

GIDEON—JEPHTHAH---SAMSON - I

(Judges 6:1—15:20)

Keep in mind the time periods in the Old Testament: Beginnings---Noah---Patriarchs (all in Genesis). Then: Captivity (in Egypt)---Wilderness Wandering (40 years)---Conquest (when they move into Canaan to conquer the land)---and now Judges.

Remember that the book of Judges is a book of cycles. Every so often God raises up a judge to deliver the penitent Israelites from an oppressor---whom God has used to punish them. In Judges 6 it is the Midianites who are the oppressors. (The chapter is worth reading for the full story.) An angel appeared to Gideon, telling him that God had chosen him to deliver his people. A skeptical Gideon needed a couple of signs, including wet and dry fleece, to be convinced that it was really God behind the call.

Chapter 7 records the great defeat of the Midianites with only 300 men---as God had reduced the force to prove that it was the Lord and not Gideon's forces who were successful. Gideon ruled for 40 peaceful years.

Chapters 10-12 record the interesting story of Jephthah, an outcast son of Gilead and a prostitute. The elders of Israel, desperate for someone to deliver them from the Ammonites, turned to Jephthah, known to be a mighty warrior. They promised to let him be their leader if he was successful.

Jephthah is best known for a rash promise he made to the Lord: if the Lord would give the Ammonites over to him he would give as a burnt offering the first thing that came out of his door upon his return. To Jephthah's horror, it turned out to be his only daughter. Chapter 11 makes it sound as if he actually sacrificed her---although some scholars think she was not actually killed (see Adam Clarke's Commentary if you want more information).

Chapter 13 begins the well-known story of Samson---the angel's message to his parents, the Nazarite vow, and his birth. Chapter 14 records his marriage to a Philistine woman, his great power in killing a lion, his riddle for the bridegrooms, and his wife's betrayal of his secret. Finally he kills 30 men to get their clothing to fulfill his promise. In anger at his wife he does not return to her, after which she marries another man.

Samson, of course, was known for his great supernatural strength. Chapter 15 records his vengeance on the Philistines by burning their wheat fields by tying torches to the tails of 300 foxes, leading to the slaying of 1,000 Philistines.

