

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 21.7%

Weekly Readings will cover: Judges 1 through Judges 7

Sunday: Judges 1

Monday: Judges 2

Tuesday: Judges 3

Wednesday: Judges 4

Thursday: Judges 5

Friday: Judges 6

Saturday: Judges 7

Current # of email addresses in the group: 599

I hope you enjoyed your last week of studying the book of Joshua. Congratulations, we have now finished seven books! We now launch into the book of Judges. The book of Judges has 21 chapters, so we will finish this book over the next 3 weeks. This book contains fascinating stories of God's mercy and love and I hope you enjoy your first week in this new book!

Website archive location for audio files & PDFs:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/posts/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep-dive-reading-program-circa-2022-2025-903711>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 38

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 239 - SUNDAY: August 27th

Judges 1

Daily Deep Dive:

Book Overview:

Here is the UCG reading programs overview of Judges:

“The second book of the Prophets, Judges spans the approximately 325 years from the death of Joshua, some 25 years after Israel's entry into the Promised Land, to shortly before the coronation of Israel's first human king, Saul. Though it may have been written by various authors, adding to the storyline as events transpired—e.g., the Song of Deborah and the parable of Jotham—it was probably put into its final form by

the last of the judges, Samuel, in the 11th century B.C. The Talmud states, "Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the book of Judges" (*Baba Bathra 14b*).

Moses and Joshua were, of course, the first of Israel's judges. But once in the Promised Land, others followed. The judges were military men and governors whom God led to deliver Israel from foreign oppression and who then had a responsibility to "judge" the people in concert with the priests and Levites (Deuteronomy 17:8-9). Each judge acted in a capacity similar to the later kings of Israel, except no hereditary line was involved. No judge after Moses and Joshua exercised authority over *all* Israel, but each functioned within a limited geographical area for a particular period of time.

As for general themes, the book of Judges shows that Israel's national existence depended on her obedience. In a monotonous cycle: Israel rebelled; God allowed them to be conquered by an enemy king; they were vassals to a foreign nation for a period of years; Israel cried to God; and God raised up a judge to deliver them. The cycle may be described as sin, servitude, supplication, salvation. (Notice that God always gave more years of peace than years of captivity—often at a five-to-one ratio.)

Judges also shows the necessity of right leadership. Each time God delivered Israel, He called a specific individual to lead them into battle, and to be judge over them when they were freed. And when that leader died, the nation returned to its apostasy (with the exception of Samuel, the last judge, whose situation was rather different, as we will later see).

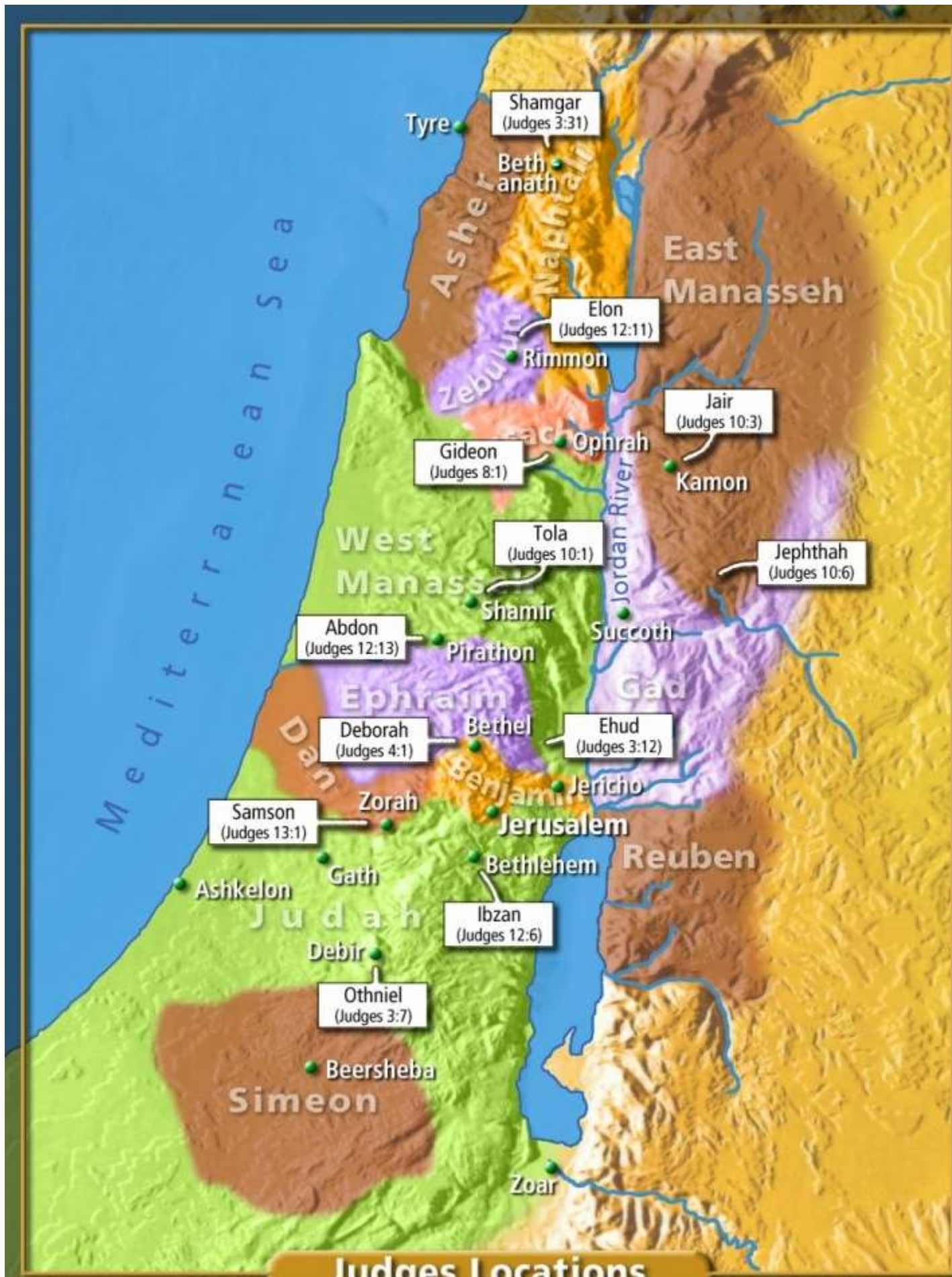
Judges is a book about people set on "doing their own thing" ("In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"—Judges 21:25; also 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). The absence of a human

monarch allowed the people a great deal of personal freedom. But such freedom without adherence to God's moral instructions inevitably leads to anarchy and confusion. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

The *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* on Judges notes that the period of the Judges set the stage for the apostasy that later led to the national punishments God visited upon Israel and Judah. "Few periods in Israel's eventful history are as important as the period of the judges. During these centuries the nation took the wrong turning that led to her downfall and near-destruction. The apostasy of the later generations has its origin in the early years of the settlement, and there is a clear line between the time when the nation first went after Baal and the dark age when the Jerusalem Temple itself was defiled with all the trappings of the Baal worship, not excluding cultic prostitutes (2 Kings 23:4-7)" (p. 11).

Because many of the tribes allowed Canaanites to continue to dwell in the land, the influence of Baal and Asherah worship retained a foothold. Worship of these pagan gods involved the most vile acts, including sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals. For these and other abominations, God would eventually send His people into captivity.

Bible scholars have a problem with Judges because "there is general agreement that the problem of harmonizing the chronological data presents insurmountable difficulty" (*Soncino Commentary*, introductory notes to Judges). Some 50 different methods of calculating the chronology of Judges have been offered. This is because many of the judgeships overlap, the last chapters of the book are out of sequence, and many scholars—dating Israel's conquest of the land too late—do not allow the full amount of time between the conquest and the beginning of the monarchy.



Judges Locations

Map of the Judges Locations

After God had brought Israel out of Egypt, He told them that He would bring them into a blessed land whose inhabitants were to be utterly destroyed (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). Israel was to show no mercy, nor make any covenant with them. Nevertheless, God said He would not expel the Canaanites immediately, but would, little by little, drive them out before Israel, lest a sudden depopulation of the land be to Israel's hurt (Exodus 23:29-30). This God would have done, if only Israel would have remained faithful to the task.

The business of conquering the land was begun under Joshua. All the days of his life it appears that the Israelites remained generally faithful to the task, though Joshua complained about their lack of zeal even during his lifetime (e.g., Joshua 18:3). But after Joshua died, Israel's zeal definitely slackened. The people became more interested in enjoying God's blessings (a settled life in a new land) and less interested in carrying out His directives (exterminating the Canaanites). Their shortsightedness would haunt the new nation throughout its entire history and ultimately lead to its downfall.

Judah and Simeon began well, working together to clear their inheritances of the Canaanites. Most of the highlands were secured for Judah and Simeon, but the Canaanites of the lowlands were better armed and resisted the two tribes. God was not willing to then remove those Canaanites. Instead, they would be removed later.

The people of Benjamin, however, were not so zealous. When they could not drive the Jebusites from Jerusalem—Jebusites who had been driven from the city by Judah, but then had returned to reinhabit it—the Benjamites did nothing. They did not seek assistance from their brother tribes but instead chose to allow the Jebusites to remain.

Benjamin pursued the occupation of its territory halfheartedly, and the Jebusites would remain until David's day.

The story was much the same with the other tribes. Ephraim and Manasseh left many Canaanites dwelling in their land. Asher did likewise. Naphtali followed suit, and Dan allowed itself to be driven away by the Canaanites who held its allotted territory. Thus the stage was set for a continual train of miseries. The halfhearted conquest would result in repeated wars, intertribal disputes, inefficient national government, frequent apostasies in which Canaanite religious practices were embraced, and, as a result, eventual expulsion from the land.

God never gives a command that cannot be followed, at least in the letter. Though the doing of the command might be difficult and may require considerable time and effort, the latter end always proves to be immeasurably better than the results of neglecting to obey the command.

As Christians we have been given the command to fight the good fight of faith, pressing onward to receive our reward in the spiritual "Promised Land" of God's Kingdom. It requires consistent and energetic effort, and there are always spiritual Canaanites who oppose us and attempt to drive us from our inheritance. How have you pursued your inheritance? Have you slacked off? Have you warred with half a heart? Are you willing to fellowship or run with spiritual Canaanites, not recognizing that to do so only means eventual expulsion from your inheritance? If so, now is the time to repent, redouble your efforts and make a good warfare. And while warring, do not forget to aid your brother as he strives for his inheritance also." [END]

I'll add a few more comments: The Archeological Study Bible (Zondervan) states: "It is conceivable that Samuel compiled some accounts from the period of the judges and that afterward such

prophets as Gad and Nathan helped to edit the material” This is based on 1 Chronicles 29:29 that states: “Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they *are* written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer,”

This study bible continues by saying: “The frequently repeated phrase “in those days Israel had no king” does suggest a date after the monarchy had been established. Some scholars believe that this book was written before David had captured Jerusalem because the Jebusites still controlled that city.”

Verse 1 – It’s interesting to me that Joshua left no successor as the overall ruler of the nation of Israel. Therefore, Israel asked of God, which tribe should go first as they had no leader to give them instructions.

Verse 5 – Adoni-Bezek was the local king or ruler there.

Verse 6 – The JFB commentary states: “being taken prisoner, he was treated with a severity unusual among the Israelites, for they “cut off his thumbs and great toes.” Barbarities of various kinds were commonly practiced on prisoners of war in ancient times, and the object of this particular mutilation of the hands and feet was to disable them for military service ever after. The infliction of such a horrid cruelty on this Canaanite chief would have been a foul stain on the character of the Israelites if there were not reason for believing it was done by them as an act of retributive justice, and as such it was regarded by Adoni-bezek himself, whose conscience read his atrocious crimes in their punishment.” [END]

Verse 13 – We covered this in Joshua 15:17

Day 240 - MONDAY: August 28th

Judges 2

Daily Deep Dive:

Today's UCG reading plan states: "The halfhearted efforts of the Israelite tribes in dealing with the inhabitants of Canaan as God had instructed resulted in God's refusal to drive out the remaining Canaanites. Instead, those Canaanites would be a continual source of misery and frustration for Israel. Yet when God told Israel that He would not drive out what Israel was only too willing to live with, all Israel could do was weep and sacrifice. They were unable to bring themselves to repentance. They were unable to rise up with one voice, confess their sin, and rededicate themselves to the prompt fulfilling of God's command if He would grant them forgiveness.

This lamentable condition was the result of missing components in Israel's character and government—components that are *vital* to any enterprise. The first component is strong, fearless, visionary leadership. Without leaders who are willing to lead, willing to set forth a vision and fearless in its pursuit, the people involved in the enterprise will limp along, wandering from pillar to post, never accomplishing any great thing. For Israel, the generation that went in to the Land of Promise under Joshua was a generation that had such leaders. Men like Joshua and Caleb, and the elders of Israel, though making occasional mistakes, were not afraid to lead. The vision was clearly laid out for them and they pursued it fearlessly, despite occasional errors.

But after Joshua and his generation died, the leaders who filled their offices were not cut from the same cloth. These men, and the people they led, "did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Now certainly they did know *about* God. They had been keeping His feasts, observing His Sabbaths, sacrificing at His tabernacle, and certainly they had heard the stories of the Exodus under Moses and the conquest begun under Joshua. These men, however, did not "know" the Lord nor His works in the sense of having personally experienced them.

These are the second and third necessary components to right character—a personal knowing of God and a sharp remembrance of His works. The second generation knew *of* God, but they did not personally *know* God; they had become lax in their spiritual condition. They knew *of* the Exodus, but they did not *lay to heart* the lessons of it. They knew *of* the conquest, but they had largely grown up during one of those tranquil periods in which God intended that Israel dwell in the land already conquered and build their strength for the next period of conquest.

A personal knowing of God, a remembrance of His works and strong, visionary and fearless leadership act as internal and external restraints on the carnal nature's desire to let down, compromise and just make do. When any one of those three elements is missing, the people are loosed of restraint and end up living comfortably with sin. Israel's second generation lacked those qualities, and as a result they did not pursue their God-given inheritance with vigor, but preferred to make do with what they had, to compromise and live with a certain amount of sin.

By not studying the Old Testament, people can slip into the same errors without realizing their predicament. Indeed, ancient Israel is supposed to be an example for us (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-9). As Christians we cannot afford to make the same mistakes. Each of us must come to personally know God, to have *real* and daily experience of Him. Each of us must develop a sharp memory for what God has done for Israel, for the Church and for us in our private lives. Leaders must lead. Do not be timid or fearful. A light yoke is laid upon each of us, therefore let us all work the harder that we may partake of a very bountiful harvest.”

[END]

Verse 1 – While some claim that this was some prophet from Gilgal, it's more likely the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. We have already seen that

“angel” in the Hebrew simply means “messenger” and can be used for human or spirit messengers as well as the Word (the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ). Notice that here there is no “thus says the Lord” to indicate that this messenger is bringing a message from God, but instead speaks in the first-person as the one who brought them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them. So why might He be said to come up from Gilgal? It was at or near Gilgal when the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ met with Joshua (compare Joshua 5:13) and this seems to be the last place He met with them, so it appears they are referring to the last place they saw Him as where He was coming from. It was at Gilgal that the Israelites made a solemn dedication of themselves to God after entering the promise land (compare Joshua 4:1-9).

Verse 5 – “Bochim” means “weeping” (BDB).

Verse 11 – Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “The word בעלים baalim signifies lords. Their false gods they considered supernatural rulers or governors, each having his peculiar district and office; but when they wished to express a particular בעל baal, they generally added some particular epithet, as Baal-zephon, Baal-peor, Baal-zehub, Baal-shamayim, etc., as Calmet has well observed. The two former were adored by the Moabites; Baal-zebub by the Ekronites. Baal-berith was honored at Shechem; and Baal-shamayim, the lord or ruler of the heavens, was adored among the Phoenicians, Syrians, Chaldeans, etc. And whenever the word baal is used without an epithet, this is the god that is intended; and probably, among all these people, it meant the sun.” [END]

Verse 13 – Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “In a general way, probably, Baal and Ashtaroth mean the sun and moon; but in many cases Ashtaroth seems to have been the same among the Canaanites as Venus was among the Greeks and Romans, and to have been worshipped with the same obscene rites.” [END]

Verse 17 – Even when God raised up a leader for the people who redirected them to obey God and stop their false worship, the people didn't want to listen to the wise counsel.

Verse 23 – God could have driven out these nations in spite of the failings of Israel, but He choose to use these nations as tools in His hands for the purpose of seeing whether Israel would obey and choose Him or choose to serve false gods. Where does God allow tests in our lives to see whether we will follow Him or choose our own path?

Day 241 - TUESDAY: August 29th

Judges 3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan for this chapter states: “All of the Israelites’ weeping and sacrifice did nothing to restrain them from mixing with the detestable heathen in the Land of Promise. “And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods” (verse 6). Israel simply did not have a heart to obey God (Deuteronomy 5:29). The effect was disastrous: conquest and reduction to servitude under gentile kings. The first servitude in the land was under Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, and it lasted for eight years. This king’s name “means ‘Cushan of Double Wickedness’; this may not have been his actual name, but instead a name pinned on him by the author of Judges for ridicule [or perhaps one that the people called him for the same reason]. Note that this name is found four times in two verses (vv. 8, 10), which may support the point that the author was mocking the king” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Judges 3:8). The brevity of the servitude under him may be accounted for by the fact that it was Othniel, the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb (Judges 3:9; compare Joshua 15:16-17), whom God used to restore Israel’s freedom. Othniel probably saw and participated in the initial conquest, making him a transitional figure from the generation

that saw the earlier works (compare Judges 2:7) to those who didn't. It may be that some of the first-generation zeal was in Othniel and that his fearless leadership was able to rally a more repentant and zealous spirit in his brethren. For 40 years Israel had freedom. But after the death of Othniel and his restraining influence, Israel returned to the slavery of idolatry.

With the return to idolatry came the inevitable return of servitude to a foreign nation. This time it was Eglon, king of Moab, who subdued Israel. After 18 years, God provided release through Ehud, who assassinated Eglon. Once again, Israel had rest, this time for 80 years. But once again, Israel lapsed into disobedience.

The deliverance by Shamgar is related in a single line. It may be that he judged contemporaneously with Ehud, perhaps taking a more westerly area of administration. He is said to have slain a large number of Philistines, which would put his activity in the western lowlands of Judah. We cannot know for certain. Since Israel is said to have gone astray after Ehud died (Judges 4:1) we may conclude that Shamgar's deliverance occurred after Ehud's judgeship began (Judges 3:31) and that he died before Ehud. Beyond that, The Nelson Study Bible makes some interesting points: "Moreover, Shamgar delivered Israel but did not judge it [at least, that is not expressly stated]. Even the name Shamgar is not Hebrew. Yet he was the son of Anath—clearly a Semitic name. This may mean that he was from the town of Beth-Anath in Galilee; more probably, however, Anath is derived from the name of the Canaanite warrior goddess. If so, then it is ironic that God used a foreign warrior to deliver Israel" (note on 3:31)." [END]

Verse 11 – Othniel means "Lion of God" (BDB)

Verse 13 – The city of Palms refers to valley of "Jericho" (compare Deuteronomy 34:3). The Jewish historian Josephus records that a

palace/garrison/fort was near the destroyed city of Jericho. The city of Jericho was not rebuilt until the reign of Ahab.

Verse 15 – Ehud means “united” (BDB).

Verse 16 – This dagger was approximately 18 inches long.

Verse 24 – Some commentaries and translations believe this verse states that they believe he was “taking a nap” (by taking off his slippers and covering his feet) or that he was using his private toilet.

Verse 27 – Here the word for trumpet in Hebrew is “shofar”. While this trumpet had multiple uses, one of its primary purposes was a call to war which we see the people do in verse 28.

Verse 31 – The name Shamgar means “sword” (BDB). This is the only time this word for “ox goad” is used in the Bible. The JFB commentary states: “This instrument is eight feet long and about six inches in circumference. It is armed at the lesser end with a sharp prong for driving the cattle, and on the other with a small iron paddle for removing the clay which encumbers the plough in working. Such an instrument, wielded by a strong arm, would do no mean execution. We may suppose, however, for the notice is very fragmentary, that Shamgar was only the leader of a band of peasants, who by means of such implements of labor as they could lay hold of at the moment, achieved the heroic exploit recorded.” [END]

Day 242 - WEDNESDAY: August 30th

Judges 4

Daily Deep Dive:

Here’s what the UCG reading plan has for this chapter: “Once the restraining influence of Ehud's leadership was removed, "the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord" (verse 1). *The Expositor's*

Bible Commentary refers to the quotation here as "the sin phrase." It occurs six times in the book of Judges (see Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). For their rebellion this time, God sold them to Jabin, king of Canaan in Hazor, who cruelly oppressed them 20 years. Long before, Joshua had defeated a king of Hazor named Jabin (Joshua 11:1-15). The same name has been found in a text from the archeological site of Mari on the River Euphrates (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Judges 4:2). Such facts may suggest that *Jabin* was a title rather than a proper name, like *Abimelech* among the Philistines or *Ben-Hadad* among the Syrians.

It does not appear to have dawned on the Israelites that as they continued to disobey God their periods of servitude lasted longer and grew more intense in severity. Neither did it occur to them that, one way or the other, they were going to serve *someone*—God or a gentile. Their service to God was light and held great reward, but their service to the gentiles was always heavy and bitter. Were these men mad in not being able to discern such things? No, they were simply carnal, and carnality does not like restraint of any kind—enabling their willing blindness to reality.

At this time Deborah was judging Israel. How she became a judge we do not know, but perhaps her status as a prophetess caused Israel to seek counsel and justice at her word. Her judgeship, however, took place during the oppression of Jabin and must have been limited to religious matters and civil matters of little consequence to him. It was while she was judging Israel that she received a revelation instructing her to call Barak and inform him that God had chosen him to free Israel.

When Barak came to Deborah and received word of God's intention, he agreed to assume the task but only if Deborah would accompany him. Barak's reluctance is not too difficult to understand when one considers that what made Jabin's army so formidable was the presence of 900 chariots of iron. These were strategic superweapons when pitted

against forces without them, such as Israel's. Furthermore, the number of chariots suggests that Jabin had built a very large standing army. To attempt to defeat such a numerically superior and well-armed force would be quite daunting, and trepidation, especially given Jabin's cruelty, would be the natural response. Also, Barak may have questioned the truth of Deborah's revelation. Was she issuing a false prophecy, one of her own making? If she would go with him, Barak could be assured that the prophecy was true—else why would Deborah hazard her life for what she knew to be a falsehood?

Fear, of course, is an enemy of faith. And despite the fact that Barak is recorded in Hebrews 11:32 as an example of faith, his wavering in this situation would cause the honor of victory to go to a woman, leaving Barak somewhat disgraced. Nevertheless, Barak still consented to the task, perhaps expecting that woman to be Deborah—which would not have seemed so bad considering the important position she already occupied. Instead, God chose yet another woman, further stripping Barak of honor.

Many of the judges raised armies from only one or two of the Israelite tribes, which is evidence that Israel was probably more of a loose tribal confederation at this time. Barak's army was drawn primarily from Zebulun and Naphtali. Chapter 5 of Judges reveals that smaller elements of Issachar, Benjamin, Manasseh and Reuben were also present, but Reuben (true to his nature, Genesis 49:3-4) vacillated. Large parts of Manasseh remained beyond Jordan, and Dan and Asher preferred to continue their shipping trade rather than engage in a war of liberation. At this time in their history, Israel had no strong central government that organized and legislated for all the nation. The individual tribes acted in their own self-interest, with most of the governmental authority of the nation being vested in the tribal elders.

The engagement at the River Kishon was a complete rout of Sisera, general of Jabin's army. The entire Canaanite army was exterminated, and Sisera fled on foot. Unhappily for Sisera, he came across the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Exhausted and begging water, Jael instead gave him milk—a wise move considering the sleep-inducing properties of milk. Sisera's fatigue combined with a large amount of milk sent him fast off to sleep, a slumber so dense that Jael was able to sneak into the tent and kill Sisera by driving a tent peg through his skull.

With his army destroyed, all his chariots captured and the military genius of Sisera gone, Jabin's days were numbered. Israel grew stronger and stronger until they finally killed Jabin and destroyed his persecuting power forever. And Israel had peace 40 years.” [END]

Verse 4 – The name Deborah means “bee”. She is called the feminine form of the Hebrew word for “prophet”. Before this point, it was used only once in Exodus 15:20 referring to Miriam. It will be used of several other women in the Bible. The male form of the word was first used for Abraham and then later for Aaron.

Verse 6 – The JFB commentary draws out that the wording “Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?” is a Hebrew form of making an emphatic communication.

Verse 9 – Clearly God had provided Deborah with a vision of what would take place for her to be able to prophesy so specifically.

Day 243 - THURSDAY: August 31st

Judges 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “The Song of Deborah is one of the finest examples of an ode of triumph preserved in Israelite literature [with] a vividness, an almost staccato effect of action and a spirit of sheer

exultation" (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, chapter 5 summary). The song celebrates the outcome related in our previous reading—a most unexpected deliverance from an apparently unconquerable and desperately cruel foe.

Considering all that transpired, the opening lines of the song are most instructive: "When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the Lord!" While this is not an exact translation of the Hebrew here, the idiom used being somewhat obscure, it does perhaps convey the intent behind it. And the sentiment is certainly a true one in any case. For strong, fearless, visionary leadership combined with a people who willingly offer themselves to God produces an irresistibly powerful and successful combination. Wherever there is vacillation and little success among God's people, at least one of these two factors is missing.

The song gives some very interesting details of God's maneuvering in the deliverance from Jabin, as well as the conditions of Israel's servitude to that terrible king. Verses 4-5 reveal that God caused a major rainstorm just before or during the battle. No doubt the muddy ground mired the heavy iron chariots of Jabin, vastly reducing his army's strength and demoralizing his troops. God often uses weather to confound armies, and it has even apparently happened in modern times.

Verses 6-9 reveal the severity of Jabin's oppression. Main highways were desolate of traveler, whether trader or pilgrim; all took the rougher unknown, but safe, trails through the hill country. Moreover, the many small Israelite villages were under constant fear of destruction, and as a result many were depopulated, the people either moving to larger cities or preferring tent dwelling, as did Jael.

Verse 20 has been interpreted in several ways, with some scholars preferring to understand it as an ironic slap at the Canaanite practice of astrology, while others view the stars as symbolic of real heavenly forces, implying that Israel had angelic help in its fight against Jabin. Another explanation is that the reference is to meteors.” [END]

Verse 10 – Regarding “white donkeys” the JFB commentary states: “Those which are purely white are highly prized, and being costly, are possessed only by the wealthy and great.”

Verse 23 – Regarding “Meroz”, the JFB commentary states: “a village on the confines of Issachar and Naphtali, which lay in the course of the fugitives, but the inhabitants declined to aid in their destruction.”

Day 244 - FRIDAY: September 1st

Judges 6

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan: “Deborah and Barak's victory brought Israel 40 years of independence and peace. But Israel again did evil in the sight of God, and God once again delivered them over to their enemies, this time the Midianites. For seven years the Midianites, with smaller contingents of Amalekites and Mesopotamians, would raid Israel during harvest seasons, swooping down and confiscating all the produce of the fields. Many Israelites took to the hills to live in caves, no doubt because the invaders would seize even the foodstuffs stored in houses, and dwelling in highland caves provided a place both of security and of safe storage.

Gideon was a Manassite, but of the smallest of that tribe's clans, and he himself the "least" in the house of his father—implying the smallest, youngest, least important or least thought of. In any case, he was clearly not a man of any considerable wealth or influence. But God

often works through the unknown and apparently insignificant. This is also true of New Testament times (see 1 Corinthians 1:26).

During this oppression, God, through His prophet, plainly told Israel why they were being oppressed (verses 8-10). Yet, when the Angel of the Lord—who seems to have been the Lord Himself in this case (compare verses 12, 14, 16, 23), i.e., the preincarnate Christ as messenger of the Father (compare Genesis 16:10-13)—appeared to Gideon, Gideon asked why all this had happened. Apparently few paid any heed to the words of the prophets. Nevertheless, the time for punishment was to be ended, and God had chosen Gideon as the instrument of that deliverance.

Our introduction to Gideon is somewhat humorous. He is threshing wheat not out in the open on a threshing floor as would normally be the case, but hidden in a winepress out of fear of the Midianites stealing the grain from him. Yet this divine Messenger's first words to fearful Gideon are, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (verse 12). "Both statements seemed absurd. First of all, where was the God of Israel? Second, anyone with eyes to see could know that he was no mighty man of valor. Gallant generals and fearless warriors did not hide from the enemy in winepresses" (Phillip Keller, *Mighty Man of Valor*, 1979, p. 25). But God often refers to people according to what they will become. Gideon certainly didn't come across as mighty or valorous initially, but by believing and trusting in God, he ultimately lived up to the confidence God placed in him and truly became a mighty warrior, a man of valor. Interestingly, the name Gideon itself actually meant "Hewer," "Feller" or "One Who Cuts Down," perhaps implying an *overcomer*. And after God's calling, Gideon would begin fulfilling the meaning of his name.

His first action was to destroy the local altar to Baal—another sign that few Israelites were listening to God's prophets. When the local officials

sought to put him to death, Gideon's father Joash challenged them to let Baal prove his own divinity by taking vengeance on Gideon through some supernatural means. The challenge was ironic, because it would show Baal completely incapable of taking vengeance upon anyone—Midianite, Amalekite, Mesopotamian or even the smallest, most insignificant man in Manasseh. Of course, nothing happened. Joash then called Gideon by the name Jerubbaal ("Let Baal Plead" or "Let Baal Take Revenge"), thus making him a living taunt to the worshipers of Baal.

The destruction of the altar, and the confounding of the Baal devotees, gave evidence to Gideon that God was on his side. He would need the encouragement of that thought, for then the seasonal raids of the Midianites and their confederates commenced. When they appeared, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he gathered an army from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali—again, only a few of the tribes of Israel.

While the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Gideon, he had as yet developed little faith. He required another sign from God that God would truly deliver Midian into his hands. While this was probably for his own sake, he may also have felt it necessary for the Israelites to know, with the evidence of such signs, that God had chosen him to fight the battle. In any event, God did perform the famous fleece signs. Gideon, we can see, was still used to walking by sight, not faith. Nevertheless, the success of his enterprise was not to come from his strength but God's. The signs were given, and Gideon was emboldened." [END]

Verse 12 – The Lord calls Gideon a “mighty man of valor” (NKJV). The word “mighty man” in Hebrew means “strong, mighty, brave (BDB)” and the word “valor” in Hebrew means “strength, might, efficiency, wealth, army (BDB)” and is most commonly translated as “army” in the

NKJV. As the reading program above indicates, it seems God sees the potential within Gideon to be a mighty warrior for God & Israel.

Verse 15 – Gideon now calls his family “weakest” in Manasseh and the “least” in my father’s house. The word in Hebrew translated as “weakest” means “low, poor, weak” (BDB). It appears likely that they were the low-ranking family within Manasseh without a lot of honor. The Hebrew word translated “least” means “little, insignificant, young”. Like David, Gideon appears to be the youngest of the family from a “low” household. How often God chooses the one no one else would choose. He did the same with each of us so that He receives the glory for the great things He does in and through each of us.

Verse 26 – I find this so interesting. God normally makes such a clear distinction between clean and unclean (holy and common), but here to likely demonstrate His great power over the false gods Israel was worshiping, He has Gideon use the wood from the image as the wood for the Burnt Offering to God. Which because of the next verse, isn’t even done in the sight of all the people of the city.

Verse 27 – This brings back to mind how God called Gideon a mighty man of valor, yet, here again, we see him afraid of both his father’s household and the men of the city. He doesn’t seem so bold and strong yet. Yet, why did God choose him? Was Gideon the only one within his household who wasn’t fine worshiping false gods? This may be the case since we see that he feared his own household being angry with his actions to cut down image and break the false god altar. He may also have been afraid of individuals trying to stop him before he was able to complete all that God had asked of him, where by doing it at night he may have it done before anyone could react.

Verse 34 – This trumpet is again the Hebrew shofar which was often used as a call to war.

Day 245 - SATURDAY: September 2nd

Judges 7

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The army that Gideon gathered numbered 32,000 men, too large for God's purposes. If the battle had been engaged, Israel would have attributed the success of the battle to their large numbers. Therefore, God set about paring down the force. First, those who were afraid of battle would be dismissed. That left 10,000 soldiers. Still too many. So God instructed Gideon to bring the army down to a stream or pool. There Gideon was to separate the men into two groups—those who scooped water in their hand and brought it to their mouth, and those who got down on all fours to drink by placing their face in the water. Those who scooped the water numbered 300, and those were the men God chose.

As to why God chose this method, we simply do not know. However, being such an unusual occurrence, it is deserving of a comment here. *The Nelson Study Bible* offers a note on this division, the merits of which you may judge for yourself: "Some commentators have suggested that the men who did not get down on their knees were maintaining a higher degree of military readiness by drinking out of their hands. However, they may be reading too much into the account, for the text does not indicate any reason for Gideon's preference. The reference to the way a dog laps might even be derogatory since dogs were despised creatures in the ancient world [as they were considered worthless scavengers] (1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Kings 8:13; Matthew 7:6). If so, God's role in the victory becomes even more apparent, since the three hundred who were left were the ones who did not even have the common sense to drink in a normal fashion. God's comment in v. 7 seems to reinforce this suggestion" (note on Judges 7:4-5). Still, others stress the *alertness* of a dog as a positive. Whatever the reason, we are still left with an incredible miracle of winning with only 300 men.

When the battle was engaged by night, Gideon gave every man a torch, a clay pitcher and a horn. As the troops dispersed in the night, descending on the Midianites in the valley, Gideon gave the sign. The horns blew, the pitchers were broken, the torches flared and a great shout was made—all simultaneously. This was an important stratagem. Normally only the commander of a body of men would have a horn and a torch, so the sound of 300 horns and the sight of 300 torches made it appear that Israel had a very large army. Moreover, the sound of 300 clay pitchers breaking simultaneously would have carried down the valley walls sounding like the clanking of military armor. The valley walls would also have caused the noises to amplify. The sight of the torches and sound of the Israelites' horns and shouting terrified the Midianites, who imagined a huge army bearing down on them. It was every man for himself, most fleeing without their armor or battle gear, thus becoming even easier prey for Gideon and his little band. In the confusion, the Midianites, Amalekites and Mesopotamians even slaughtered each other in the dark in their panic and desperation.

So God, by the most insignificant man in Manasseh leading an insignificant troop, wrought a great victory for Israel. And there was peace for 40 years (Judges 8:28)” [END]

Verse 14 – As God had brought about the dream, He also provided the interpretation of the dream to these men.

Verse 19 – The John Gill commentary states: “very wisely did Gideon fix on this watch for the time of his coming; for had he come at the first watch, many as yet might not have been in bed, or at least not fallen asleep; and had he come in the third watch, many might have been awake out of their sleep, and others up; but he took this time, a little after midnight, in the dead of the night, when the whole army was fast asleep:” [END]