

UNION BAPTIST CHURCH
BIBLE STUDY – CHRISTIANITY 101
TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025

Stan Campbell, *Bible to Go: Genesis to Revelation in One Hour*, (New York: Faith Words, 2006)

Settling Down – Building a Nation

So far in our rapid journey through the Bible, the action has moved from Mesopotamia to Israel, to Egypt, and back to Israel again (the promised land). It is here that the action will take place for a while. Sadly, the people will eventually be forced to leave, but for the next few centuries they will be settling in.

The Judges

The “judges” of this biblical era are by no means what we imagine when we think of courtrooms, flowing robes, and rules of order. The biblical judges are warrior leaders of the nation, called by God to confront powerful enemies during rough and barbaric times. After the people have settled in the promised land, it doesn’t take long for the spiritual commitment of Israel to decline and then disappear altogether. The motto of this era is well described in the final verse of the book of Judges: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25).

The book of Judges describes a repeated cycle:

- (1) People forget about God,
- (2) God allows various enemies to conquer and rule the Israelites,
- (3) The Israelites repent and cry out to God for help,
- (4) God calls a judge to confront and defeat Israel’s enemies,
- (5) The nation has a lengthy time of peace and freedom. And each time, the people again forget about God, starting yet another cycle.

Of the thirteen or so judges who rule, the better ones are Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

Deborah (Judges chapters 4-5)

The judge of this era should be a man named Barak, but he is a hesitant leader.

Deborah is a prophetess who tells Barak what he should do, but his reluctance to respond

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results in Deborah taking the lead. In addition to Deborah and her leadership, another woman helps end Israel's oppression. Although Deborah and Barak have already routed the enemy, the opposing leader (Sisera) has escaped and is hiding in the tent of a friend. But the wife of that friend, a woman named Jael, puts the evil leader to sleep and then drives a tent peg through his head (Judges 4:17-22).

Gideon (Judges chapter 6-8)

Gideon is definitely not the world's dynamic leader. When we first see him, he is threshing wheat in a winepress to avoid being seen by the vicious Midianites, who would most certainly help themselves to his grain. Nevertheless, an angel suddenly appears and says: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12). Gideon does everything God asks of him, even when he doesn't seem to have a lot of confidence in himself. He is the one who asks for a sign from God by placing a wood fleece on the ground and asking that in the morning the fleece be wet with dew while the ground be completely dry: And when God does as Gideon asks, Gideon asks for the reverse to occur. The next morning the ground is covered with dew, but the fleece is dry (Judges 6:36-40).

God wants to show Gideon what He, God, can do. Gideon has an army of thirty-two thousand soldiers, but God tells him to send home everyone who is scared. Immediately, twenty-two thousand men leave. Then God reduces the remaining ten thousand to only three hundred (Judges 6:6-7). And even then, by following God's instructions, the three hundred Israelites defeat the entire Midianite army using torches, pitchers, and trumpets rather than swords. A God-initiated panic caused the Midianites to turn on one another and flee. Thanks to Gideon, the Israelites experienced peace for forty (40) years (Judges 7:1-25).

Samson (Judges 13-16)

Samson is Gideon's opposite. At God's instructions, Samson's parents raise him as a Nazarite, which means in part that he will never drink wine, eat grape products, or get a haircut (Numbers 6:1-21). Other biblical Nazarites were the prophet Samuel (I Samuel 1:11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15).

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God has given Samson extraordinary strength, which Samson takes for granted. He disregards his parents' wishes, goes where he wants, gets into fights, and is a sore loser when outsmarted. Even so, God uses Samson to retaliate against the Philistines, who are oppressing Israel at the time. Samson sleeps with their women, single-handedly kills a thousand of their men in a skirmish, removes and carries away their city gates, and escapes every time they try to trap him.

So, the Philistines use Samson's self-interest against him. Samson falls in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah (Judges 16), whom the other Philistines hire to find the secret of his strength. He holds out for a while, but eventually he lets her know that his strength is connected to his long hair (Judges 16:17). When he awakes from a nap, he discovers he is bound and has had a haircut. For the first time in his life, he is helpless.

The Philistines blind Samson and force him to work for them. But when his hair grows back out, his strength returns. At a large religious gathering where the Philistines are making fun of Samson, he pulls down the central pillars of their temple, killing thousands of Philistines and dying in the process.

Next Week's Focus:

- King Saul (I Samuel chapters 8-31)
- David (I Samuel chapters 16 through 2 Samuel 24), and
- Solomon (I Kings chapter 1-11)

Note: Please continue to read the above chapters in preparation of our Bible Study's discussion. Your thoughts and feedback help to develop group understanding of the material covered. Please feel free to ask questions, send follow-up emails, and text for further discussion.