**Survey of Old Testament**

**Judges**

1. Just as Joshua continues the history of Israel after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:1), the Book of Judges picks up the story of Israel after the death of Joshua (Jud. 1:1). This is a book of defeat and disgrace, as we see in the key verse (17:6): “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The Lord was no longer “King in Israel”—the tribes were divided; the people were mixing with the heathen nations; and it was necessary for God to chasten His people. We have a summary of the entire book in 2:10–19—blessing, disobedience, chastening, repentance, deliverance. Judges is the book of incomplete victory; it is a book of failure on the part of God’s people to trust His Word and claim His power.

**Judges 1–2 The Failures of the Nation**

1. Verses 1–18 record the early victories of Judah and Simeon, while the rest of the chapter is a record of repeated defeats. What began as a series of victories, led by the Lord, ended as a series of compromises. Of course, they were able to rationalize their failures by making slaves out of the heathen peoples; but this only led to further trouble. In Joshua 23–24, Joshua had warned them against compromising with the enemy, but now they were falling into that very trap.
2. They forsook the Lord and they followed other gods. The religion of the Canaanites was horribly wicked, with practices too obscene to discuss. Worship of Baal and Ashtaroth (male and female deities, v. 13) plagued Israel throughout their history. Once it got into their lives, it was difficult to exterminate. When the people forsook the Lord, He forsook them. Time after time he “sold them” into the hands of their enemies. Instead of enjoying the “rest” God had promised, the nation was in and out of slavery for hundreds of years, with only occasional periods of “rest” from the Lord. Each time the judgment became so severe that the nation finally cried out to God. He would send a deliverer, but note that God was with the judge personally, not with the nation collectively. Sadly enough, the people turned to the Lord only when in trouble; once the judge was gone, the nation fell back into sin again.

**Judges 3–5 The Victories of the Judges**

1. In the Book of Joshua, there was one leader and God was with the whole nation; but in Judges, there are many leaders, and God is with these leaders only, not with the entire nation (2:18). Several minor judges are listed here.
2. Othniel: The people of Mesopotamia enslaved Israel for eight years; then God raised up Caleb’s son-in-law Othniel to deliver the nation. His name means “God is might,” and he lived up to his name. It must have pleased the family of Caleb to have such a courageous man in their ranks. He delivered the nation and they had rest for forty years.
3. Ehud: This time the Lord used Moab to chasten Israel, along with Ammon and Amalek, the old enemies of the Jews! The Israelites served as slaves for eighteen years until Ehud delivered them and gave them rest for eighty years. God used the fact that he was left-handed to deceive the enemy, for the king would not have known what Ehud would be drawing out from his garments on the right side (3:21). The Benjamites seemed to be gifted with left-handed men (Jud. 20:16; 1 Chron. 12:2). Once the enemy king was slain, Ehud was able to muster his army and drive out the invaders.
4. Shamgar: Shamgar led in a victory against the Philistines. He is not called a judge, although he is listed with them. God is able to use the most foolish weapons, even an ox goad.

**Judges 4-5 Deborah and Barak**

1. For twenty years the Canaanites had oppressed Israel, so God raised up Deborah a prophetess to lead the way to victory. First she called Barak to deliver the nation (4:1–7), and she even gave him the battle plan from the Lord. Usually the Kishon River was dry, but God was going to send a great storm that would flood the river-bed and trap the chariots of iron (see 4:3 and 5:20–22). Though Barak is listed as a man of faith in Hebrews 11:32, we see him here as a man who had to depend upon Deborah for victory. In fact, God used two women to deliver the Jews—Deborah the prophetess and Jael (v 18–24). Barak led 10,000 men from Mt. Tabor, trusting the promise of God given by His servant, Deborah. Whatever may have been Barak’s weaknesses, God still honored him for his faith in her song of victory.
2. Note in 5:6–8 a description of the terrible state of society in Israel at that time. The people were so fearful they moved from the villages into the walled cities, and it was not safe for people to travel on the highways. A decline in the social and moral life of the nation was the inevitable consequence of the nation’s spiritual decline.

**Judges 6-8 The deliverance by Gideon.**

1. The seven years of oppression under the hands of Midianites was divine chastening for Israel’s idolatry and evil practices. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:1–2). The strength of Midianite oppression forced the Israelites to hide themselves and their produce in mountains. You However, this was not a continual occupation but a seasonal invasion at harvest time. The Midianites and their allies traveled on camels (7:12) whose range of distance and speed (as high as 100 miles per day) made them a long-range military threat. This drove Israel to cry out to the Lord for help. This cry does not seem to have been an indication of repentance for sin because they apparently were not aware of the moral cause behind the enemy’s oppression until the Lord sent a prophet to point this out (6:7–10).
2. Gideon’s call or commission resulted from a confrontation with the Angel of the Lord (who is “the Lord,”). Gideon’s act of threshing wheat in a winepress reflected his fear of discovery by the Midianites. The Angel’s introductory remark affirmed the Lord’s presence with Gideon and described Gideon as a mighty warrior. Gideon questioned the divine promise in view of his people’s present circumstances. He correctly concluded, however, that the Lord had put them into the hand of Midian.
3. “The Angel of the Lord” commissioned Gideon to Go … and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. But, Gideon objected, “My clan is the weakest … and I am the least.” God’s reassurance reaffirmed His presence with Gideon (I will be with you) and the ease with which he would accomplish victory over the Midianites (as if they were but one man).
4. Gideon requested a sign to confirm the Lord’s promise. After Gideon prepared a meal, the Angel of the Lord touched the food offering with the tip of His staff and consumed it by fire, thus providing the sign Gideon had requested. Then the Angel … disappeared. Gideon feared impending death because of seeing the divine presence. When the Lord assured Gideon he was not going to die … Gideon built an altar and named it the Lord is Peace.
5. God commanded Gideon to destroy his father’s altar to Baal and Asherah pole. Gideon was then to construct a proper kind of altar to the Lord, kindle a fire with the wood of the Asherah pole, and offer one of his father’s bulls as a burnt offering to the Lord. The hostility of the community against Gideon was defused by his father’s advice. Joash, perhaps repentant and inspired by his son’s remarkable actions, wisely proclaimed, “If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself. “
6. An army of thirty-two thousand men rallied to his side … he asked God to confirm victory. Gideon “put out the fleece” twice, and both times God answered. God spoke to Gideon and told him the army was too big. So the Lord told him to let all who were fearful go home. So 22,000 soldiers went home. However, God did not need all of the remaining 10,000 men, so He tested them and sent most of them home. The 300 who drank from the hand would have been in better position to face and fight the enemy in a surprise attack.
7. On the night of the battle, God graciously gave him a special sign assuring him that he would win the battle. The barley cake represented Gideon, for barley was the poorest kind of food. But God was going to use this ordinary farmer to win a great victory!
8. The steps in Gideon’s victory are easy to trace: he has a promise to believe, an altar to build, a vessel to break, a lamp to burn, and a trumpet to blow. And God gave the victory! As a result of this stunning victory, the men of Israel urged Gideon to rule over them. For the first time, the tribes begin to desire a king. However, Gideon refused the offer because he believed that “the Lord shall rule over you.”
9. Having refused the kingdom, Gideon requested instead that they give him the earrings of his prey, which they had taken from the fallen Ishmaelites. The weight of the golden earrings was about seventy pounds, from which Gideon for some unexplained reason, made an ephod. Whatever Gideon’s reason for making the ephod, the end result was that all Israel went a whoring after it so that it became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house (v. 27). It is possible that Gideon meant no harm by his actions and was equally shocked by the unfortunate result.
10. The subsequent history of Gideon’s family is not encouraging. He had many sons and daughters by his “many wives” (v. 30), but these were all slain (with the exception of Jotham) by the son of Gideon’s concubine, a man named Abimelech.

**Judges 10-12 Judges The deliverance by Jephthah**

1. The Lord again chastened His straying people by foreign oppressors, the Philistines in the west, the Ammonites in the east, who oppressed Israel for 18 years.
2. In previous times of distress Israel’s calling on the Lord was not an evidence of repentance for her sin. However, on this occasion the Israelites demonstrated genuine repentance, first confessing their sins and then, after the Lord rebuked them they remained steadfast in their confession of sin and took action to get rid of the foreign gods and serve the Lord.
3. Jephthah was used by God to deliver the children of Israel. He made a vow to the Lord that the first thing that met him when he came back from victory at his house he would offer as a burnt offering to the Lord. His only daughter who was a virgin was the first thing to come out of his house. He ended up dedicating her to the Lord and she served the Lord all her life in the temple at Shiloh.