

PART 3

CONNECT GUIDE

**THE BOOK OF
JUDGES**

**WALLACE MEMORIAL
BAPTIST CHURCH**

Composed By: Chase Campbell
Designed By: Jarred Morgan

AS WE BEGIN

A READING PLAN

WEEK 7

- Judges 9
- Genesis 4
- Genesis 16
- 2 Samuel 9
- Judges 9

WEEK 8

- Judges 10
- Judges 11
- Judges 12
- Genesis 22
- Matthew 9

WEEK SEVEN

DAY 1: JUDGES 9

Throughout our study of Judges, we've watched Israel ignore God's commands, create a problem for future generations, forget God, get conquered, and then cry out for help. In chapters 1-5 we saw that God sent leaders to deliver Israel that were upright and faithful. These men and women led the people back to God and thus helped restore peace for a number of years. We call this "The Judges Cycle" because it's a story that repeats itself in a number of ways over and over with essentially the same outcome.

With Gideon, that cycle changes. In Judges 6-8 the people never repent. They cry out to God to save them, but they still act in anger when He sends Gideon to tear down their altars to Baal. Moreover, we see Gideon's trust in God erode almost immediately. He becomes fearful in the face of Ephraim and then vengeful and petty towards his own people, and finally he makes his own idols to fuel his greed and negligence. It's at this point where the "cycle" becomes much more of a downward spiral.

When we reach chapter 9 there is a massive difference in the conflict. God doesn't send a foreign army, a group of raiders, or an evil king to conquer Israel. God doesn't send ANYONE AT ALL. Israel's conflict in chapter 9 is self made. Yes, they are clearly still worshipping idols and abandoning God's ways,

but the oppression and violence in Israel are the natural result of their own sin, not of divine intervention.

There's a lesson in this conflict that teaches us something tangible about sin. Sin has its own consequences. Cause and effect are a natural and logical flow that reveal God's desire for order. Every action has a consequence because of the fabric of reality that an orderly God sets up. Gideon and his contemporaries wanted freedom from oppression, but had no interest in repentance. Gideon paid lip service to God, but then turned around and instituted his own form of idolatry. The next generation went right back to worshipping idols, but we also see Gideon's vindictive and violent streak imitated.

This chapter should be a massive warning for all of us. What idols are we holding onto so tightly that we refuse to give them to God? What sins are we normalizing in our lives that the next generation will embrace? Where are we being wilfully blind to the consequences of our sin? We will see that this is only the beginning of what happens when humanity does things their own way instead of honoring God.

- Are there any habitual sins in your life that you still cling to even though they cause you trouble?
- Are you tempted to blame "the devil" when you start experiencing the consequences of your own choices?

DAY 2: GENESIS 4

In Judges 9 we see that Abimelech is jealous of his brothers, and lusts after their positions of power. I wish that we could call this a low point in human history and say it won't happen again, but you and I both know that this type of violence is almost cliché. It happens so often, and not just in the Bible. Killing one's own family for power and jealousy becomes a theme in almost every civilization's story. In fact, the first ever murder had this exact same precedent.

To oversimplify the story, Adam and Eve got hungry and curious so sin entered the world. That sin began corrupting the human heart in a way that said "I've got a better way to do this than what God came up with." It's the idolatry of self here that ends up in the first murder. Cain actually started out with an admirable desire. He wanted his offering to be accepting and pleasing to God. As a pastor I would hope that's something we all desire. The text seems to suggest that God wanted this for him as well. Although we don't get details, we know that Cain was doing something he knew was wrong. God simply told him to do what's right and it would be accepted.

We do know that Cain decided to ignore God's ways in his attempt to be accepted. Instead of examining himself, he decided to murder his brother. Cain had a worthy goal, and

clear instruction from God how to achieve it, but his desire to obtain it his own way caused him to be dominated by his hatred and jealousy.

Sin is always a slippery slope. God doesn't ask for an outcome that we can reach at any cost, He asks us to follow His ways first. His warning to Cain is also a warning to all of us. Sin is crouching at the door. We must dominate it or it will dominate us, and the only way for us to have any chance against our own sinful nature is to let the Holy Spirit do the supernatural work of breaking sin's hold over us. So the question remains... Will you do it God's way, or will you choose your own glory?

- What causes you to be jealous of another person?
- Have you ever had a good goal, but ended up doing something unethical to reach it?

DAY 3: GENESIS 16

Sin has consequences, and we continually find those consequences because we decided to do things our own way instead of following God's way. Honestly, that's a pretty good summation of humanity's contribution to the Old Testament. We saw that Abimelech did things his own way and almost all of his brothers got killed. Adam and Eve did things their own way and sin entered the world. Did you notice however, that Gideon set things into motion by his own infidelity? According to chapter 6, Gideon had "many wives and a concubine." Abimelech was the son of that concubine.

Yes, many people in the Bible are polygamists. No, that doesn't mean it's ok. Every time we see polygamy, slavery, concubines, and infidelity in the Bible it always creates long term suffering for those involved. We see this in the life of David, where his children end up in civil war. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and it only pulled him away from God. In today's reading we see the same thing. Sarai convinces Abram to seek God's promise outside of the specific instructions He gave them.

God promised them a child, but in her impatience Sarai decided to also bow at the altar of self direction and request that Abram conceive a child with their servant. At this point, many people explain this away by simply saying "well, that was a common practice in the region at that time." To that

we reply: Just because something is common, doesn't make it good. The practice itself was oppressive and demeaning to the servant, just like it was to Gideon's concubine. In both these cases these were probably women who had been sold like property and were treated as disposable.

In both cases we see that resentment and jealousy created generational conflict that caused pain, suffering and death for those involved. How many times do we have to read a story about someone deciding their way is better before we realize that only God's path leads us to peace, and our own methods will always end in pain. So as we read today, let's ask ourselves: What "common" practices are we accepting even though they're sinful? Are you setting aside your ethics to say "That's just business." Are you praising immorality because it's the "lesser of two evils." Are we approving of sin because it makes us comfortable? Let's not fall into the same self idolatry of Gideon and Abimelech. Let's embrace God's ways, and trust the consequences to Him.

- What are commonly accepted practices in our culture that are sinful?
- Why is it so easy to tolerate sin when it becomes common?

DAY 4: 2 SAMUEL 9

The story of Abimelech shows us how the pattern of sin constantly recreates itself through our idolatry. What would happen, however, if a person chose to do something that reflected the character of God instead of reflecting the human lust for power? Yes the Bible is primarily full of stories where people fail, reject God, and suffer the consequences, but there are moments where people choose to follow God instead.

In the ancient world, regime change happened often. Elections and peaceful transitions of power were rare if they happened at all. In most cases the previous king, chief, judge, or emperor was repeatedly stabbed and then discarded. The common and accepted practice was to then make sure that ALL of the previous ruler's family members were killed so that no one would arise and lay claim to the power that was just taken. It was brutal, it was evil, and it was common.

In 2 Samuel 9, however, we see that King David decides to reject the way of the world and show kindness. David seeks out any remaining members of Saul's house, not to destroy them, but to show them mercy. This remaining heir to Saul's house was named Mephibosheth. Now, I'm sure that David's advisors challenged this decision. They probably told him that he was endangering his claim to the throne. They probably told him to sacrifice his morals in the name of "stability," but David was set on showing mercy and grace. Not only did Mephibosheth get to live in safety, but David essentially adopted him as one of his own and had him eat at his personal table.

David's mercy in this case gives us a beautiful picture of what Jesus also does for us. Our ancestors all challenged God, and through our self idolatry we pathetically attempted to

dethrone Him. God would have had every right to destroy each of us, but instead He showed us mercy and grace and offered us restoration as His own children.

Judges 9 teaches us what happens when we follow our hearts.
2 Samuel 9 teaches us what happens when we follow God.

- Who can you show mercy and forgiveness to today?
- How can you show the character of God by breaking cultural norms?

DAY 5: JUDGES 9

If you thought the first half of Judges 9 was messy and violent, then I'm sure the second half was absolutely gutwrenching. God began to turn the hearts of the people against Abimelech, but it did not happen quickly, and many people paid the price for evil leadership repeating the mistakes of the past. While this is all very disturbing, it shouldn't surprise us. After all, Abimelech was just doing what Gideon did. Wait! Didn't Gideon trust God and win a great victory? Wasn't he the hero of the last story?

That's the hard part about the book of Judges: there are no heroes. Yes, Gideon trusted God for a few moments, but as soon as the first part of that battle was over he fell right back into his own self centered ways. Let's not forget that after Gideon chased down and defeated the Midianites, he also went back through towns of his own people on a vengeful rampage where he tortured and killed hundreds. One generation later, there are no foreign invaders, but the people of Israel are still killing each other and worshipping idols.

This brings to light one of the most important lessons we can learn about sin. Our sin, whether it's our action or our negligence, will always have consequences, but sometimes those consequences may not even be your own. In this story we see Gideon's sin passed down through the generations of his family. His sons pay for it with their lives. Thousands of people are caught in the aftermath, and the entire nation pays a price.

Generational sin can seem like an unstoppable force. Many people in this world simply imitate what previous generations have modeled for them, and then take it a step further. This should terrify us. One generation can make church attendance optional, but then the next will abandon it all together. One generation will be politely quiet about racism, and the next will call it "just an opinion." One generation will overlook the immorality of their leaders, but the next will embrace and celebrate it. Every generation will talk about "kid's these days," only to shift the blame and ignore their responsibility.

As we finish this week on Abimelech, let's consider what we're modeling for the next generation. Let's teach them to be open about their faults and failures instead of trying to self justify. Let's teach them to do what's right instead of making moral compromises. Let's teach them to trust Jesus, because it's only His mercy and His grace that can prevent generational sin and destruction.

- What are Generational sins that you often see repeated?
- What are some bad, but common justifications for moral compromises?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: OCTOBER 19, 2025

WEEK SEVEN: JUDGES 9

This week we studied the story of Gideon's son Abimelech, who murdered his brothers and dealt in treachery. This marked a low point for Israel in Judges because the violence was internal and self inflicted. We look at how the idols of self determination and jealousy caused Abimelech to repeat his father's ways and adopt vindictive brutality. Today your Campus Pastor will walk you through the story of Abimelech and show you the implications this has for Christian living in our modern context.

ACTION STEP

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

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CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 7

- Have you ever had to break a family habit? How did you become aware that it needed to change? What were the difficulties you had in breaking this habit?
- How did Abimelech imitate Gideon in his violence and his motivation? Could Gideon have prevented this from repeating? How can we talk about our failures to a younger generation so they can avoid them?
- Violence within families is all too common in the Old Testament. It happens with Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and so on. What do each of these other stories of family violence have in common with Abimelech? How do they each teach us a different insight from the others?
- Israel suffered because they chose an immoral and dishonest leader. Does God still hold different groups accountable for the leaders they choose to follow? What does that look like?
- Most of us have had conflict with a family member at some time or another. Have you repented and restored that relationship? If not, then how could you do that?

WEEK EIGHT

DAY 1: JUDGES 10

The people again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. No, that isn't a misprint, it's just how every section of Judges begins. After the horror that was Abimelech's rule the people spent several generations in relative peace. We get very few details about what actually happened in this era, except that one of the Judges had a bunch of sons who rode donkeys. One would think that after all these cycles of idolatry and oppression that Israel would abandon the idols and stay true to the ways of their God, but we know that's not what happens. We start the same cycle over, and over (and over) again.

In chapter 10, however, it's God's reaction that is unique and different. This time when the people cry out for Him to save them, God reminds them it hasn't really worked in the past. He reminds the people that He has been delivering them since their days of slavery in Egypt, but even though He's proven Himself they always choose to worship statues and little wooden tiki men instead. In one of the harshest statements we see in the whole book, God says "You chose to worship idols. Ask them to save you and see how that works out."

The reaction of mixed confusion from the people is what reveals their hearts. They tell God they realize they've sinned, and they'll accept punishment as long as He saves them today. If there was ever a statement that revealed the short sighted

nature of sin, it's that one. The people of Israel are completely missing the point. After generations they still believe that changing their circumstances will fix all of their problems. They still refuse to recognize that they need a change of heart instead of an easier life.

No battle, no ruler, no harvest, no good fortune will ever fix the greed, violence, and self centered idolatry that exists in the human heart. The people of Israel don't need another tribal leader, they need a savior. They need someone who will be able to break the hold that their sin has over them. This chapter of Judges reminds us that nothing will ever replace our need for Jesus.

- What are the situations in your life that remind you how badly you need God?
- Where are the places you're tempted to trust in your circumstances instead of asking God to change your heart?

DAY 2: JUDGES 11

This chapter is one of the most disturbing stories in the entire Bible. That's why we want to start out our explanation with a reminder that the people in Judges are not examples to be followed. They are warnings to be feared. The warning from

Jephthah's story is this: God doesn't want YOUR version of worship. God doesn't want your compromise with the culture you live in. God wants you to follow HIS ways and imitate HIS character.

It's very easy to point out those in Scripture and in life that know God's commands and choose not to follow them. However, for some reason, we tend to have a much harder time recognizing those who choose to add to the commandments of God, even though that's just as bad. Moreover, when we do recognize that people are adding their own laws and rules to God's ways we tend to take a much softer approach and at times even validate them as "just trying to do more."

This story however, shows us a true low point in Israel's history. In Joshua, as Israel was conquering the land, God specifically said that the Canaanites were being punished and driven out because of their evil practices. The most notable of those evil practices was the act of sacrificing children to the false god Molech. In this chapter, Jephthah proves that Israel has become no better than the people they displaced.

God granted Jephthah numerous victories over Israel's enemies, but Jephthah's sacrifice to honor God was nothing less than betrayal. God never asked Jephthah to make a sacrifice. God never condoned what he did to his daughter. God had no interest in being worshipped as if he was an evil

pagan entity instead of the ruler of the universe who told us to value human life above all else. (Genesis 9) This specific story was included so that everyone could see how sin blinds us to the ways of God.

We would be wise to learn the lesson from this chapter. Our choice of how we want to worship God is meaningless, because He hasn't called us to come up with our own way. The people of Israel chose to adopt child sacrifice and claim that they were worshipping God. The Nazis claimed to be a Christian party "worshipping" God, even while they slaughtered millions. The Spanish Inquisition claimed to be evangelism while they tortured people into "repentance." 20th century Americans sang hymns in church on Sundays and then claimed "purity" in their Jim Crow laws and their Lynchings.

God doesn't want our tainted human version of worship. He told us how to worship him, and if we continue to add our own ways then we become no better than the Canaanites who had to be driven out of His presence.

- What are some false worship practices of our culture today?
- How can we repent from the past mistakes in our culture and mend the hurt they caused?

DAY 3: JUDGES 12

At a certain point, the book of Judges starts to get a little predictable. Jephthah wins a victory at God's hand then does something evil. Just like Gideon. After the fighting is over and the risk is in the past the men of Ephraim show up and ask why they weren't included. Just like in the story of Gideon. The big difference in this case is that where Gideon became passive and groveled in the face of Ephraim, Jephthah decided to settle their dispute with violence.

In both stories, the people of Israel had no concern with the ways of God. They were only concerned with their own glory, their own lust for violence, and their own arrogance. In both cases, the men of Ephraim should have repented and given God glory for His victory, but instead their personal honor weighed heavier. Both Gideon and Jephthah should have given God glory for the victory, but where Gideon was a coward Jephthah was a warmonger.

The same story is retold over and over again because it shows the trajectory of the human heart when we decide we know better than God. In this case the cost was death. 42,000 men of Ephraim and an uncounted number of Jephthah's men. When we decide we know better than God there will always be a cost. Let's not allow our own desire for glory and self determination to cost us our friends, our families, and even

our lives. Let's make sure we aren't ever willing to sacrifice someone else's good for our own whims.

Instead, let's be like Jesus. This was a chapter of people willing to sacrifice others so they could be praised. Jesus was the only person who ever deserved to be worshipped and He sacrificed Himself so that we could be saved.

- Why is personal pride such a driving force?
- How can we seek the good of others instead of our own glory?

DAY 4: GENESIS 22

For today's devotion I'd like to teach you about "polemics." A polemic is a written argument, speech, essay, or story that functions as a criticism. Much of the Old Testament functions as a polemic against the worship of false Gods. God reveals Himself and His character to us in the pages of Scripture so that we can know Him, and know how to properly worship Him. In doing this He also distinguishes Himself from the false religions of the ancient Near East, and explains why His ways are good and their ways are evil.

Since we've had to tackle the horrifying story of Jephthah this week, it's important to look back and see where exactly God distinguishes Himself from false gods like Molech who were worshiped through human sacrifice. In Genesis 9, God reiterates that Human life and dignity belong exclusively to Him because humans are made in His image. When it specifically comes to human sacrifice though, we have to look at Genesis 22.

For a story to be a polemic against child sacrifice, it has an odd start. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son. You and I read that and we are immediately horrified, but to a person living in that region at that time, this wouldn't have been scandalous. In fact, if someone did not know our God, they would see this as normal. Abraham complies with God's request, not because he wants to make this sacrifice, but because he knows the character of God. Later the Bible tells us that Abraham believed that God could have easily raised Isaac back to life. We see this trust that Abraham has when Isaac asks where the sacrifice is among their packed items. Abraham tells him that "God will provide."

You and I get to be deeply relieved when God halts the process and commands Abraham to stop, but to the average person of that time THIS would have been the shocking part. This story makes it clear that our God doesn't want us to sacrifice people in His name. He is not petty and needy like the false gods and

idols of this world. He is the God who created everything, and has no need to be provided for, especially not by human sacrifice.

Jephthah knew this story. Jephthah should have stopped and not sacrificed his daughter. Jephthah should have worshipped God based on the way He revealed His own character. Instead, Jephthah chose to adopt the ways of cultists and pagans. Few of us are pressured to make human sacrifices in our time. We are however told that we need to compromise with our culture and change our worship practices to fit their comforts. We don't burn people in sacrifice, but we betray people for career advancement. We don't slaughter people to appease false Gods, but we often tolerate oppression and racism as "opinions." We don't offer infants to idols, but we often tolerate their loss as "birth control."

The polemic lessons of the Old Testament may seem far away and wrapped up in different long forgotten cultures, but they reveal God's character to us, which becomes shockingly relevant with just a little context.

- What are sacrifices that people make today for their own desires?
- What are some false worship practices that are common in our culture?

DAY 5: MATTHEW 9

If you focus on how bad things get in the book of Judges you might just miss one of the most important things it's trying to tell you. Yes, we need to learn lessons about not following immoral leaders who claim Christianity and then act immorally. Yes, we need to learn that forgetting God and embracing the ways of the world has consequences that can cause pain and suffering for generations. Although I'm not sure why, we also apparently need to know about how many sons and grandsons each owned their own personal donkeys. (Judges 10 and 12) All of these lessons, however, point us to one lesson that outweighs all of them: We don't need a leader, we don't need a change in circumstances, we need a savior. We need Jesus because He's better than anything this world has to offer.

Jephthah sacrificed his own child. Jesus, however, came to save your children, and he proved it by raising one from the dead. Matthew 9 is a collection of stories that details how Jesus went about healing people. Already, in just that theme we see that He is better than the Judges of the Old Testament who only came to kill. In verse 18-26 we see that Jesus not only leads by healing, but that He controls the very balance of life and death. The father in the story comes to Jesus in faith and Jesus immediately follows him to heal his daughter. It's also worth mentioning that he stops to comfort and heal a woman on their way because Jesus still has time for everyone. When

Jesus arrives, the people in the house laugh at Him for saying that He can heal the girl. Yet, without even exerting any effort He brings her right back from the dead.

We don't need another Jephthah, we need Jesus.

Many of us have friends, family members, coworkers, and acquaintances that are headed on a bad path. We see their rejection of God and we often feel helpless to do anything. Many people try arguing, legislating, or even berating people into faith, but that never works. We need to do the same thing as the father in this story. We need to put our faith in Jesus and then walk with Him and bring His light to those that are dead in their sin. Jesus is better in every way. We don't need a Judge, we don't need a ruler, and we certainly don't need another Jephthah. The book of Judges makes us look forward to the Gospel of Matthew. It makes us realize how badly we need Jesus.

- Make a list of people in your life that need to know Jesus.
- How are you going to share His gospel with each of them?

DISCUSSION GUIDE: OCTOBER 26, 2025

WEEK EIGHT: JUDGES 10-12

This week we had to read several disturbing stories in the book of Judges. We saw that Jephthah sacrificed his own child and brought Israel to the point of being no better than the Canaanites they drove out of the land. We also learned how and why our God distinguished Himself from the false gods that were worshipped through human sacrifice. Finally we learned how Jesus came to restore and revive life instead of sacrificing it. Today your Campus Pastor will go into further detail of multiple aspects of this disturbing narrative.

ACTION STEP _____

How will I live out the action step this week?

SERMON NOTES

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CONNECT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: WEEK 8

- Has someone ever wronged you, and then asked for your help? How did that make you feel? Did God's response in Chapter 10 verses 10-14 surprise you?
- This week in our devotions we learned about how our God set Himself apart from the false gods who were worshiped through human sacrifice? How is Christianity uniquely different from the other main religions in the world today?
- While human sacrifice is uncommon today, we often make numerous other sacrifices. What types of things do people often sacrifice for their goals in our culture today? What goals tend to demand more sacrifice than others?
- Read Judges 12:1-7 and Judges 8:1-3. How are these interactions alike? How are they different? What can we determine about the state of Israel in chapter 12 from the differences?
- Jephthah committed a terrible evil in sacrificing his daughter because he chose to worship God in a way that God did not want. What are some false worship practices that have become common in our culture today? How can we speak against them in a way that keeps us approachable and maintains our integrity? (Please be sure to provide chapter and verse for proof with your answers!)

Bonus Question: What's with all the Donkeys in chapters 10 and 12?

