

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit www.UjimaChurch.org

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11 - Highlights from Judges 3 - 9, "Othniel to Abimelech"

After the death of Joshua and the generation of those who entered the Promised Land with him, the Israelites turned to the wicked and idolatrous ways of the people around them, worshiping false gods like the Baals and Asheroth. The Lord withdrew his protective hand from Israel, punishing them just as he said he would do if they broke His covenant, and the king of Mesopotamia rose up and oppressed Israel for eight years (Judges 3). The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel, the nephew of Caleb, who led Israel into battle against the king of Mesopotamia and was victorious. Othniel judged Israel through forty years of peace, but after he died, the people fell back into the ways of the wicked and then were oppressed by Eglon, the king of Moab, for eighteen years. The people cried out to the Lord and when Ehud of the Tribe of Benjamin went to pay the tribute King Eglon demanded, Ehud told him that he had a secret that could only be spoken in private. When the king dismissed his guard to hear the secret, Ehud assassinated King Eglon with a sword he had concealed under his garments. Escaping capture by Eglon's guards, Ehud summoned the people to follow him and led Israel to victory over the Moabites. For eight years, there was peace. When the Philistines then rose up against Israel, Shamgar saved the Israelites from them, killing 600 Philistines with a mere oxgoad.

After Ehud died, the people sinned against the Lord and were oppressed by Jabin, a Canaanite king, whose army had 900 chariots of iron (Judges 4). The prophetess and judge Deborah told Barak of the Tribe of Naphtali that the Lord commanded him to gather an army and go to battle against King Jabin and his forces. Barak was reluctant to go unless Deborah went with him. So, Deborah agreed, but told him that the glory of the victory would be given to a woman. General Sisera, with his army and 900 chariots of iron, engaged Barak and his army. The Lord was with Barak and Deborah against Sisera's forces and they were defeated. Sisera escaped and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of one of his allies. But, after Sisera refreshed himself and had fallen asleep, Jael hammered a tent peg through his skull, killing him as he slept. King Jabin was defeated and Deborah and Barak praised the Lord in song (Judges 5). There was peace for forty years.

Again, the people did evil and the Lord allowed the Midianites to oppress them for seven years, ravaging the land. The people cried out to

the Lord for deliverance. The Angel of the Lord then appeared to a man named Gideon, telling him that he was to save Israel from the Midianites. To prove his word, the Angel of the Lord caused Gideon's preparation of a gift of food to be consumed by fire as he vanished. The Lord then spoke to Gideon, calming his fears over the miraculous appearance. After tearing down the altars to the false gods Baal and Asherah in his hometown, Gideon sounded the trumpet call, summoning the men to fight. An army formed in support of him and Gideon asked the Lord for a sign for reassurance. Placing a fleece on the ground, he asked the Lord to cause the fleece to become wet with the morning dew, but the ground to remain dry. When the Lord did this, Gideon asked him to do the opposite on the next morning, which the Lord also did. After such reassuring signs, the Lord chose to put Gideon's faith to the test by reducing his forces so that it would be clear that the victory would be from the Lord and not military might (Judges 7). God told Gideon to tell anyone who was fearful to go home, and his forces were reduced from 22,000 to 10,000. Then the Lord told Gideon to take his men to the waterside and divide them based on how they drank. When this was done, Gideon only had 300 men left to fight an army so vast it was like the sand on the seashore. The Lord told Gideon to take his servant and sneak into the Midianite encampment by night; there he heard two Midianite warriors discussing a dream that they interpreted to mean that Gideon would defeat them by the hand of God. Emboldened by this sign from the Lord, Gideon divided his men into three companies of 100 each and gave them empty jars with torches inside. When Gideon's company sounded their trumpets, all the companies also blew their trumpets and broke their jars to let the torchlights show as they also shouted. The commotion sent the enemy forces into a panic, attacking each other and fleeing. Gideon's small fighting force pursued the enemy army as Gideon also sent messengers to the nearby Israelite tribes, asking them to send fighters to assist in the pursuit of the retreating Midianites. And, Gideon defeated the Midianites because the hand of the Lord was with him.

After his victory, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon their king, but he refused, choosing instead to take part of the spoils of gold to make an ephod to place in his city as a commemoration of the victory (Judges 8). Gideon, also called "Jerubbaal," judged Israel through forty years of peace. He had many wives and seventy sons and lived to a ripe old age. But, when he died, the people, including members of Gideon's own family, began to worship idols again, even worshiping his ephod as an idol!

After Gideon died, one of his sons, Abimelech, convinced his mother's clan in Shechem to let him rule over them. When they agreed, he killed his brothers! Only one escaped, who prophesied a curse against him. His tyrannical 3 year reign ended as he besieged a tower stronghold and a woman threw a millstone on him, crushing his head. Abimelech ordered his own armor bearer to finish him off with a sword.