

THE BIBLE

in a nutshell

Judges

—by Peter Hammond



"Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan." Judges 3:1

Contrasts	
Joshua	Judges
Conquest Faith Obedience People are united God's Word is central	Defeat Unbelief Disobedience People in division and anarchy God's Word is neglected



Two themes:

1. Faithfulness of the Covenant keeping God,
2. Unfaithfulness of the Covenant breaking people.

- Judges is a record of man's sin, God's judgement, God's grace and deliverance
- Judges show us man's potential for greatness and capacity for catastrophe
- From conquest in Joshua we see compromise and chastisement in Judges (see Judges 2:10).

Judges reflects

- 7 apostasies,
- 7 seven servitudes,
- 7 deliverances.

In Judges we see again and again the truth, that what you sow is what you reap. There are consequences for incomplete obedience: forced labour and servitude under foreign oppression. God's Word had been clear, there was to be no peace treaties, inter-marriages, or religious syncretism. No peaceful coexistence with paganism. "Another generation arose... who did not know the Lord, nor the work which He had done." Judges 2:10.

The consequences of sin

Sin leads to servitude. Sin leads to slavery and suffering. However supplication and seeking the Lord leads to salvation. When God's people repented, the Lord raised up

a judge to deliver them.

"When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer...who delivered them." Judges 3:9.

The people lost fellowship with God by incomplete obedience. They neglected God's Word and became tolerant of the paganism that God had commanded them to destroy.

God's strategy for complacency

Judges 3:1-2: God's strategy for

The Judges of Israel

Following the conquest of Canaan by Joshua until the formation of the first Kingdom of Israel, the Israelite Tribes formed a loose confederation. No central government existed in this confederation and in times of crisis, the people were led by ad hoc leaders known as judges.

These judges consisted of eleven men and one woman. The judges often administered justice in legal matters, but most judges acted primarily as military leaders in times of war. These leaders were sent by God to deliver the people; after the threat had passed, the judge was generally expected to give up their position as military leaders. God uses people who step out in faith, who trust Him and have the courage to confront the enemy.



complacency. He turns sins into scourges that He might teach His people how to trust Him in battle. This is God's plan, that His people might be trained, purged, purified and prepared through conflict to advance. Are you a spectator, or a soldier?

A test

The Lord left the heathen amongst them "that He might test Israel by them,

Deborah

Deborah saw a need and was determined to do something about it. She enlisted qualified help, confronted Barak with God's command, strengthened her general with God's promises and developed a plan. The armies of Israel were to meet the enemy at his strongest point, on the plain.

Although Israel was out-manoeuvred, out-supplied and out-positioned, God in- »

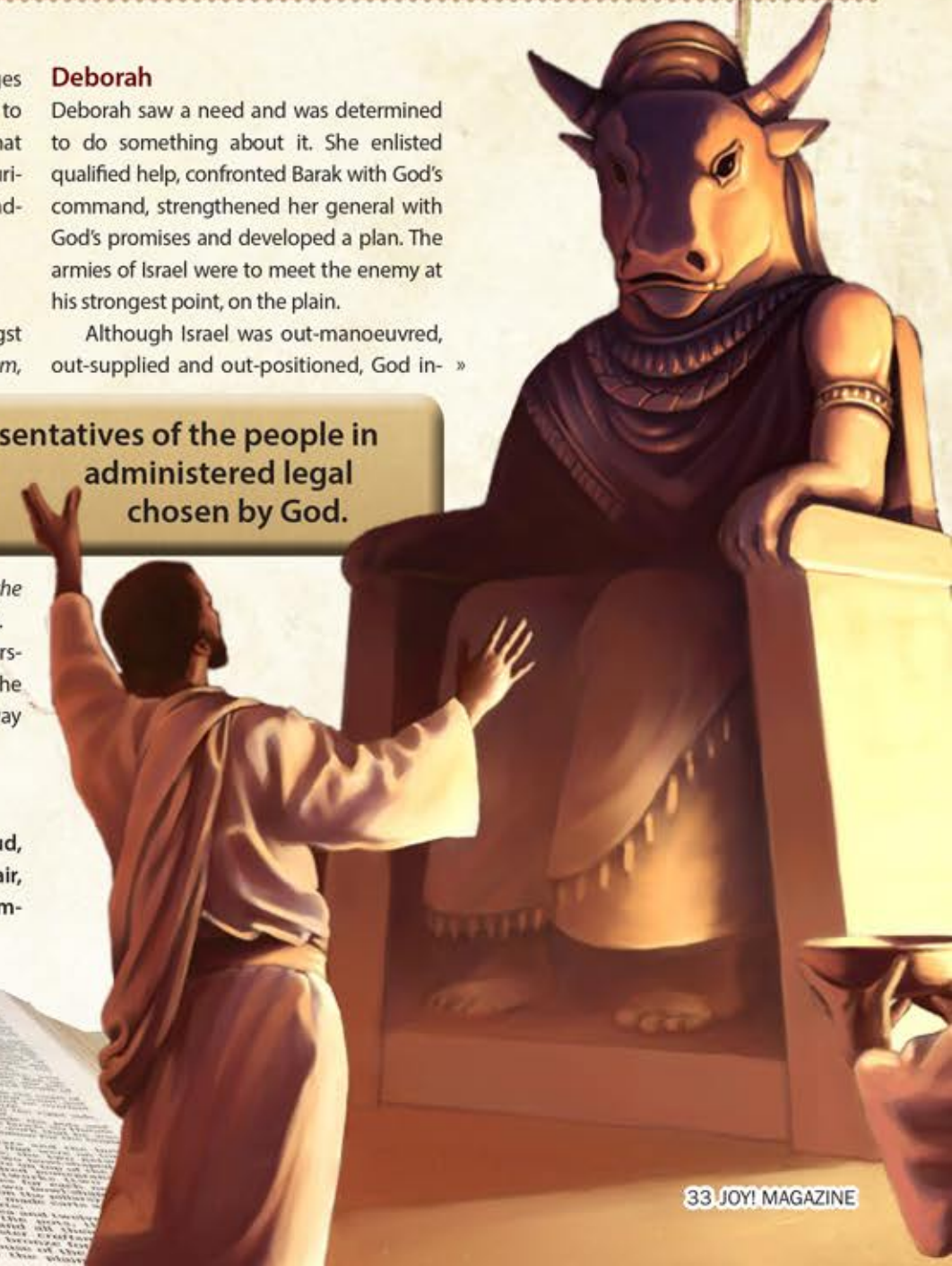
The judges were representatives of the people in times of war and they administered legal matters. They were chosen by God.

to know whether they would obey the Commandments of the Lord..." Judges 3:4.

Time and again one sees the twin curses of immorality and idolatry blighting the people of Israel and leading them away from God.

The Judges

The 12 judges included: Othniel, Ehud, Shamger, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson.



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tervened and sent a violent storm and flood which broke the banks of the Kishon river, the plain was flooded and the chariots of Sisera floundered in the mud. As Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael, she drove a tent peg through his head. (Again, one sees this theme of the seed of the woman crushing the serpent's head, as prophesied in Gen 3:15).

In the song of Deborah, she rebukes those who stayed amongst

Power in weakness

Repeatedly one sees God taking weak and apparently insignificant people, transforming them and using them. They accomplished great things for God, because they reckoned on His strength being made perfect in their weakness. God delights in using what the world may look down on. **Ehud** who used a homemade dagger. **Deborah**, a remarkable woman. **Gideon**, the youngest from an obscure family of the smallest tribe. **Shamgar** with an oxgoad and **Samson** with a jawbone. God will bring deliverance by subordinates when their leaders fail to take a stand.

the campfires to hear the whistling of the flocks, those who lingered by the ships and remained on the coasts, who stayed in their coves and for various reasons failed to mobilise in the time of war.

"Curse Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord, curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to help the Lord against the mighty." Judges 5:23.

However, the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you. Where God guides. He provides. God's servant is God's responsibility. The safest place is in the centre of God's Will.

Dismantling the Baal altar

Before the Midianites could be expelled, the source of their political and military

In Judges, we see leaders who show obedient faith in spite of their fear. They trust in a God who guides, equips and empowers them for His work.

Gideon

The aggressive Midianites invaded the land, looting and ruining the crops, not sparing a living thing. Like a swarm of locusts, they impoverished the Israelites until they cried out to the Lord for help. The Angel of the Lord called Gideon, who at first seemed timid and discouraged. He was commanded to go in the strength of the Lord, but Gideon protested that his clan was the weakest in Manasseh and he was the least in his own family.

power, Baal worship had to be attacked. God's altar cannot be built until Baal's altar is destroyed. The first assignment of Gideon is to destroy an altar of Baal; he started in his own back yard.

Courage and confrontation

Private commitment must produce public courage and confrontation. Gideon's actions showed obedient faith in spite of his fear. Faith is not fearlessness, but obedience. Gideon openly challenged Baal and lived to tell the story, proving that Baal was powerless. When God calls us, He equips and empowers us. Every time peo-

ple saw Gideon, they saw a visible proof of God's power and Baal's weakness. Gideon had destroyed the altar of Baal and lived to tell about it.

Gideon's 300

Gideon then used a simple, secret and significant test to select his special group of soldiers. Most of the 32 000 who chose to serve God were rejected and sent home. They chose God, but He did not choose them. Anyone can drink water, but it is how we do the little things that matters. Gideon's 300 went out to defeat 135 000 Midianites.

Defeating the Midianites

Leading by example, Gideon mobilised a unity of action, using speed, skill and surprise to defeat the enemy. Encircling the Midianites, with perfect strategy and timing, with the noise of trumpets and the lights of their burning torches, they deceived the enemy into thinking there were vast companies of enemy on every side.

Repeatedly we see God taking the weak and apparently insignificant and using them mightily.

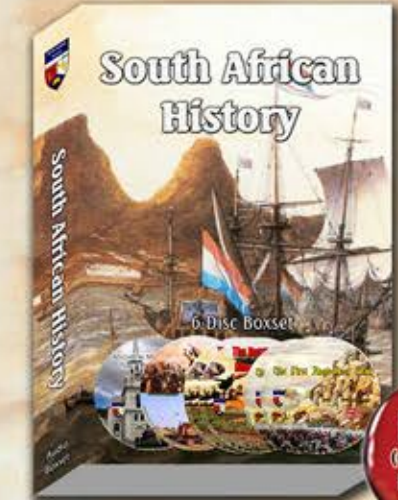
Samson

God answered the prayers of a devoted couple for a child. This child had a unique birth and was to have a unique lifestyle – he was to be set apart to maintain unbroken fellowship with God.

The story of Samson is one of potential wasted through lack of discipline. Samson had great potential, but squandered it. Samson had God-fearing parents, a unique birth, a unique lifestyle, great personal strength and he was anointed by the Holy Spirit as a deliverer. Samson became a weak

*Sin will take you further than you want to go
Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay
Sin will cost you more than you want to pay.*

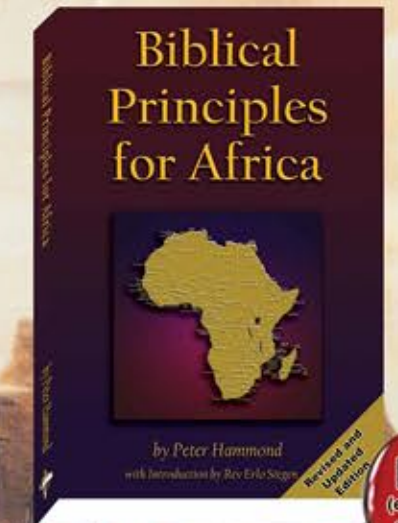
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Toying with temptation

Samson toyed with temptation and in the very stronghold of his enemy - Gaza. Sins may start small, but they do not end that way. The Scripture warns us to "flee sexual immorality" 1 Cor 6:18, but Samson chose not to flee, he lost his character.

Peace comes through strength. Stability comes through victory. However, "pride goes before a fall". Samson became so self-confident and careless that he deliberately exposed himself to the enemy. "Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good character."

1 Corinthians 15:33



man, because he never learned to control himself. "He who rules his spirit is better than he who captures a city." Prov 16:32.

However, despite his serious flaws, Samson had a passion for freedom and he recognised the threat of the Philistines. His resistance hurt the Philistines so badly that they sent a large army to deal with him.

The Hebrews were ignored by the

burst the ropes that tied him. He picked up the jawbone of a donkey, and struck down a thousand Philistines. This was followed by twenty years of peace and stability for Israel under Samson.

Moral compromise makes us vulnerable. Temptation comes in attractive packages.

"So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord...and served the Baals and Asheras. Therefore the anger of the Lord was against Israel."

Philistines who mobilised 3 000 men to apprehend Samson. The Hebrews not only missed the opportunity to join God's freedom fighter, they co-operated with the oppressors to betray Samson into their hands! They preferred slavery to freedom! Compromise was more comfortable to them than commitment and confrontation. They did the enemy's dirty work for them.

Courage and faith

Samson acted with courage and faith, allowing himself to be tied up and walked unarmed and helpless into the vast army of Philistines.

The Spirit of God came upon Samson in power and he

We see the stubborn self-confidence of Samson. The seduction of Delilah and the stupidity of sin. The result: disgrace, defeat, and disaster.

The message of Judges

The story of Samson summarises the messages of Judges: Sin blinds. Sin binds. Sin grinds. God did not give up on Samson. His discipline led to restoration. Blinded, in chains, enslaved and imprisoned, Samson returned to God in repentance. God heard his heartfelt prayer and accomplished a great victory over evil through Samson. Samson is honourably mentioned in the Hall of Faith - Hebrews 11.

Sin does not have to have the last word in our life. Sin cannot win. Faith cannot fail. Jesus is the Eternal Judge. ■

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