Judges 13–21

Survey of the Bible

God’s character amid Israel’s decline

Decline

Judges 13–21

1-12 Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah (A), Gideon (C), Jephthah (C-)

13–16 Samson (D+): deliverance amid personal conflict

17–18 Micah, the Danites (F): religion on human terms

19–21 Gibeah, the Benjamites, and civil war: a national catastrophe

Study discipline:
Distinguish God’s words and actions from human claims.

God Takes the Initiative

Judges 13:1–5, 24–25

Setting: Israel lives under Philistine rule.

God announces a son to a woman who has borne no child.

Samson will be a Nazirite to God from the womb.

He will begin delivering Israel from the Philistines.

Wonder Who this is!

Judges 13:18 / Isaiah 9:6

Judges 13:18	Isaiah 9:6
“seeing [my name] is wonderful”	“Wonderful Counselor”
pil’i: an adjective Wonderful, beyond comprehension	pele: a noun Wonder

Some Christians read this as Christ appearing before his incarnation.
The connection is purely interpretive — an interesting speculation!

Good God

Judges 13:16–23

Manoah: “We will surely die, **for we have seen God.**”

His wife **considers** the offering God accepted,

the things He revealed, and the promise He gave.

God’s promise gives her reason to trust His intentions.
Contrast how God approaches women in Judges with how Israelite men do.

Deliverance Under Philistine Rule

Judges 13:1, 5 / Judges 15:11–13 / Judges 16:23–24

Israel lives under domination.

Judah hands Samson over to the Philistines.

His capture later becomes a celebration of Dagon.

We know God has a bone to pick here. This isn’t just Israel’s history.

What is at stake beyond Samson’s personal conflicts?

The Marriage and the Narrator’s Explanation

Judges 14:1–4

Samson requests a Philistine woman as his wife.

His parents ask why he will not marry among his people.

The narrator: this was “of the LORD,”

connected with “seeking an occasion against” Philistine rule.

How does the narrator’s explanation frame our assumptions?

Who Are the Philistines to God?

Amos 9:7 / Zechariah 9:7 / 2 Samuel 15:18–21

God’s concern extends beyond Israel.

Zechariah pictures a Philistine remnant belonging to God.

David receives loyalty from Ittai the Gittite, the Cherethites

Could this conflict expose their response to God’s deliverer?

The Wedding Riddle

Judges 14:12–19

The wager: 30 linen garments and 30 changes of clothes.

The companions threaten Samson’s wife and her family.

She obtains the answer and tells them.

The Spirit empowers Samson; he kills 30 men at Ashkelon to pay the wager.

Does their treachery exemplify the occasion God seeks in verse 4?

The Conflict Escalates

Judges 14:19–20 / Judges 15:1–11

Samson goes home angry, then returns to visit his wife.

Her father has given her to his wedding companion.

Samson burns crops. Philistines kill her and her father.

Samson retaliates again.

Samson: “As they did to me, so I have done to them.”

Deliverance and Dependence

Judges 15:11–19

Philistines come for Samson. Judah hands him over. The Spirit empowers.

Samson’s bonds give way and he kills 1,000 with a jawbone.

Afterward, he calls to God when he fears dying of thirst.

God opens a hollow place. Samson drinks and revives.

“You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant”

God Sustains Those He Leads

Judges 15:18–19 / Exodus 17:1–7 / 1 Kings 19:1–8

After the ordeal	God meets the need
Samson: battle, then thirst Judges 15:18–19	Water and renewed life
Israel under Moses: rescue, then thirst Exodus 17:1–7	Water from the rock
Elijah: Carmel, flight, exhaustion 1 Kings 19:1–8	Bread and water as he rests

God meets those He leads into an ordeal.

“God has no unfunded mandates.”

Gaza and Delilah

Judges 16:1–20

In Gaza, Samson visits a prostitute and escapes an ambush.

He carries away the city gates.

He loves Delilah. Philistine rulers offer her money.

After three false answers, he reveals the secret of his consecration.

“He did not know that the LORD had departed from him.”

Set Apart: Something to Lose

Judges 13:5 / Judges 16:17–20 / 1 Corinthians 9:27

God gives Samson a concrete boundary: no razor.

Samson knows it belongs to his dedication to God.

After the shaving, he assumes he can act as before.

Paul wrote to Corinth, taking the possibility of disqualification seriously.

God’s past work through us calls for continuing faithfulness

Remember Me and Strengthen Me

Judges 16:21–31

The Philistine rulers credit Dagon with Samson’s capture.

They bring out the blinded Samson for entertainment.

Samson asks God for strength and vengeance for his eyes.

The building falls. Samson dies with those inside.

“O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me”

Entrusting Vengeance to God

Judges 16:28 / Revelation 6:9–11 / Romans 12:19–21

Samson brings his desire for vengeance to God.

The martyrs ask God to judge and avenge their blood.

Paul wrote to Rome to entrust repayment to God, calls us to love our enemies.

Bring the desire for vengeance to God; entrust judgment to him

Micah: Worship on His Own Terms

Judges 17:1–13

Micah of Ephraim is not the later prophet Micah.

His mother dedicates silver to the LORD for an image.

Micah creates a shrine and eventually hires a Levite.

Micah’s conclusion: “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me”

Religious confidence is often a sign of disobedience and disregard.
Contrast to the times God directs Israel who seek confirmation of His will.

Dan: An Inheritance Still Unsecured

Joshua 19:40–48 / Judges 1:34 / Judges 18:1–10

Dan is a full tribe with an allotted territory.

Amorite pressure confines the Danites to the hills.

Scouts seek a new home and ask the Levite “priest” for guidance.

He encourages them. But no inquiry or reply of God is recorded.

The *scouts’* claim: “God has given it into your hand”

Dan’s Actions and God’s Instructions

Judges 18

What Dan does	God’s instruction
Takes Micah’s objects 18:17–18, 24	Do not steal Exodus 20:15
Installs the carved image 18:30–31	Do not make or serve idols Exodus 20:4–5
Appoints its own priest 18:19–20, 30	Priesthood belongs to Aaron’s sons Numbers 18:7
Establishes a rival shrine 18:31 contrasts Shiloh	Worship at God’s chosen place Deuteronomy 12:5–14

Being a Levite does not automatically qualify someone as a priest

“No King in Israel”

Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

“No king” occurs	“Right in his own eyes” also appears
17:6	Yes
18:1	No
19:1	No
21:25	Yes

God’s law remains, but justice breaks down

Gibeah: Violence Within Israel

Judges 19:10–28

The travelers bypass foreign Jebus for Israelite Gibeah.

The host offers women to protect his male guest.

The Levite hands over his concubine to the attackers.

They assault her all night. She collapses at the doorway.

No hero to follow: the narrative records no divine approval

Civil War: God Answers Israel

Judges 20:12–35

Benjamin refuses to surrender Gibeah’s offenders.

18: God names Judah to go first. Israel suffers defeat.

23: God says to go again. Israel suffers another defeat.

28, 35: God promises victory and strikes Benjamin.

The narrator explicitly attributes Benjamin’s defeat to the LORD

Victory and Devastation

Judges 20:47–48 / Judges 21:1–7

600 Benjaminite men escape to the rock of Rimmon.

Israel turns back against Benjamin’s communities.

They strike the population and animals and burn towns.

They then grieve over the tribe’s threatened extinction.

The wider destruction receives no separate recorded command

Preserving Benjamin: More Victims

Judges 21:1–23

An oath prevents Israel from giving daughters to Benjamin.

They attack Jabesh-gilead for missing the earlier assembly.

They give 400 surviving young women to Benjamin’s men.

The elders arrange abductions at Shiloh for the remainder.

The remedies are the people’s decisions; no divine command is recorded

Shiloh: Worship Continues

Joshua 18:1 / Judges 18:31 / Judges 21:12, 19–23

God’s house stands at Shiloh while Dan maintains an idol.

Captive women from Jabesh-gilead arrive at Shiloh.

An annual feast of the LORD becomes an opportunity

for the abduction of more women.

The sanctuary and festivals remain; obedience cannot be assumed

Right in Their Own Eyes

Judges 17–21

Women and other vulnerable people are unsafe.

Religious reassurance accompanies disobedience.

Group loyalty protects wrongdoers.

The powerful silence those they exploit.

Attempts to repair harm create new victims.

Our Need for God

Judges 21:25

A people’s certainty that it is doing right

can coexist with profound corruption.

We need God to expose what we cannot see and to form his character in us.