

# JUDGES

## *Introduction*

*Israel is established in Canaan, but they have powerful enemies as neighbors, especially the Philistines that are in what today is “the Gaza strip.” Israel is not a united people, they do not have a permanent ruler. When difficulties with their neighbors arrive, “Yahweh raises a saving ruler.” These ruler are “the Judges.”*

*Once again, what the writers are interested in is the history of the fidelity / infidelity of the people of Yahweh, and the protection / punishment of Yahweh to his people.*

## **Penitential liturgy**

**2**<sup>6</sup>When Joshua dismissed the Israelites, each one of them went to his inheritance to occupy the land.

<sup>7</sup>The people served Yahweh during the lifetime of Joshua and of the leaders who outlived him, and who had witnessed all the great works of Yahweh for Israel. <sup>8</sup>Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of Moses, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. <sup>9</sup>They buried him at the boundary of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. <sup>10</sup>That whole generation died and another one came, but they did not know Yahweh or what he had done for Israel.

## **Grand introduction**

<sup>11</sup>The Israelites treated Yahweh badly for they served the Baals instead. <sup>12</sup>They abandoned Yahweh, the God of their ancestors who had brought them out of Egypt, and served other gods, the gods of the neighboring peoples. They bowed before those gods and offended Yahweh.

<sup>13</sup>When Yahweh saw that they had abandoned him to serve Baal and Ashtaroath, <sup>14</sup>he became angry with his people and gave them into the hands of plunderers who left them in misery. He himself sold them to their enemies who completely surrounded the Israelites, so that these Israelites could no longer withstand them.

<sup>16</sup>Yahweh raised up “judges” (or liberators) who saved the Israelites from their exploiters. <sup>17</sup>But neither did they obey those “judges” for they still prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They soon left the way of their fathers who obeyed the commandments of Yahweh; they did not follow the way of their fathers.

## **Gideon**

**6**<sup>1</sup>The Israelites treated Yahweh badly, and Yahweh gave them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years.

<sup>11</sup>The Angel of Yahweh came and sat under the sacred tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, of the family of Abiezer. Gideon, the son of Joash, was threshing the wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

<sup>12</sup>The Angel of Yahweh said to him:

—Yahweh be with you, valiant warrior.

<sup>13</sup>Gideon answered:

—Please, my lord, if Yahweh is with us, why is all this happening to us? Where are the wonders which our fathers recounted to us? Did they not say that Yahweh led them up from Egypt? Why has he abandoned us now and given us into the hands of the Midianites?

<sup>14</sup>Yahweh then turned to him and said:

—Go, and with your courage, save Israel from the Midianites. It is I who send you.

<sup>15</sup>Gideon answered:

—Pardon me, Lord, but how can I save Israel? My family is the lowliest in my tribe and I am the least in the family of my father.

<sup>16</sup>Yahweh said to him:

—I will be with you and you shall defeat the people of Midian with one single stroke.

<sup>33</sup>All Midian, Amalek and the people of the East joined forces, crossed the Jordan and invaded the plains of Jezreel.

<sup>34</sup>Then the spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon with strength; he blew the trumpet and summoned the men of Abiezer. <sup>35</sup>He sent messengers throughout the whole territory of Manasseh and they joined him. The people of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali also went out to meet them.

<sup>36</sup>Gideon said to God, “If indeed you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, grant me this favor. <sup>37</sup>I am going to spread this woolen fleece on the threshing ground. If the dew falls only on the fleece while all the ground remains dry, then I shall know that you are to save Israel by my hand, as you have promised.”

<sup>38</sup>So it was: Gideon rose at day-break, squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, filling a cup with water. <sup>39</sup>Gideon again spoke to God and said to him:

—Don’t be angry with me if I dare to speak to you again. Allow me to make another test with the fleece: let it be dry only on the fleece and let dew come on all the ground.

<sup>40</sup>That night, Yahweh did so. The fleece remained dry and dew covered all the ground.

**7**<sup>1</sup>Jerubaal, that is Gideon, rose early with all the people who were with him and they encamped beside the spring of Harod. The Midianite camp was farther north and extended from the hill of Moreb to the plains.

<sup>2</sup>Then Yahweh said to Gideon:

—There are too many people with you. If I give the Midianites into their hands, the Israelites might think that they won over the Midianites by their own strength. <sup>3</sup>So summon your men and say to them that whoever is afraid may go home.

So twenty-two thousand men returned and only ten thousand remained.

<sup>4</sup>Yahweh said to Gideon:

—There are still too many people. Take them down to the water and I myself will test them for you. If I say: This one shall go with you, he will go. And if I say: Not this one, he shall not go.

<sup>5</sup>So Gideon brought them down to the water and Yahweh told him:

—Those who lap the water like a dog, you shall place on one side. And those who kneel down to drink, you shall place on the other side.

<sup>6</sup>Three hundred men lapped the water, and the rest knelt down to drink.

<sup>7</sup>Then Yahweh said to Gideon:

—I will help these three hundred men who lapped the water and give the Midianites into your hands. Let the rest return to their homes.

<sup>8</sup>The three hundred men took the pitchers and the horns of whom Gideon dismissed. Finally, Gideon and his three hundred men faced the Midianites who were encamped below the valley.

<sup>9</sup>That night Yahweh said to him:

—Rise and go down to the camp, because I have given it into your hands.

<sup>15</sup>When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed, returned to the camp of Israel and said:

—Arise, for Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into your hands!

<sup>16</sup>Gideon divided the three hundred men into three groups. Then he handed the trumpets to all and the empty pitchers with lighted torches inside. <sup>17</sup>He said to them:

—Look at me, and do what I do. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. <sup>18</sup>When I and those who are with me blow the trumpets then blow yours all around the camp and shout: For Yahweh and for Gideon!

<sup>19</sup>With the hundred men with him, Gideon came to the Midianite camp just as the guards were changing shift at the beginning of the midnight watch.

<sup>20</sup>Then the Israelites smashed the jars, took the torches in one hand, and blew the trumpets they were holding in the other hand. After blowing the trumpets, the three groups shouted:

—For Yahweh and for Gideon!

<sup>21</sup>Everyone stood in his place around the camp while the Midianites ran, shouting as they fled. <sup>22</sup>As the three hundred Israelites went on blowing the trumpets, Yahweh made the Midianites in the camp kill one another. Those who managed to escape went as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, and as far as the border of Abel-meholah opposite Tabbath.

**8**<sup>13</sup>After the battle, Gideon, the son of Joash, returned through the slope of Heres.

<sup>22</sup>The Israelites said to Gideon:

—Since you have saved us from the Midianites, you shall be our king, and after you, your son and the descendants of your son.

<sup>23</sup>But Gideon answered:

—I will not rule over Israel, nor my son, for Yahweh is our king!

<sup>32</sup>Gideon the son of Joash died at a happy old age, and he was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of Abiezer.

<sup>33</sup>After the death of Gideon, the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals and took Baal-Berith as god. <sup>34</sup>The Israelites no longer remembered Yahweh, their God, who had freed them from the hands of all the enemies who surrounded them. <sup>35</sup>Neither were they grateful to the family of Jerubaal-Gideon for all the good things he had done to Israel.

## Samson

**13**<sup>1</sup>The Israelites again treated Yahweh badly so he gave them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

<sup>2</sup>There was a man of Zorah of the tribe of Dan, called Manoah. His wife could not bear children.

<sup>3</sup>The Angel of Yahweh appeared to this woman and said to her:

—You have not borne children and have not given birth, but see, you are to conceive and give birth to a son. <sup>4</sup>Because of this, take care not to take wine or any alcoholic drink, nor to eat unclean foods from now on, <sup>5</sup>for you shall bear a son who shall be a Nazirite of Yahweh from the womb of his mother. Never shall his hair be cut for he is consecrated to Yahweh. He shall begin the liberation of the Israelites from the Philistine oppression.

<sup>24</sup>The woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew and Yahweh blessed him. <sup>25</sup>Then the Spirit of Yahweh began to move him when he was in Mahane Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

**14** <sup>5</sup>Samson then went down to Timnah, and when he reached the vineyards at Timnah, a young lion came up roaring toward him. <sup>6</sup>The Spirit of Yahweh then seized Samson. With bare hands he tore the lion to pieces as he would have done with a young goat.

**15**<sup>1</sup>After some time, during wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing a young goat with him, and he said:

—I want to be with my wife in our room.

But her father would not let him in, <sup>2</sup>saying:

—I thought that you did not like her anymore, so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister still better? Why don't you take her instead?

<sup>3</sup>Samson replied:

—This time I owe nothing to the Philistines even if I do them harm.

<sup>4</sup>Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes, took some torches and tied the animals tail to tail. He then placed a torch in between every two tails, <sup>5</sup>set fire to the torches and turned the foxes loose in the grain fields of the Philistines. In this way, he burned the sheaves and the standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.

<sup>6</sup>The Philistines asked:

—Who did this?

And they answered:

—Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah, because this man took his wife and gave her to his companion.

So they went up and burned her and her family. <sup>7</sup>Samson said to them:

—Since you did this, I will not rest until I have had my revenge on you.

<sup>8</sup>So he caused a great havoc upon them.

## Samson and Delilah

**16**<sup>4</sup>After this, Samson fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek; she was called Delilah. <sup>5</sup>The Philistine chiefs said to this woman:

—Charm him and find out where he gets such strength and how we can defeat and tie him up. Each of us shall give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.

<sup>6</sup>So Delilah asked Samson:

—Tell me, please, where do you get such strength and how can others tie you up to subdue you?

<sup>7</sup>Samson answered her:

—If they bind me with seven new and moist bowstrings, then I shall lose my strength and be as any other man.

<sup>8</sup>The Philistine chiefs sent seven new bowstrings that had not been dried to Delilah, and she tied Samson with them. <sup>9</sup>With men hidden in her dwelling, she shouted:

—Samson, here come the Philistines!

Samson broke the bowstrings as if they were burned flax. So they did not find out where his great strength came from.

<sup>10</sup>Then Delilah said to Samson:

—You made a fool of me, and you lied to me. Tell me, how can they subdue you?

<sup>11</sup>Samson answered her:

—If they bind me this time with seven newly-braided ropes which have never been used, then I shall lose my strength and be like any other man.

<sup>12</sup>So Delilah bound him with seven newly-braided ropes. But when she shouted:

—Here come the Philistines!

He again snapped the ropes round his arms like thread. <sup>13</sup>So Delilah said to him:

—How long will you deceive me and lie to me? Tell me how they can subdue you.

He answered her:

—If you braid the seven locks of my hair in the warp of the loom and tighten it with a pin, then I shall lose my strength.

<sup>14</sup>She lulled him to sleep, and then braided the seven locks of his hair in the warp of the loom and tightened it with a pin. Then she cried:

—Here come the Philistines!

Samson woke up and pulled the warp with the locks of his hair. And so, Delilah did not find out where his great strength came from.

<sup>15</sup>Then Delilah said to him:

—You say that you love me, but your heart is not with me. Three times, you have deceived me and have not told me from whence your great strength comes.

<sup>16</sup>And as Delilah insisted and bothered him day after day with her questions, the time came when Samson felt he would die in disgust. <sup>17</sup>So he told her the truth:

—Never has my hair been cut for I am a Nazirite, consecrated to God from the womb of my mother. If my hair is cut, then I shall lose my strength and be like any other man.

<sup>18</sup>Delilah understood that he had told her the truth this time, so she called the Philistine chiefs and said:

—Come, because Samson has revealed his secret to me.

They took the money and came to her. <sup>19</sup>Delilah lulled Samson to sleep upon her knees and called a man to cut the seven locks of his hair. And she could immediately subdue him for his strength had left him.

<sup>20</sup>When Delilah shouted:

—Samson, the Philistines!

He awoke and thought that he could still save himself as on other occasions. But he did not know that Yahweh was no longer with him.

<sup>21</sup>So the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and brought him to Gaza. There they bound him with two bronze chains and made him turn the mill in the prison. <sup>22</sup>The hair on Samson's head, however, began to grow as soon as it was cut.

<sup>23</sup>The Philistine chiefs assembled to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon and had a great feast, saying:

—Our god has given Samson, our enemy, into our hands!

<sup>25</sup>As they were very happy, they said:

—Bring out Samson that he may amuse us.

They brought him out of prison and he amused them. Then they had him placed between the columns <sup>24</sup>and on seeing him the people praised their god saying:

—Our god has put our enemy into our hands,

Samson who has destroyed our country and killed our men.

<sup>26</sup>Samson then said to the boy who held him by the hand: —Lead me where I can touch the pillars on which this house rests, so that I may lean on them.

<sup>27</sup>The house was full of men and women, all the Philistine chiefs were also there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson for amusement.

<sup>28</sup>Samson called on Yahweh and exclaimed:

—Lord, Yahweh, please remember me and restore my strength only this once, so that I may avenge myself against the Philistines for my eyes.

<sup>29</sup>Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, leaned on them with his right arm on one pillar and his left on the other, <sup>30</sup>and cried out, “Let me die with the Philistines!” He pushed with all his strength and the house fell upon the chiefs and the people gathered there. Those who joined him in his own death were more than those he had killed during his lifetime.

<sup>31</sup>His brothers and the whole family of his father went down to get him. They buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the tomb of his father Manoah.

He had judged Israel for twenty years.