

BAND OF BROTHERS
WHEN
JUDGES RULED
AND
SIN REIGNED
LIFE LESSONS FROM
THE BOOK OF JUDGES

WEEK 9 HOMEWORK

- Read Judges 14-15
The last two verses of chapter 13 left us with the impression that Samson was going to be a different kind of judge, whose life might turn out for the better. But it won't take long to realize that this man is going to exhibit such egregious behavior that it will make the rest of the judges look like saints.
 - Read Judges 14:1-3. What do these verses tell us about Samson's moral character?
 - But according to verse 4, who was ultimately behind Samson's seeming lack of ethical awareness and poor judgment?
 - How would you justify God's actions in this case?
- Read Judges 15:5-7. Verse 6 contains a statement that will appear two more times in these two chapters. It states that "the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him." At first glance, the anointing of Samson by the Spirit of God seems a bit odd in this scenario. Why would that be the case?
 - What was Samson doing in Timnah in the first place?
 - What does verse 7 tell you about Samson and his struggle with controlling his physical passions and desires? How did this conflict with God's will?

- Look at verses 8-9. What did Samson do that would have violated his Nazarite vow? For help, refer to Numbers 6:1-21.

- Read Judges 14:10-20. This section contains the second occurrence of the phrase, “the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.” And, once again, it seems like an odd occasion for the Spirit to anoint Samson. Why do you think he was empowered by the Spirit of God at this particular point in time? What could God be trying to show us?

- Read chapter 15 again. Summarize the story in your own words.

- What does this story reveal about Samson’s character?

- Look at verses 14-15. This is the final use of the phrase, “the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.” Why would God empower Samson when his motivation seemed to be based on little more than revenge?

- In verses 15-20, we see Samson having a conversation with God. What does Samson’s prayer reveal about his relationship with God and the condition of his own heart?

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WEEK 9: Judges 11:29-13:25

Just When You Thought Things Couldn't Get Worse: When the inevitable becomes unavoidable

- **Review**

- The book of Judges is on tail end of its downward spiral
- Things are going from bad to worse

Othniel ➡ Ehud ➡ Shamgar ➡ Deborah (Barak)



Gideon ➡ Abimelech ➡ Tola ➡ Jair ➡ Jephthah

- Jephthah
 - They lived on and stewarded His land
 - A **disqualified** leader for a **disobedient** people
 - The illegitimate son of a prostitute
 - His name *Yiphtach* means: "He opens"
 - He was constantly **opening** his mouth
 - He was the consummate **negotiator**
- But Jephthah **said** to the elders of Gilead – 11:7*
- Jephthah **said** to the elders of Gilead – 11:9*
- And Jephthah **spoke** all his words... – 11:11*
- Jephthah sent messengers...and **said**... – 11:12*
- Jephthah again sent messengers...and **said**... – 11:14*
- Jephthah negotiated his contract with the Gileadites – 11:4-11
 - He failed to negotiate peace with the Ammonites – 11:12-27
 - Now, he's going to attempt to bargain with God – 11:29-31

- **Let's Make A Deal** – Judges 11:29-40

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

– Judges 11:30-31 ESV

nadar neder – vowed a vow

- Jephthah makes a promise to God
- He attempts to bargain with Jehovah
- "You give me victory – I'll give you an offering"
- He has been completely "Canaanized"

*And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them **who did not know the LORD** or the work that he had done for Israel. – Judges 2:10 ESV*

- Jephthah was more familiar with the gods of Canaan

*The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served **the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines**. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. – Judges 10:6 ESV*

Asherah	Baal-berith	Dagon
Ashtoreth	Baal-zebub	Milcom
Baal	Chemosh	Molech

- Jephthah has no track record with God
- His view of God was heavily **paganized**
- He was **misinformed** as to how God worked

"...he was still negotiating – manipulating God and seeking to wrest concessions and favors from him like he had from the Gileadites and the Ammonites."

– Daniel L. Block, *The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth*

*"My people are foolish and **do not know me**," says the LORD. "They are stupid children who **have no understanding**. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right!" – Jeremiah 4:22 NLT*

*"Even an ox knows its owner, and a donkey recognizes its master's care— but **Israel doesn't know its master**. My people don't recognize my care for them." – Isaiah 1:3 NLT*

- And yet, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah
 - o There is a gap between verses 29 and 30
 - In 29, the Spirit sends Jephthah on a recruiting mission

- In 30, Jephthah appears to be on his own again
- Key transition: *he passed on to the Ammonites*
From there he approached the Ammonites... – NET Bible

- When confronted by the enemy, he panicked
- Jephthah desperately wanted victory
- His future depended upon it

“If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.” – Judges 11:10 ESV

- His hope of becoming head was in the deity’s hands
- And you don’t get something from the gods for nothing

“If you will give...then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return...I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” – Judges 11:30-31 ESV

- This is an Old Testament case of a **quid pro quo**
something that is given or taken in return for something else
- He’s playing Let’s Make A Deal with Yahweh

In this instance, Jephthah is neither rash nor pious – he was outrightly pagan. Rather than a sign of spiritual immaturity and folly, like Gideon’s ephod, his vow arose from a syncretistic religious environment.

– Daniel L. Block, *The New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth*

- God never required Jephthah’s vow
- And He never acknowledged it
- But He would hold Jephthah to it

- **A surprising victory and a shocking homecoming** – Judges 11:33-40
 - God gave Jephthah victory over the Ammonites
...the Lord gave them into his hands... – vs. 32
 - But when Jephthah returned home, he was greeted by his daughter
And behold, his daughter came out to meet him... – vs. 34
 - Jephthah lives up to his name: “He opens”
*I have **opened my mouth** to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow.* – vs. 35
 - His daughter agrees
*My father, **you have opened your mouth** to the LORD; do to me according to what has **gone out of your mouth**...* – vs. 36
- Jephthah had a big mouth
 - And he had an ego to match

*“Alas, my daughter! You have brought **me** very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to **me**.” – Judges 11:35 ESV*

- He made it all about him
- He showed little concern for his daughter
- It was all about his agenda and his quest for success
 - Abimelech sacrificed his 70 brothers on the altar of ambition
 - Jephthah did the same with his daughter
 - Jephthah’s vow was unwise
 - His sacrifice was ungodly
 - And his daughter’s death was unnecessary

- **Déjà vu all over again** – Judges 12:1-6

- Jephthah has a run-in with the Ephraimites, just as Gideon had

Then the men of Ephraim said to him, “What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they accused him fiercely. – Judges 8:1 ESV

- He ends up going to war with his fellow Israelites
- The result is 42,000 dead Ephraimites
 - The evil is escalating
 - The tribes of Israel are committing **fratricide**
 - Gideon killed the people of Penuel
 - Abimelech killed his 70 brothers
 - He also killed more than 1,000 Shechemites
 - Now, Jephthah kills 42,000 Ephraimites

- **A death, a delay, and a divine encounter** – Judges 12:7-13:25

- Jephthah was followed by 3 more judges
 - **Ibzan** – judged Israel 7 years
 - **Elon** – judged Israel 10 years A TOTAL OF 25 YEARS
 - **Abdon** – judged Israel 8 years
- After a 25-year period of peace, the cycle of sin begins again

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. – Judges 13:1 ESV

- This was a time marked by **physical barrenness**
*...he [God] handed them over to raiders who **stole their possessions**. – Judges 2:13-14 NLT*

*They left the Israelites with **nothing to eat**, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys....And they stayed until **the land was stripped bare**. – Judges 6:4-5 NLT*

- And it was all because of Israel's **spiritual barrenness**
- So, God introduces a barren couple into the narrative

*There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And **his wife was barren and had no children...** – vs. 2*

- But God shows up in the midst of all the barrenness

*Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, **but you shall conceive** and bear a son... – vs. 3 (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23; Luke 1:30-31)*

- The opening of Judges 13 is meant to be hopeful
- God is about to intervene as never before

- **A child promised and a vow shared** – Judges 13:4-5, 13-14

- The angel of the Lord commands Samson's mother to keep the Nazarite vow
- But wasn't Samson supposed to be the Nazarite?

When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried....All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. – Numbers 6:2-3, 5 ESV

- Manoah and his wife were responsible for Samson
- God was placing him under their care
- He would be a product of their tutelage
- But their parenting would prove insufficient

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. – Luke 2:52 ESV

Samson will serve as a stand-in for the nation of Israel

- Miraculously born by the will of God
 - Called to a life of separation and devotion
 - Rash, opportunistic, and impulsive
 - Driven by physical appetites and pleasures
 - Characterized by deceit
 - Possessed by a false sense of pride
- A call to be careful
 - This phrase is spoken two different times in chapter 13
 - First to Samson's mother

*Therefore **be careful** and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean...*
– vs. 4

- Then to his father
*Of all that I said to the woman let her **be careful**.* – vs. 13

Literally: “Now guard yourself”

*“**Only take care, and keep your soul diligently**, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children...”*
– Deuteronomy 4:9 ESV

Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so. – Deuteronomy 4:10 ESV

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why was it so important that Manoah and his wife be careful with God’s commands? What would happen if they failed to do so?
- What are some ways in which you become careless in living out your life as Christians?
- Are there times when your relationship with God reveals that you’ve been “Canaanized?” What does that look like and why is it so dangerous?

An Abomination to the Lord

Ken Miller

¹ *“You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.*

² *“If there is found among you, within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing his covenant, ³ and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, ⁴ and it is told you and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, ⁵ then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. ⁶ On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. ⁷ The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”* – Deuteronomy 17:1-7 ESV

One of the reasons God instructed the people of Israel to elect judges and officials in each of their communities was to protect against idolatry. As time passed and each of the tribes began the process of possessing the land allotted to them, it would become increasingly more difficult to police the activities of the people, especially their natural tendency to worship false gods. So, Moses expected these appointed officials to judge the actions of those who violated God’s laws concerning idols and idol worship. Moses had clearly communicated God’s restrictions, which were nothing more than an elaboration on the first commandment.

“You must never set up a wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build for the Lord your God. And never set up sacred pillars for worship, for the Lord your God hates them.” – Deuteronomy 16:21-22 NLT

This section is all about proper worship – the kind of worship that is acceptable to God. He has not left it up to mankind to decide how, when, or who to worship. The *form* of Israel’s worship was just as important to God as the *focus* of their worship. Not only were they prohibited from worshipping false gods, they were denied the freedom of worshipping the right God in the wrong way.

“You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.” – Deuteronomy 17:1 ESV

They were not allowed to borrow and incorporate elements from the pagan religions around them in the worship of God. Asherah poles were off limits. These wooden totems were dedicated to the worship of Asherah, a Canaanite fertility god who was considered the wife or sister of another one of their deities. God had strictly forbidden the Israelites from incorporating these kinds of pagan rituals and forms in their worship of Him.

But God would also not allow the Israelites to use proper forms of worship in the wrong way. They couldn't bring their sick or blemished animals and offer them as sacrifices to God. That was unacceptable worship. He described these kinds of sacrifices as "abominations." The Hebrew word is *tow`ebah* and it refers to "a disgusting thing (morally)."

Someone who offered a blemished lamb as an offering to God was technically obeying the command of God. But he would be violating the intent behind the command. The sacrifice was meant to cost the one offering it. By sacrificing an unblemished, perfect lamb, the worshiper was giving the best of what he owned. He was dedicating to God the animal that would have made the best breeding stock. In doing so, he would be placing his faith in God to provide for his needs.

But that unblemished animal was also intended to represent the idea that God's forgiveness and atonement from sin required a sacrifice that would be acceptable to Him. It had to satisfy His demand for holiness or imperfection. The lamb was acting as a substitute for the sinful human being was offering it. It stood in the place of the sinner, acting as his proxy or replacement.

Because God demanded that His people worship Him in a way that reflected His holy and righteous character. They had to honor Him for who He was and all that He had done. And beyond worshiping Him in the wrong way, the most egregious sin they could commit would be failing to worship Him at all. Which is why Moses provides these future judges of Israel with instructions about dealing with idolaters. He describes idolatry as doing "evil in the sight of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 17:2 NLT). It was considered a violation of the covenant the Israelites had made with God. And just so they knew what kinds of actions constituted idolatry, Moses spelled it out: "they might serve other gods or worship the sun, the moon, or any of the stars—the forces of heaven—which I have strictly forbidden" (Deuteronomy 17:3 NLT).

Moses commands these future judges to investigate thoroughly any reports of this kind of behavior among the people. If they found the reports to be true, the violator was to be dealt with quickly and severely.

"...the man or woman who has committed such an evil act must be taken to the gates of the town and stoned to death." – Deuteronomy 17:5 NLT

Once again, Moses refers to this kind of behavior as *tow`ebah* – an abomination. God sees idolatry as disgusting and unacceptable. Those who practice idolatry are guilty of failing to remain set apart unto God, and so they are to be set apart from the community by taking them outside the gates of the town, and then executed.

While this sounds like harsh and unusual punishment to our modern ears, we must understand that it was intended to act as a purifying and preserving agent among the Israelites. Sin of any kind, if left unchecked, would act as a cancer among the people, eventually infecting the entire community and resulting in the judgment of God. The death of one, while difficult for us to understand, was to be preferred to the ultimate judgment of God against the entire community.

The death of Jesus incorporates both illustrations used in these verses. First of all, He became the sinless Lamb of God who offered His life as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He became the unblemished substitute who gave His life so that others could live. The apostle Paul points out the vivid contrast between Adam, the first man, and Jesus, the God-man.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. – Romans 5:12 NLT

In other words, Adam's sin spread to all mankind. His disobedience brought the curse of sin and death onto all humanity. But Paul goes on to explain that Jesus offered a permanent solution to the sin problem created by Adam.

Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:14-15 NLT

God would not allow the sin of Adam to permanently destroy His creation, so He sent His Son as the sinless sacrifice to atone for the sins of man.

Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:16-17 NLT

God takes sin seriously. Because He is holy, God must punish those who commit sin, and the Bible clearly states that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). But God graciously offered His Son as the payment for man's sin debt. He offered His life as a substitute for sinful man. And while the death of the sinner stoned outside the gates of the city had no atoning value, it would prevent further infection of the community.

The judges of Israel were to treat sin with a seriousness and soberness that reflected God's hatred for it. But they were to be careful to ensure that any accusations concerning idolatry were fully investigated and thoroughly proven so that no one was punished unjustly. And just to make sure that no one would be tempted to use a false accusation of idolatry in order to enact vengeance against another, Moses commanded, "never put a person to death on the testimony of only one witness. There must always be two or three witnesses. The witnesses must throw the first stones" (Deuteronomy 17:6-7 NLT).

One man could not falsely accuse another. There had to be corroborating witnesses. And it was these men who had to cast the first stone to take the life of the guilty party. This added feature was intended to place the heavy burden of taking the life of the accused on the heads of those who brought the charges. If they had lied, they would be responsible before God for the death of an innocent man.

God considers the worship of false gods to be disgusting and unacceptable. But even the worship of the right God in the wrong way is equally repugnant to Him. Man's worship is the greatest gift he has to offer. God doesn't need our gifts. He doesn't require our sacrifices. What God is looking for is true worship. As the prophet Micah so aptly put it:

What can we bring to the LORD? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves?

Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins?

No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:6-8 NLT