**Lesson – 4 Conflict and Crisis: The Judges**

**Read for your study:** - [Judges 4:1-24](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%204.1-24); 6:1-40; [14:1-20](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Judges%2014.1-20), [Heb. 11:32](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%2011.32), [1 Sam. 2:12-25](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Sam.%202.12-25), [8:1-7](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Sam%208.1-7).

**Memory Text: -** "And Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation' **(**[**1 Samuel 2:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Samuel%202.1)**)**

**Introduction: -** There were 15 Judges – or leaders — during the period of the Judges, which lasted more than three centuries. Moses and Joshua were each the General, Prime Minister and Chief Rabbi all rolled into one. And the Jewish people responded to them.

However, death of Joshua brought about an entirely new situation in Jewish history and Jewish life. For the first time the Jewish people were independent in their own homeland – and, even more significantly, for the first time they did not have a single, strong leader. The vacuum of leadership created by the death Joshua led to all sorts of challenges. Besides lacking central temporal authority (i.e. central government) there was little religious authority in many ways as well. The Book of Judges is named from the people God selected to provide leader­ship for His people. **Judges 2:16** says that God **“raised up judges who saved them.”** We will not cover all the details of all the judges but learn about a few who played vital role during these new challenges in sacred history! Let us dive into our study and learn!

**Deborah: -** After Joshua’s death, there was a slow re-infiltration of the enemies whom he had driven from the land. For more than a century, father, son, grandson, great-grandson, great-great grandson – all had to fight what often seemed like the same never-ending war. This had a demoralizing effect.

Eventually, by the time of the third Judge, **Shamgar ben Anas**, the enemies to the east and west had been defeated. Nevertheless, there was still a threat from the north by a king named (**Yavin) Jabin**, whose fortified city-state lay in the Galilee.

Yavin developed metal-manufacturing foundries used for weaponry. Employing this new technology, he innovated a method of mechanized warfare using chariots that no one could match. On top of his technological advantage, he aligned himself with the greatest General of the time, **Sisera,** who had never lost a battle. No one could stand against Sisera, including the Jewish people who were terrorized by him. After all the wars, this brought Jewish morale to a new low. The situation was turned around by a great person – who happened to be a woman: Deborah.

**Who was Deborah?** One of the first of the Judges is a woman—Deborah.She was a born leader; a prophetess possessing great knowledge, intelligence and charisma. She was also famous for conducting her meetings with great modesty in the open under a palm tree. We do not know much about her husband, whose name was Lapidus.

Deborah mobilized an army led by Barak, who like her was from the tribe of Naphtali. However, even she could not mobilize too many from the other tribes. They were frightened of Sisera and as the battle took form the other tribes mostly stood by and watched which was indicative of the times of the Judges.

On the eve of the battle, Barak is doubtful that Israel’s warriors could ever beat such a strong opponent but Deborah stands firm. An unexpected storm is unleashed in the heavens, and the resulting downpour turns the ground to mud; the iron chariots get stuck and the Canaanites panic. Sisera himself fled on foot. He came to the tent of a man named Heber the Kenite **(Judges 4:11)**, whose wife, **Jael (Yael),** seduced him and then drove a peg through his temple with a hammer. The biblical narrative considers her act worthy of great blessing. The Oral Tradition classifies her act as one of the rare cases in history of a **“sin for pure reasons.”** Deborah celebrated the victory by composing a famous song, which is recorded in Judges Chapter 5.

**Considering Jael’s actions from our perspective today, can her deeds of deception and violence be justified to achieve ends, no matter how right those ends might be?**

**Gideon: -** Deborah had set things right for the Israelites. After her, there was peace in the land for about 40 years. But soon they were back to idolatry and back into the hands of their oppressors. **Judges 6:1** says, “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.”

God says over and over again—keep the Law and no one will bother you. You will live in peace in your land. You will prosper, and not only that, the whole world will come to learn from you and you will be a light to the nations. But they did not follow His Commands!

The oppression from the Midianites was aided by Amalekites and “other eastern peoples.” This combined enemy came from the east to plunder the grain-growing areas of Israel, primarily the Esdraelon Valley and the Mediterranean coastlands as far south as Gaza **(Judg. 6:4)**.

For six years the invaders stripped these areas of livestock and grain. The Israelites’ hid in caves. When the people cried for relief this time, God pro­vided a deliverer, Gideon and was asked by God to destroy their Baal Altar, which he did at great personal risk, showing courage and faith **(Judges 6:25-32).**

Gideon called for an Army, 32,000 responded from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. But God said that 32,000 are too many. With the test of drink from the brook, only 300 were ready for the battle.

 Gideon divided his men into three sections, deployed it around the edge of the enemy camp, and attacked by night killing two main leaders, Zebah and Zalmunna and won the battle. The country had peace for 40 years while Gideon lived.

**Samson: -** After Deborah, eight different Judges ruled Israel over approximately the next 120 years. Samson was the ninth judge after Deborah. He is arguably the most difficult one to characterize and understand. During his reign, the eastern border quieted down but the western one heated up. The Philistines came back with a vengeance and remained the main enemy of Israel for the next 100 years. They were able to impose their will on Israel for 40 years and continued to periodically do so through the reign of Israel’s first king, Saul.

**Who was Samson?** Samson’s father was Manoah, a Danite who had not migrated north with other of his tribe. Importance was lent to Samson’s birth by a prior announcement through the Angel of **God (Judg. 13:3-23).**The son to be born would be a Nazirite, which means, among other things, that his hair was not to be cut **(Num. 6:1-13).** His place of birth was Zorah, located at the boundary line between Israelite and Philistine land.

Samson did not lead an army to battle, but he did go alone among the Philistines, working havoc by feats of enormous strength. This strength was of special enablement by the Spirit of God, his dedication to God being symbolized particularly in his uncut hair. Through this strength he was able to kill many of the enemy.

**Samson’s Feats of Strength (Judges 14-15)**

1.      Samson’s first demonstration of strength came in connection with his marriage to a Philistine girl of Timnah. On the way to visit her Samson encountered a lion and killed it with his bare hands.

2.      The second demonstration occurred within a year. Samson returned to claim his bride, but he was told that she had been given to another. In retaliation, he caught 300 foxes, tied firebrands to pairs of them joined by their tails, and released them to burn Philis­tine crops. The Philistines reacted by burning Samson’s one-time bride and her father to death. Samson avenged their death by slaughtering many of the enemy. Then he moved back to Israelite territory, where 3,000 of his own people, afraid of Philistine retaliation, came to capture him. His countrymen promised not to hurt him themselves, so Samson per­mitted himself to be bound and delivered to the Philistines in Lehi. Once among the Philistines he burst his ropes and killed 1,000 of the enemy with the use of a *“fresh jawbone of a donkey.”*

3.      After these experiences Samson served as judge in Israel for twenty years **(Judg. 15:20)**. These years may have been spent in Hebron **(Judg. 16:3)**, and would be contemporary with Samuel’s judgeship prior to the battle of Mizpah **(1 Sam. 7:3-11)**.

 4.      Samson again visited Philistine territory, stopping at Gaza, where he fell victim to lust and sinned with a harlot **(Judg. 16:1-3).**Rising at midnight, and finding the city sur­rounded by waiting Philistines, he inflicted marked humiliation on Gaza by breaking away defensive gates and carrying them to a nearby hill on his return to Hebron. Not long after, Samson once more submitted to lust, becoming infatuated with a woman of the Philis­tines named **Delilah,** who lived in the Sorek Valley not far from his place of birth, Zorah. Given promise of massive reward by the Philistine leaders, Delilah sought to entice Samson to reveal the secret of his strength. He gave her false answers three times but finally told her the truth regarding his uncut hair. She cut it off while he slept, and the Philistines were able to put out his eyes and make him labor sightless in their prison in Gaza. When his hair had grown again, Samson had his last revenge. Taken to entertain assem­bled Philistines in the temple of Dagon, he called upon God for a return of his strength, and he was enabled to dis­lodge two central supporting columns of the temple from their bases, destroy­ing the building and killing more of the enemy at the time of his own death than in all his prior years.

In this last attempt, Samson eliminated the entire Philistine leadership. This was a major setback in their conflict with Israel. It was a turning point. From this time on, the Israelites started to gain the upper hand.

**Did God use Samson’s weakness for women as "an occasion to move against the Philistines?"**[**Judges 14:4, NKJV**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Judges%2014.4)**.**

God, indeed, had special plans for Samson; unfortunately, things didn't work out as well as they could have. **Ellen G. Whites** writes, “"Just as he was entering upon manhood, the time when he must execute his divine mission-the time above all others when he should have been true to God-Samson connected himself with the enemies of Israel. He did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing."-**Ellen G. White,**[**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 563**](http://www.ssnet.org/lessons/16a/helps/lesshp04.html#pp563).

**Ruth: -** The 4 chapter book of Ruth does not contain the name of its author but most scholars believe that Prophet Samuel penned the book.

The story of Ruth does not speak about any army or enemies that threaten God’s people, but rather speaks about another part of Jewish history. It was written to the Israelites. **It gives a link in the seed-line of the coming Christ.** Perhaps this part of Jewish history pertaining to the coming Christ is most memorable because it is presented as a love story. There is pictured a loving husband, Elimelech, in a time offamine (1:1), a loving wife who was supportive of her husband'smove (1:4), two loving sons, Mahlon and Chilion (1:1,2) whobecame husbands (1:4), and two loving daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth (1:6-14).

However, the primary love story has to do with the love of Ruth for her mother-in-law (1:14-22). The love was repaid with a husband, Boaz, and the blessing of bearing a child who would be in the seed-line of the Christ (4:17-22).

**How this brief bit of history must have thrilled the Jews when they heard and read it!** It was written to teach that genuine love at times may require uncompromising sacrifice which the Israelites had forgotten. Regardless of our lot in life, we can live according to the precepts of God and genuine love and kindness will be rewarded. God abundantly blesses those who seek to live obedient lives. Obedient living does not allow for **"accidents"** in God's plan. God extends mercy to the merciful. His providence is seen in His care for the seed through which Jesus would come **(Matt. 1:5-6)**.

**What is the significance of the story of Ruth?** The author gives us the background telling us that ‘Ruth was from an enemy nation that had on many occasions tried to destroy Israel, but she chose to identify with God's people and worship their God. In addition, she found favor in the eyes of her adopted homeland, not just by Boaz **(**[**Ruth 2:10**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth%202.10)**)** but also by the people who knew of her **(**[**Ruth 2:11**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth%202.11)**)**. Boaz was confident that she also found favor in God's eyes **(**[**Ruth 2:12**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth%202.12)**)**, and taking his admiration for her a step further, he agreed to marry her **(**[**Ruth 3:10-11**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ruth%203.10-11)**)’**.

**What is the lesson for us today?** The sovereignty of our great God is clearly seen in the story of Ruth. He guided her every step of the way to become His child and fulfill His plan for her to become an ancestor of Jesus Christ **(**[**Matthew 1:5**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%201.5)**)**. In the same way, we have assurance that God has a plan for each of us. Just as Naomi and Ruth trusted Him to provide for them, so should we.

**Ruth’s choice sets before us a great example (Ruth 1:16)**

* She chose the True God – “Your God shall be my God”
* She chose the right path – “Where you go I will go.”
* She chose a godly home – “Where you stay I will stay.”
* She chose godly associates – “Your people will be my people.”
* She made a wise choice – a personal choice – a determined choice – and she was rewarded for her wise choice.

**Samuel: -** The last great personality of the period of the Judges is the Prophet Samuel, who is one of the most important prophets in Jewish history, and who is also famous for anointing the first two kings of Israel—Saul and David. **(See 1 Samuel, chapters 1-16.)** He authored the Book of Judges and, together with the prophets Gad and Nathan, the book of Samuel.

By the time Samuel appears on the scene, the Jewish people have gone through close to 400 years of no strong central leadership. They had to live up to a very high level of individual responsibility or else God would let them know they were off course via the **Canaanites or the Philistines or the Midianites.** This was a very difficult way to live. In the final analysis, the nation couldn’t maintain this level of scrutiny without stronger guidance.

When Samuel was younger, he would travel the land adjudicating Jewish law and giving people advice, but now that he has grown old, he can’t do it anymore. Meanwhile, his two sons, who have taken over for him, prove unpopular with the people. And they demand for a king.

Unfortunately, Samuel was facing the same reality that Eli faced: sons who didn't follow in his footsteps of faithfulness and fidelity **(**[**1 Sam. 8:1-7**](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Sam.%208.1-7)**)**. His two sons Joel and Abijah, sinned before God by seeking dishonest gain and perverting justice.

About Eli, Ellen G. White writes, “"But although he [Eli] had been appointed to govern the people, he did not rule his own household. Eli was an indulgent father. Loving peace and ease, he did not exercise his authority to correct the evil habits and passions of his children. Rather than contend with them or punish them, he would submit to their will and give them their own way."-**Ellen G. White,** [**Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 575**](http://www.ssnet.org/lessons/16a/helps/lesshp04.html#pp575)**.**

**Samuel** doesn’t want to do it, but God tells him to go ahead and find a king for the people. And this is how the Time of Judges comes to a close. Samuel functions as a leader for 13 years and the last of two years he actually co-leads the Jewish people with the first Jewish king whose name is Saul.

**What can we learn from the life of Samuel?**

* We see the sovereignty of God in Israel, no matter whom the people chose to reign over them.
* There may be times when we feel intimidated by those in authority, but, as Samuel proved more than once, it is God who must remain our priority.
* The world may look on us cynically when we remain steadfast in our faith. However, we can be confident that God will vindicate those who have remained faithful to His Word **(**[**Psalm 135:14**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20135.14)**).**
* Samuel was a great man of prayer, and his people respected him for it **(**[**1 Sam. 12:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%2012.19)**,**[**23**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Samuel%2012.23)**)**.
* Even though Samuel was aware of the evil in Saul’s life, he never stopped praying and mourning for him.
* He also teaches us that God alone should receive the glory and honour.

**How do we see the reality of good and evil in our lives?**

**The Bible makes it very clear that there is no middle ground in the great controversy. What are some of the ways we can seek guidance to help us make right choices?**

**Did we learn anything about faith, trust, grace, and human frailty from these stories and incidents of the past?**

**God Bless You!!!**