

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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12- Highlights from Judges 10-16, "Jephthah and Samson"

The cycle of sin that has been apparent in the book of Judges continues: as people stray from the Lord... He then withdraws His protection as He said He would... their enemies rise and oppress them... they cry to the Lord for deliverance... the Lord sends a judge as His instrument of rescue... and the people are faithful during the judge's life, but when the judge dies, the people again abandon the Lord and turn to idols - and the cycle repeats. As the people sinned and turned to worship foreign gods, the Philistines and Ammonites rose up and, for eighteen years, oppressed the Israelites that lived on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Then they gathered to attack the tribes on the western side of the river. This caused the Israelites to cry out for the Lord to deliver them (Judges 10).

The enemy crossed the Jordan and prepared to attack a place called "Gilead," but the Israelites of Gilead had no warrior to lead them. They turned to a man named "Jephthah," who was a mighty warrior, but had been an outcast (Judges 11). Yet, in this time of distress, the elders of Gilead promised Jephthah that he would be the head over them if he came to fight for them. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah and embolden him to go into battle against the enemies of his people. However, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that turned out to be unnecessary and unwise; he promised that if the Lord would give him victory over the enemy, whatever came out of his home when he returned he would offer as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Lord gave Jephthah and his forces victory over the enemy. But, when Jephthah returned home, his daughter, his only child, joyfully came out to meet him. In great grief, Jephthah told her of his vow to the Lord. She asked to be allowed to go to the mountains with her closest friends for two months to mourn and promised to return so that her father could keep his vow. When she returned, Jephthah did as he had promised. Even though he had led Israel to a surprising and overwhelming victory, Jephthah did not truly understand that the Lord neither required that he make such a vow, nor would it have been within God's will for the girl to be sacrificed. But, pagan ways infected the worldview of the people.

In the wake of his victory, a civil war broke out between the people of Gilead and the people of Ephraim and Jephthah defeated the Ephraimites in battle (Judges 12). Jephthah judged Israel for six years.

The cycle of sin continued as other judges came and went and the people again did what was evil in the site of the Lord and fell under the oppression of the Philistines. The Angel of the Lord appeared to a woman of the tribe of Dan, the wife of a man named, "Manoah." The woman was unable to have children, but the angel told her that she would conceive and bear a son who would be a "Nazirite," which meant that he was to always live under a special vow and was never to drink any form of alcohol nor cut his hair. The Angel of the Lord said that this child would deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. Later, the Angel of the Lord confirmed this promise to both the woman and to her husband, Manoah, disappearing before their eyes in the flames of fire as Manoah made a burnt offering to the Lord (Judges 13).

Just as had been promised, the woman bore a son and named him "Samson." Samson judged Israel for 20 years and God gave him incredible physical strength. So much so, he was able to defeat an attacking lion with his bare hands (Judges 14), snap strong ropes that bound him, defeat 1000 Philistines with nothing more than the jawbone of a donkey as a weapon (Judges 15), and even tear a city's gate doors up from the ground and carry them to the top of a nearby hill (Judges 16). Yet, this "one-man army" was unwise in matters of romance. He fell in love with a woman named "Delilah" who had been paid by the Philistines to learn the secret of his great strength. Three times, Samson lied to her about the secret of his strength, and each of those three times Delilah acted on the information, summoning his enemies to ambush him as he slept in her home. And, each time Samson awakened with all of his strength intact and defeated those who sought to capture him. Not learning the lesson that Delilah was not to be trusted, Samson was seduced into finally telling her that if his head was shaved, his Nazirite vow would be broken, and his strength would be gone. Once again, Delilah betrayed him, calling a man to shave off the locks of Samson's hair as he slept. When the Philistines came upon him, they were able to defeat him because the Lord was no longer with him and his strength was gone. The Philistines gouged out his eyes, shackled him, and put him to hard labor in prison. As time passed, Samson's hair grew back.

One day the Philistines had a great celebration to their false god, "Dagon." Praising Dagon for giving Samson into their hands, they brought Samson from the prison to make a spectacle of him. He asked to be able to lean against the pillars that supported the building. Samson then prayed to the Lord that his strength might be returned one last time. He stretched out his hands to the pillars and pressed against them with all of his strength, and the building came crashing down on the 3000 Philistines who had gathered to celebrate their false god. Samson's family gathered his remains and buried him in the tomb of his father.

Even as Israel's judges occasionally displayed poor judgement, the Lord was still working His plan and using them to protect and deliver his people.

