of the ruler is resting on the block and the rest is hanging over the edge. Have your students place

pennies on the ruler, seeing who can put a penny (or several pennies) closest to the edge without the ruler toppling. Alternately you may bring in a commercial game such as *Jenga*, *Don't Spill the Beans*, or *The Last Straw*, where the purpose is to see how many blocks (or beans, etc.) may be added (or taken away) without the structure falling.

Tell your students that in life people often try to live too “close to the edge.” They want to get away with as much as they can, as long as they think it is still moral or legal, rather than trying to live as close to God as possible. Samson had been given so much, but seemed to live only for his own pleasure, even though God used him to destroy Israel’s enemies, the Philistines. Again Samson fell in love with a girl who was, in all probability, not an Israelite (God did not want the Israelites to intermarry with foreigners). She tried to find out the secret of Samson’s strength. [Briefly review last week’s lesson, asking what was the secret of Samson’s strength.] Perhaps it wasn’t wrong for him to tell her (although it was at least very foolish), but he teased her, coming closer to the truth each time. Like Samson, some people try to play with coming as close to the line as they can (and even going beyond) without falling off the edge.

Read and discuss Judges 16 as presented in the Lesson Background. Emphasize the importance of complete obedience to God rather than allowing ourselves or others to push us as close as we dare to the “moral edge.”

Activity

Continue preparation for the Samson play and have your class act it out. Use it as a review of the lessons to be learned from the life of Samson.

MICAH AND THE DANITES

Judges 17-18

Lesson Aim

That your students will understand the crucial importance of knowing the true, holy God, and the consequences of having a mere religious veneer.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:20-21 - “Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and said, ‘Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died.’”

Lesson Background

Micah was a religious person. He performed religious duties and wanted the Lord to bless him; even his name (*Micahyahu* - *Who is like Yahweh?* - 17:1,4, or Micah for short) indicates a religious connection. Yet Micah was far from worshiping the Lord in Spirit and truth as God desires (John 4:23-24). The Danites, too, claimed pious interests, but, like Micah, they disobeyed the Lord and worshiped idols.

Micah’s character is revealed as flawed at the outset of the story in Judges 17, and his mother’s character seems to be not much better. Micah admitted to his mother that he had stolen 1100 shekels of silver (about twenty-eight pounds) from her, but confessed only because she had cursed the thief who had taken her money. Curses were regarded very seriously, and their pronouncement deemed to cause actual harm rather than being mere angry outbursts. Micah hoped that his mother would bless him to reverse the malediction, which she indeed did do. In gratitude, she solemnly consecrated her silver to the Lord, but for the purpose of making an image and an idol (the first probably being a carved image plated with silver and

the second a figure of poured, molten silver, both words possibly even describing the same idol)! How horrible and how ironic that money dedicated to God should be used to foster something that He hates, a distortion of His character, and to bring down a curse rather than the desired blessing (Deuteronomy 27:15). As individuals and a church we must be careful we do not do likewise. Also note that, like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), Micah's mother only gave part of the money that she had promised to the Lord.

Having provided himself with objects of worship (the word in 17:5 for idols is *teraphim*, a household god or gods used in divination), Micah made his house a shrine (contrary to Exodus 20:24) and installed his son as priest. When a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah came by, Micah invited him to stay with him and be his priest in return for room, board, clothes, and ten shekels of silver per year (compare this with the 1100 shekels of silver Micah stole). Micah reasoned that if he had a Levite as his priest (actually only the descendants of Aaron were to be priests), God would have to bless him. Micah seems to have had no concept of the Lord as a holy, powerful, and loving God. Like the heathen around him, Micah regarded God as a being to be placated and manipulated so life could go on in a happy way. Micah did not want to know God or follow His precepts, but only to secure His blessings. He thus created a god to his liking (18:24), but this god was unable to keep him from trouble (Isaiah 44:9-20; 46:6-7) as a group Danites came to steal his idols and priest.

The Danites, too, rather than submitting themselves to the Lord, worshiped as they pleased and took things into their own hands. The Lord had promised to give them a certain portion of land, but the Amorites had given them a tough battle for possession. Rather than trusting the Lord and continuing to fight, the tribe of Dan, or at least a portion of that tribe, migrated northward. As they traveled through the hill country of Ephraim, they came to the house of Micah and recognized the voice of the Levite. They asked him why he was there, and upon learning that he was acting as a priest for Micah, they asked him to inquire of the Lord whether or not their journey would be successful. The Levite replied that their journey had the Lord's approval. Five Danites reconnoitered to the north of Ephraim and came to Laish, "where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting and secure" (18:7). Seeing that the land was ideal, with springs of water and far from enemies, they assembled the rest of their group and brutally slaughtered the people of Laish. (On their way, they returned to Micah's house, stole his idols and persuaded the Levite to accompany them.) The destruction of Laish was obviously a terribly evil act. Even though the Levite at Micah's house told the Danites their journey had God's approval, there is no indication that this was so (and a Levite acting as a priest of an idolatrous shrine is hardly the most trustworthy source of revelation from God). Laish was 100 miles north of the territory God had promised the tribe of Dan, and they had no right to be there. However, the author's perceptive comment about Micah's sin applies to the Danites as to the entire book of Judges: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (literally, what was right in his own eyes).

Today, too, most people do what is right in their own eyes. Some of their actions may line up with God's Word, but sin is endemic in our society, as in the time of the judges. And even seemingly inconsequential sins can have far-reaching consequences. Micah's theft led to the making of idols and the hiring of a Levite to be a priest in charge of this false worship. The Danites' sin in leaving their promised territory in the first place and then stealing Micah's god and priest resulted in a place of idolatry that would be a snare to Israel for generations. Sin is serious. However, trying to quash individual sins can be harder than trying to catch popping corn from an open pot. Right behavior begins with a right view of God.

As you teach today's lesson, focus on the vital importance of worshiping and serving God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. Your students are not likely to be tempted to bow down to sticks and stones or silver statues, but anything in our lives that is more important than the Lord or anything we trust in more than the Lord has become a god. If we portray God other than He has shown Himself to be in His Word, we, like Micah and the Danites, commit idolatry. One common way to do this is, like Micah, to think we can

manipulate God if only we pray in a certain way or perform certain good works. We dishonor the Lord if we seek His blessings and not Himself. Another common temptation is that to which the Danites succumbed, being disobedient and taking the easy way out because the battle is long and hard. We must trust God to do what He has promised. As you and your students continue in your study of God's Word, may you see Him more clearly as He is, the one worthy of all our worship and praise.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by having your students draw an imaginary animal, a Martian, elf or any such pretend creature. Compare the pictures, affirming different qualities about each, and ask if it really makes a difference that, for example, Justin thinks Martians are green with ten arms while Lakisha likes orange Martians with four arms. Continue your discussion approximately as follows: "Since Martians are not real, we can make them up to be anything we want them to be. However, this is not true for most things. One might draw a purple cow with ten yellow horns for fun, but if a person seriously maintained that this was a real creature, we would worry! We would never try to draw God on paper, but we all have ideas of what He is like. Where does our 'picture' of God come from? Where should it come from? It is essential that we draw our picture of God from the Bible, where He has revealed who He is. That is one reason it is so important to read and study God's Word. In our Bible story today we will read of people who did not see God the way He really is."

Read and discuss Judges 17-18, using pertinent material from the Lesson Background.

THE BENJAMITE CIVIL WAR

Judges 19-21

Lesson Aim

That your students will better understand the heinous nature of sin and the vital importance of holiness.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:22 - “I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.”

Lesson Background

Sin is a cancer. Like that dreaded disease, it is insidious, oftentimes beginning unnoticed, but multiplying itself and spreading inexorably until there is no remedy. Prompt excision by the surgeon’s knife is the best hope for cure, but if allowed to grow, extensive, radical surgery may be necessary to remove the malignancy. Judges 19-21 vividly illustrates this truth.

These chapters probably took place fairly early in the period of the Judges. The tribes are still willing to unite in a common cause and the Philistines, who gave Israel trouble through the monarchical period, do not seem to be a threat. Also, Aaron’s grandson Phineas is high priest (20:28) and Bethel, not Shiloh, seems to be the major center of worship.

Chapter 19 opens with the story of a Levite from a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim who went to persuade his concubine, who had left him for her father’s house, to return. The girl’s father was glad to see him and persuaded him to stay longer than he had intended. Leaving late on the fifth day, the Levite,

his concubine, and his servant were forced to find shelter for the night. Bypassing Jebus because the Levite did not want to stay with foreigners, the party stopped to spend the night in the Benjamite city of Gibeah. However, contrary to that culture's strong belief in the importance of hospitality, no one offered to take them into their home, even though they had ample provisions for themselves (a host normally supplied the needs of a traveler). Finally, an old man from the hill country of Ephraim who was living in Gibeah saw them sitting in the city square and invited them to stay with him. That night some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the old man send out his guest so they could have sexual relations with him. The old man, seemingly more disturbed that the customs of hospitality would be violated than that the man would be, offered the mob his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine instead. The men would not listen, so the Levite sent his concubine out to them and they abused her until morning. At daybreak, the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, but by the time he left the house that morning, she was dead.

The callousness of the Levite in this story is incredible. Not only did he sacrifice his concubine to save himself, he seems to have had no compassion whatever for her. Rather than anxiously trying to find out what had become of her, he slept, readied himself to travel, and, finding her collapsed on the threshold, said, "Get up; let's go," as if nothing had happened! Only when he discovered that she was dead was his anger aroused, for she was his property and now he could no longer have the use of her. Following the custom of sending the cut-up parts of sacrificial animals to different tribes to summon them together, the Levite cut up his concubine into twelve parts and sent her into all the areas of Israel. Horrified, the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba and from Gilead assembled together at Mizpah. The Levite explained what had happened (completely exonerating himself), and the people agreed to fight against Gibeah to root this sin out of Israel. First, the Israelites sent messengers throughout Benjamin asking them to deal with the sin themselves by surrendering the men of Gibeah to be put to death. But the Benjamites would not listen, and they brought together an army of 26,700 to fight their fellow Israelites. What occurred next illustrates the high price that sometimes must be paid for holiness.

The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God who should be the first to fight against the Benjamites. The Lord said Judah was to go first, which they did, and 22,000 Israelites died. What a discouragement! How easy it would have been for the Israelites to doubt the word of the Lord and go home, maintaining that the price of purity was too high. But they did not do this. The men encouraged one another, took up their positions as they had at first, wept before the Lord and inquired of Him anew. The Lord told them to go up and fight again. They did so and 18,000 more men died. How could the Israelites do anything else but give up in the face of such devastation? Yet, they did not do so. A third time the people presented themselves before the Lord. They wept, fasted, and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to Him. Again, they asked if they should fight their fellow Benjamites. "The Lord responded, 'Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands'" (20:28). This time Israel set an ambush around Gibeah and the Lord defeated Benjamin that day, striking down 25,100 men.

Was it worth the cost? Yes, yes, a thousand times yes. To us the price seems astronomical. All right, most would agree, the actions of the Gibeonites were reprehensible, but that 40,000 men died (to say nothing of the thousands of women and children in the towns - 20:48) to cleanse this sin from Israel appears absurdly disproportionate. Sin, unless blatant, has become such a minor thing to us. Half-truths, lack of diligence, lack of compassion, bitterness, self-centeredness, and little love for or time spent with God, for example, are so commonplace that they are barely even recognized as sinful. Benjamin was unwilling to deal with sin in their midst; they were more loyal to their clan than they were to the Lord. The other Israelites recognized the absolute necessity of eradicating sin. God is holy and wants His people to be holy, individually and corporately.

Yet God, once sin has been dealt with, is a God of infinite love and compassion. The Israelites showed similar concern for their brother Benjamites. As they had fasted, wept, and offered sacrifice to God that they might destroy their sinful brothers (20:26), they fasted, wept, and offered sacrifice again praying for their restoration (21:2,4). They grieved that most of the men of Benjamin had died and that, since they had taken an oath not to do so, they could not give them their own daughters in marriage and so preserve the tribe. A solution presented itself when they realized that the men of Jabesh Gilead had not assembled with them at Mizpah to fight the Benjamites. The Israelites had taken a solemn oath that those who did not gather at Mizpah to help them eliminate this sin would be put to death, suffering the same fate as the Benjamites themselves (21:5). Therefore, the Israelites now sent a force of 12,000 men against Jabesh Gilead, killing everyone except for 400 virgin girls. These they offered to the Benjamites in a gesture of peace. Since these were not enough for all the Benjamites to have a wife, the Israelites instructed them to seize girls from Shiloh who would leave the protection of the city to participate in an annual festival. They assumed that when the situation was explained, the fathers, who normally had an important voice in arranging their daughters' marriages and would receive money for giving away their daughters, would understand, especially since they were not then considered guilty of breaking their oath, since they had not given their daughters away but had them taken from them.

It is easy to dissociate ourselves from stories like this. The culture and actions of the people seem far removed from our everyday lives. Yet our hearts are just as evil and are capable of the same selfishness, callousness, and utter disregard for God and His laws as the Levite and men of Gibeah. Until we believe this and have some understanding of the holiness of God, which demands the eradication of sin even at terrible cost, we will never comprehend God's grace. May God cause us to see our sinfulness and His holiness, that we may worship Him for Who He is and for all He has done in our behalf.

Lesson Procedure

Open the lesson with the following story:

"Did you give your teacher the note like I asked you to?" Jared's mother asked.

"Oh, rats," Jared thought to himself, "I forgot again. Mom's going to kill me."

"Uh, yeah, mom," Jared replied.

"Thank you for doing that," Jared's mother said. "It was really important."

"No problem," Jared shrugged guiltily. He didn't really want to lie, but his mom would have made this big deal about a stupid note. He'd probably have gotten big lecture number 3 on "responsibility and being mature and trustworthy." This way, his mom would never know; she'd be happy because he'd done what she asked and he'd avoid the lecture. "Besides," Jared thought, "it wasn't like I really told a lie. I mean, I'll give my teacher the note tomorrow. What difference does it make?"

Do you think Jared was wrong to respond to his mother as he did? Even if you do, do you really think it was a big deal? Can something that little make a difference? Consider this as you listen to the following story:

Sarah looked anxiously at her parents as they explained the results of her mother's visit to the doctor. "I don't want you to worry," her dad was saying, "but you know how that mole on your mom's arm is looking really funny lately. Well, the doctor said it is cancer, actually melanoma, the worst kind of skin cancer, but, like I said, I don't want you to worry because we've got a very good doctor and, besides, God is in control of this whole situation."

Sarah went to give her mom a hug and looked apprehensively at the mole. She tried to ignore the feeling in the pit of her stomach and the lump that had grown in her throat when she heard the word "cancer."

“Oh, mom, I’m so sorry. I love you so much. But Dad’s right; you’ll be all right; I know it.” Sarah hugged her mom again and tried to sort out her jumbled thoughts. “Dad, I know this is going to sound really stupid, but what exactly is cancer besides a horrible disease? Oh, I’m sorry, mom, I didn’t mean . . .”

“That’s all right, honey, it is a horrible disease,” her mom replied.

Sarah’s father began to answer her question. “God made the cells of your body to be able to divide to make new cells to replace those that die. Sometimes something happens and the cells start dividing like crazy, much more than they are supposed to, and they start killing the healthy cells around them. This can happen in different parts of a person’s body and can spread to other parts. That is what makes it so dangerous. But Doctor Jones thinks your mother’s cancer has not spread, so he should be able to cut it out. There will probably be some scarring, but he thinks he can get rid of it all so it will not invade other parts of her body and do more damage.”

“Wow,” said Sarah, “cells are so small you can’t even see them without a microscope. It’s hard to believe that something that tiny can do so much damage.”

Sometimes something small can be horribly destructive. Jared did not think his lie made much difference. What kind of consequences could it have had? Even, however, if it had no earthly consequences, it was an offense against a holy God whose standard is absolute perfection. Matthew 5:48 says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.” Today’s Bible story will look at the consequences of sin when “every man does what is right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25, KJV).

Read and discuss Judges 19-21 using information from the Lesson Background. You should include the material presented in the sample discussion questions below.

Like many of the other stories in Judges, chapters 19-21 show the destructiveness of sin and the importance of holiness. Do you want to live a holy life? How concerned are you about holiness in yourself and others? Are you willing to suffer what it will cost to get rid of sin? Don’t minimize the question. *It will cost*, but it will be worth it. We have talked about coming close to the line. Let’s again think about ways in which we can be tempted to do that. Is it only your parents’ rules that keep you from watching certain things on TV, or would you avoid doing so even if they would never find out? What standards would you keep if your parents were not there to enforce them? What should be our attitude toward those around us who sin? Will our response differ depending on whether or not they are Christians? (The Benjamites were fellow Israelites; Israel also fought the sinful tribes who lived around them; how were these situations the same/different?) After Israel fought the Benjamites they offered them their help; what can we learn from this?

RUTH

Ruth 1-2

Lesson Aim

That your students will see the importance having such godly character qualities as kindness, thankfulness, respect, and diligence, as did Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.

Memory Verse

This quarter, Judges 2:11-23; this week, Judges 2:23 - “The Lord had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.”

Lesson Background

As one reads the book of Judges, with its saga of idolatry, judgment, wars and oppression, he may forget the lives of the ordinary people of the time, some of whom worshiped the Lord and sought to obey His precepts. The words and actions of the major characters in the book of Ruth evidence a commitment to God. Next week you will examine the message of the book of Ruth as a whole, but today you will concentrate on how we should emulate the character traits shown by Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in Ruth 1-2.

The book opens with a man from Bethlehem named Elimelech deciding to migrate, along with his wife Naomi and two sons Mahlon and Kilion, to Moab since there was a severe famine in the land of Judah. Conditions were probably quite bad. People emigrated only in desperate circumstances, for moving meant not only leaving family and friends, but also one’s territorial god. As believers in Jehovah, Elimelech’s family should have known that the Lord is God over the whole earth, but false beliefs rampant in Israel may have had an effect. In any case, moving to an unknown place among people of another culture would not have been easy.

After an unspecified time, Elimelech died. His sons married Moabite women, but after they had lived in Moab ten years (or possibly after having been married ten years), Elimelech's sons also died. Hearing that the Lord had provided food in Israel, Naomi determined to return to her own people. Her daughters-in-law, having great affection for Naomi, followed, but she attempted to dissuade them from coming with her. Naomi must have made a great impression on Orpah and Ruth if they were willing to abandon family, friends, gods, and the possibility of marriage to follow her into an unknown land. Naomi's concern for Orpah and Ruth is evident in Ruth 1:8-15. Kindness is a theme of the book of Ruth, not only the love people show to each other, but the lovingkindness (*chesed*) of God. This word (Ruth 1:8) implies a covenantal obligation and compassionate acts of the powerful for the weak. It is difficult to understand why Naomi would urge her daughters-in-law to return to their gods (Ruth 1:15). Perhaps she was trying to make sure of their commitment to follow her in light of the difficulties it would entail. However, Naomi's devotion was not to Chemosh, god of the Moabites, but was still to Jehovah, Whom she asks to bless Orpah and Ruth. Yet Naomi seemed to hold some anger against God for the difficult circumstances of her life (Ruth 1:13, 20-21). She told the townswomen of Bethlehem to call her Naomi (*pleasant*) no longer, but Mara (*bitter*).

The book of Ruth presents snapshot portraits of three people, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, from whom we can learn much. All three speak honorably of the Lord (Naomi - 1:8-9, 21; Ruth - 1:16-17; Boaz - 2:4, 12, 15-16). Naomi, although bitter about the circumstances of her life, seemed to care about her daughters-in-law. Their reluctance to part with Naomi gives mute testimony to her character of life that would cause them to be so loath to leave her. Ruth's character can likewise be seen in the concern she shows for her mother-in-law. She willingly left family and friends to follow Naomi to a strange land with different customs. Upon arrival in Israel, she took the initiative to provide for the family by gleaning. God had commanded that farmers leave some of the harvest for the poor of the land so they could sustain themselves (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-24). To *glean* was to gather these leftover crops. Ruth worked hard to provide for herself and Naomi (2:2, 6-7, 17-18). She was kind (1:8; 2:11, 18), loyal (1:16-18), respectful (2:2) and thankful for the smallest blessings rather than being demanding or complaining (2:10). Boaz, too, showed kindness to those who were subservient to him (2:4, 8-9, 13-14).

Boaz' kindness is seen most clearly in his role as *kinsman-redeemer* (גאָל - *goel*). This concept involved caring for the weak and destitute in one's family. A man was to marry his brother's widow. The first son she bore was to carry the dead brother's name so "his name will not be blotted out from Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The nearest relative was also to buy back the family land (see also Leviticus 25:25-28, 35, 47-48). Next week you will examine further Boaz' actions in this regard. Today's lesson offers sufficient challenge to emulate the godly qualities of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, and so to be more conformed to the image of Christ.

Lesson Procedure

You may wish to introduce the lesson by having your students make a **Funny People Booklet**. To make the booklet, staple several sheets of paper together. Make two cuts, almost up to the staples, separating the booklet into thirds. On the top third of the first page, have your student draw a head, on the middle third a matching body to the waist, and on the bottom third the person from the waist down. On each subsequent page the student should draw different-looking people in the same manner. The drawings should be quickly done, not great works of art. Your students may then have fun with their booklets by mixing and matching different heads, bodies, and feet. If you prefer, one booklet can be made for the entire class by handing out paper with the cut lines already marked; the students draw their pictures and then the pages are assembled into booklet form. An alternative way to do this activity is to have your students draw the heads, bodies, and legs of each of their characters on three different index cards. Play a game with the cards by spreading them out face down on the table. When it is a student's turn, he chooses three cards, attempting to pick a head,

body, and legs card (but the head, body, and legs do not have to belong to the same person). If he succeeds, he keeps the cards; if not, he puts all three cards back on the table where they were, showing the other players the cards as he puts them down. Play continues, and the player with the most cards wins. The point of this activity is to emphasize the fact that people have different characteristics. They have different color eyes, hair, and skin; one may have large ears, another long legs, or another freckles. What they look like on the outside, however, is not what is important, but what they are like on the inside. In today's lesson your students will see "pictures" of three people: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Tell you students that as you read the Bible story, they should try to figure out what good and bad qualities these people had.

Read and discuss Ruth 1 and 2, then do the worksheet as a class.

Character Matching

Match the verse with the characteristic shown by the person. Some verses show more than one characteristic, so they are listed twice.

Naomi

Ruth 1:8

Ruth 1:8-9, 21

Speaks of God

Ruth 1:20-21

Thankful

Ruth

Ruth 1:16-17

Loyal

Ruth 1:16-18

Respectful

Ruth 1:8; 2:11, 18

Ruth 2:2

Kind, Concerned for Others

Ruth 2:2, 6-7, 17-18

Bitter

Ruth 2:10

Boaz

Diligent, Hard Worker

Ruth 2:4, 12, 15-16

Ruth 2:8-9, 13-14

What if . . .

Imagine how the story of Ruth would have been different if Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz had not shown the character traits listed above. Discuss this and rewrite what might have happened had even one of these qualities differed. Think about how your life might change if you put these God-honoring characteristics (except, of course, for bitterness, which displeases God) into practice. Ask God to help you work on one trait this week, for it is only He who can change you on the inside and make you the person He wants you to be.

RUTH

Ruth 3-4

Lesson Aim

That your students will recognize God's sovereign hand in the book of Ruth and in their lives, and be thankful for the redemption wrought by Ruth's descendant, Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse

Review Judges 2:11-23.

Lesson Background

The story of Ruth, begun in the first two chapters studied last week, continues, culminating in Ruth's marriage to Boaz. Naomi, no longer thinking marriage for her daughter-in-law impossible, had a plan to secure Ruth a husband. Ruth agreed to do what Naomi advised and went to the threshing floor of Boaz. A threshing floor, located in an open place, was merely a level patch of beaten earth or stone on which crops were flailed to separate the grain from the chaff. The harvest was then tossed into the air and the lighter chaff was blown away, leaving the good grain. After the day's threshing was done and Boaz fell asleep at the far end of the grain pile, Ruth uncovered his feet and lay down. When Boaz awoke to discover a woman at his feet in the middle of the night, Ruth asked him to spread the corner of his garment over her, since he was a kinsman-redeemer(*גאול* - *goel*). Ruth's actions indicated that she wanted to come under Boaz' protection, that she wanted him to marry her. Boaz viewed Ruth's request as a great kindness (an amazing statement since she was the foreigner dependent on his mercy), but said that a nearer relative had first priority if he wanted to claim Ruth as his own. In the morning, Boaz sent Ruth back to Naomi with more grain and promised her with a strong vow (3:13) that, if possible, he would redeem her. The nearer kinsman was

unwilling to marry Ruth because in so doing he would jeopardize his own estate, since Ruth's first son would share his inheritance, but as a son of Mahlon (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Boaz then gladly bought the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon and Ruth as his wife. So Boaz married Ruth and they had a son, Obed (*servant*), who became the father of Jesse, the father of David, the forefather of Jesus.

Although the New Testament does not speak of Ruth in any typological way, some have regarded the book of Ruth as a picture of the Gospel, and there are certainly some strong parallels from which we can learn. As a foreigner, Ruth had no hope of receiving anything good. She was completely dependent on the provision of Boaz. Boaz sought Ruth out and was kind to her. Ruth asked Boaz to protect her and marry her. Boaz willingly agreed and bought her from someone who had prior claim to her. Ruth married Boaz and shared in his inheritance. An alien, outcast from God's people, Ruth was brought into a covenant family (I Peter 2:1) and became an instrument to glorify God.

We can also learn from the godly characters of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, as your students saw last week, but perhaps the most significant theme in the book is God's sovereign kindness. Step by step the Lord brought about events and brought people together to fulfill His purpose. A famine led Naomi's family to Moab; her boys married Moabite girls; Mahlon and Kilion died; conditions improved in Israel and Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem; Ruth returned with her, but Orpah stayed in Moab; Ruth "happened" to glean in Boaz' field; Boaz noticed Ruth and was kind to her; the nearer kinsman did not want to jeopardize his inheritance by marrying Ruth. Circumstance piled upon circumstance, the altering of any one of them changing the end of the story. God is in control of our lives as well. Sometimes it seems as if God is no longer in control of our lives, or if He is, that He does not care for us. Naomi apparently felt this way in light of the trials she endured (famine, leaving home for a strange land, loss of her husband and two sons), for she asked the townspeople no longer to call her Naomi (*pleasant*) but Mara (*bitter*). Yet, as difficult as these things were, God had a purpose in them. Like Job (Job 42:10, 12-17), Naomi was blessed by God and once again knew the happiness of a loving family. While the Lord sovereignly ordered the lives of Boaz, Ruth and Naomi and her family, showing great kindness to them, His plan had a more far-reaching scope. God purposed to have Ruth and Boaz be the forebears of King David, the forefather of Jesus Christ. With complete wisdom, God prepared and protected the lineage of His own Son, Jesus Christ, Who came to be the true Redeemer of His people, chosen before the creation of the world (Ephesians 3:4). For this we praise Him!

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students if they ever felt that God did not care about what happened in their lives or that, if He did, He was not powerful enough to stop it. Naomi had experienced many trials to the point where she was bitter against God. Ask your students if they remember from last week what these troubles were, and use this discussion to review Ruth 1-2 and lead into today's Bible story. Read Ruth 3-4 and discuss, focusing on God's sovereign love toward Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, and how God does care and have the power to work in His people's lives today. Show how God's working in the individual lives of the people in the book of Ruth was all part of His larger plan to send the Messiah, God's Son, to redeem His chosen people. You may also help your students find Gospel parallels in the book of Ruth. After discussing the story, act it out using the following script.

THE STORY OF RUTH

Characters (*major roles; students should play multiple minor roles)

*Narrator

Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion

*Naomi

Orpah

*Ruth

*Boaz

nearer kinsman-redeemer

townswomen, foreman, harvesters, elders and townspeople at gate

Props: Bundles of household and farming implements, water jar, flail, winnowing fork, bread, a large basket, flowing garment or cape for Boaz, shawl, sandal. Substitutions can be made for these items, or you may choose to do the play without props, pantomiming them instead.

Act 1

Narrator: In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, so a man from Bethlehem in Judah named Elimelech, together with his wife Naomi and sons, Mahlon and Kilion, went to live in Moab (*these characters should pantomime being hungry and not having food, packing up their belongings, and leaving for Moab; as the narration continues, the other actions of which he speaks should be mimed as well*). Then Elimelech died and Naomi was left alone with her two sons. They married Moabite women, Kilion a girl named Orpah and Mahlon a girl named Ruth. After about ten years, Mahlon and Kilion died. When she heard that the Lord had provided food for people in Israel, Naomi decided to return home. Orpah and Ruth tried to follow her.

Naomi: Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. (*Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth embrace and weep*).

Orpah, Ruth: We will go back with you to your people.

Naomi: Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons - would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me! (*they weep again; Orpah leaves*) Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.

Ruth: Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. (*Naomi and Ruth travel to Bethlehem, where they are greeted by a group of townswomen*).

Women: Can this be Naomi?

Naomi: Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

Act 2

Ruth: Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.

Naomi: Go ahead, my daughter. (*Ruth goes and pantomimes gleaning*).

Boaz: (*to harvesters*) The Lord be with you!

Harvesters: The Lord bless you!

Boaz: Whose young woman is that?

Foreman: She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.

Boaz: (*to Ruth*) My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.

Ruth: (*Ruth bows down with face to ground*) Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?

Boaz: I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband - how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth: May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord. You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant - though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls. (*Ruth continues working while Boaz supervises his workers helping here and there. Then he sits down to eat and Boaz calls to her*).

Boaz: Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar (*Ruth does so and then gets up to glean. Out of her hearing, Boaz speaks to his harvesters.*) Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles, leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her (*Ruth continues to glean and carries the barley back to Naomi*).

Naomi: Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!

Ruth: The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz.

Naomi: The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.

Ruth: He even said to me, “Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.”

Naomi: It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.

Narrator: So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Act 3

Narrator: One day, Naomi and Ruth were talking.

Naomi: My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.

Ruth: I will do whatever you say (*Ruth should pantomime the actions Naomi described; Boaz should pantomime eating and drinking, lying down to sleep and then waking up to discover Ruth at his feet*).

Boaz: Who are you?

Ruth: I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz: The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning (*Both Ruth and Boaz sleep*). Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor. Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.

Naomi: How did it go, my daughter?

Ruth: *ad lib* “wait till you hear. . .” or similar words, and then have Ruth pantomime talking to Naomi, ending with: He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, “Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.”

Naomi: Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.

Act 4

- Narrator: Meanwhile, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there until the nearer kinsman-redeemer came along.
- Boaz: (*gathering several elders to him*) Sit here (*they do so*). Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.
- Kinsman-Redeemer: I will redeem it.
- Boaz: On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.
- Kinsman-Redeemer: Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it. Buy it yourself (*Nearer kinsman-redeemer removes his sandal and gives it to Boaz*).
- Boaz: Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!
- People: We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.
- Narrator: So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. The Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. They named him Obed, and Naomi took care of him. Obed was the father of Jesse who was the father of King David. And David was the forefather of the Lord Jesus Christ.