



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

JUDGES & RUTH

Week 2

DAY 8

When Bigger Is Not Better

Judges 7:1-25

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever confronted an opponent who was much bigger, stronger, more capable or better equipped than you? What was the outcome?

DIGGING
into the Word

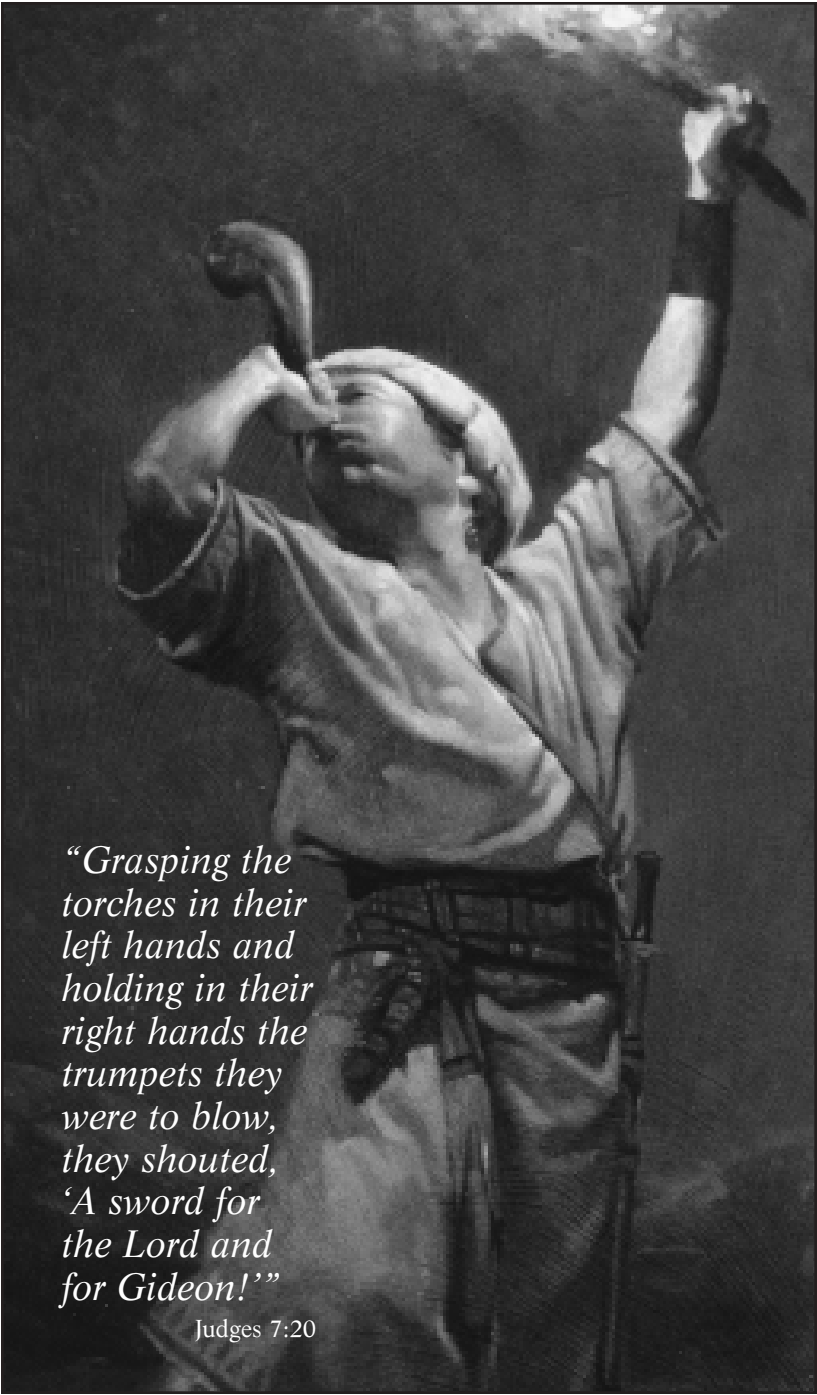
1. What are the two ways God reduced Gideon's army? What was God's purpose in doing so?
2. God spoke to Gideon "during the night" (v. 9). What were his instructions to Gideon?
3. After sneaking into the enemy camp, what information did Gideon learn that encouraged him, and how did that help him plan his battle?
4. Describe Gideon's battle strategy and the results. Which Midianite leaders were captured? What happened to them?

LIVING
out the Word

1. In what ways did God guide Gideon? How do you experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your life—through prayer, advice, meditation, Christ-centered teaching or Bible reading?
2. "When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God" (v. 15). Gideon first worshiped, then took action. Is this a pattern you follow when facing major issues and crises?
3. Much in today's culture that tells us "bigger is better." How does Gideon's experience challenge that notion?

WINDOW
on the Word

*The Midianites were descendants of Abraham. Midian was one of the six sons of Abraham's second wife, Keturah. Some have wondered how Gideon and his servant Purah could have understood the conversation between two Midianite soldiers. The Midianite language was one of several Semitic languages spoken in the area. While it was probably not identical to Hebrew, it was similar enough for Gideon and Purah to follow the conversation. In verse 2, God instructed Gideon to **prune his army down** so that "Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her." Israel's 32,000-strong army was winnowed down to 300 fighting men.*



*“Grasping the
torches in their
left hands and
holding in their
right hands the
trumpets they
were to blow,
they shouted,
‘A sword for
the Lord and
for Gideon!’”*

Judges 7:20

The Little Engine That Could

Judges 8:1-35

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever been denied help just when you needed it most? How did you feel about those who would not help you? Did you overcome the obstacles without the help you needed? Has that experience shaped your attitude about helping others in need?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What was the Ephraimites' concern, and how did Gideon deal with it?
2. Why would the officials of Succoth and Peniel refuse to help Gideon and his troops? What was Gideon's response to them?
3. Which two kings were being pursued? How many fell in battle? What happened to the two kings when they were captured?
4. What request did the Israelites make of Gideon and how did he respond? Why did he turn them down?

LIVING
out the Word

1. How do you respond to criticism? Is it easy or difficult for you to be criticized? Who is most critical of you? How do you respond to that person?
2. In this chapter, Gideon was relentless in his pursuit of and complete victory over the enemy, even though he ran into several roadblocks and detours. When are you like Gideon—relentless and persistent? When are you easily discouraged by resistance?
3. Gideon had virtues (prayerful, persistent in pursuing God's commands) and vices (creating an ephod as an object of worship). What are your virtues and vices? How do you think Jesus regards them?

WINDOW
on the Word

An **ephod** (v. 27) was a garment generally worn by a priest during the performance of priestly duties (see Ex 28:6-13; 35:27; 1Sa 2:18; 22:18; 2Sa 6:14). Scholars note that this priestly garment was costly, usually made of the finest linen. The ephod Gideon created was made of gold, making it even more costly.

Let Me Tell You a Story...

DAY 10

Judges 9:1-57

Is there a story that was important to you when you were growing up? Did that story—or parable—convey a lesson to you? How has it been helpful for Christ-centered living?

1. What was Abimelech's desire? How did the people respond? After being selected as king, what was Abimelech's first act? Who escaped the carnage?
2. Trace the elements of this civil war. Who led the revolt against Abimelech? Who was winning—who was losing? How does the story end?

1. In the parable of verses 8-15, what kind of tree would describe you and why?
2. "He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword" was certainly true of Abimelech—a violent man who died violently. Identify some modern-day examples of those who "lived by the sword and died by the sword."
3. Have you ever been called to be a "Jotham," who challenges the powerful and offers a minority perspective? What was the end result?
4. The people of Thebez (v. 50) received an unexpected deliverance. Have you ever received something similar? Or, is there something you need Jesus to deliver you from from right now?

*Verses 8-15 comprise one of the few Old Testament **parables**—stories used to convey a life lesson. In this case, Jotham used the image of a group of trees electing a king. The olive tree, the fig tree and the vine refer to Gideon and his sons who were righteous rulers over Israel. The bramble refers to Abimelech and his grasp for and abuse of power. Jotham correctly predicted that the people of Shechem and Abimelech would become embroiled in a civil war. The point of Jotham's parable is this: people need to select leaders wisely. They must not burden themselves by selecting people of questionable character. Verse 45 notes that Abimelech conquered the city of Shechem and **scattered salt over it**. Salt rendered the land useless for planting and harvesting, and it symbolized the perpetual desolation of an area. Shechem would not be rebuilt for 150 years.*

OPENING
up to the Word

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Rash Promises

Judges 10:1-11:40

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever made a rash promise—like making a large credit purchase you couldn't afford, or a commitment you couldn't fulfill? Did you make the same mistake again?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Who were the next two leaders of Israel and how long did they serve? Why do you think the account of their rule is so brief?

2. What happened after the rule of Tola and Jair? What was the result of Israel's apostasy? When they cried out to God, how did God respond at first? What was his second response?

3. Why do you think the Israelites chose Jephthah to help them?

4. What diplomatic approach did Jephthah use to avoid war? When the king of Ammon ignored Jephthah's message, how did Jephthah prepare for war? What rash vow did he make to God?

LIVING
out the Word

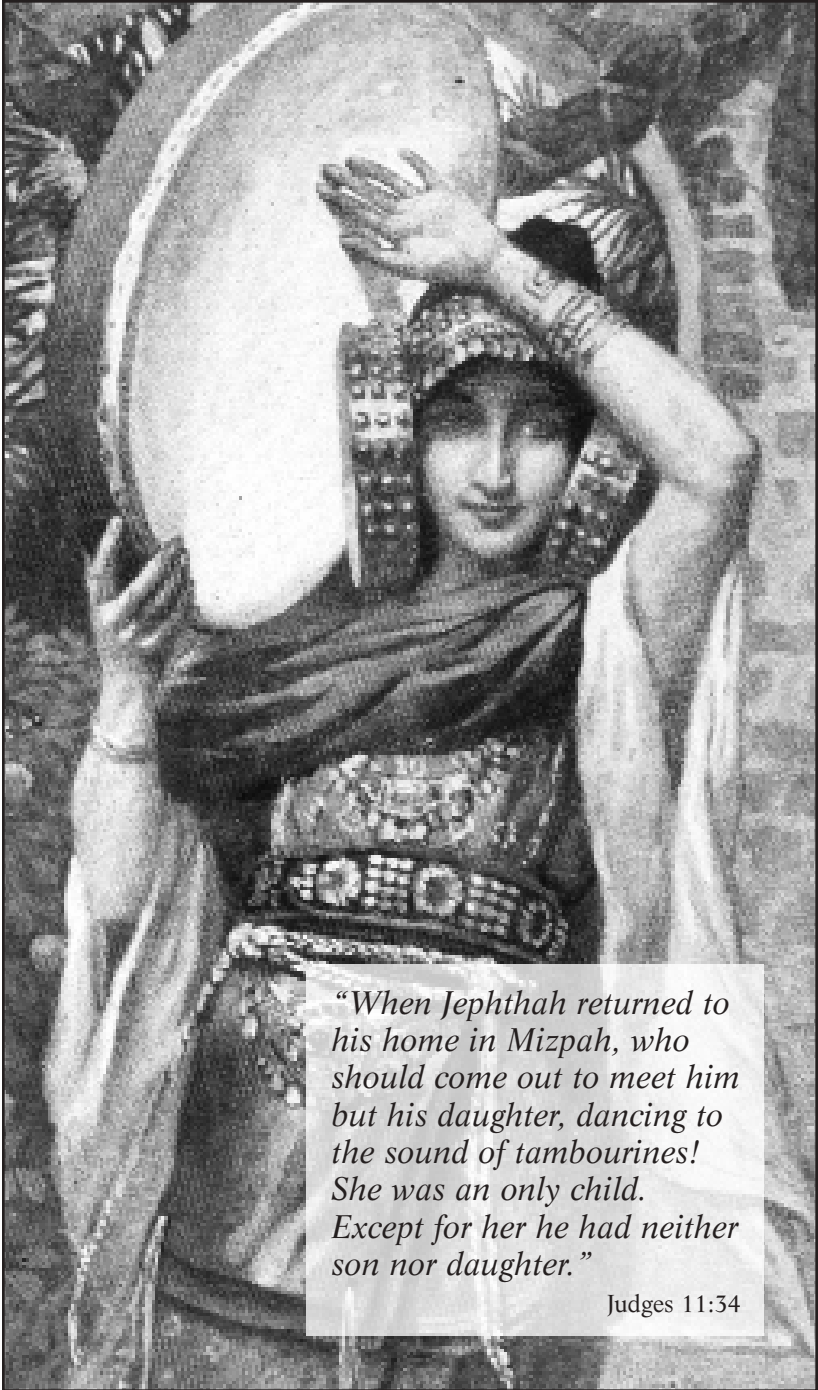
1. At this point in her history, Israel had already forsaken God several times. Is there an error you keep repeating in your life? Is there a lesson from this passage of Scripture that can help you rely on Jesus to break that cycle?

2. God again gives the Israelites another chance. Is there someone in your life who needs to be given another chance from you—or vice versa?

3. Have you ever been asked to provide leadership? How did you respond?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Jephthah made a **foolish vow** to God—that of offering as a sacrifice the first creature to greet him after his return from victory over the Ammonites (v. 31). The first creature to welcome him home was his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines (v. 34). The fulfillment of his vow can be viewed two ways: (1) that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering to God (This was extremely uncommon in Israelite history, but the book of Judges contains many horrifying reports); (2) another possible and probable interpretation is that Jephthah gave his daughter in the service of God requiring that she would remain a perpetual virgin (v. 37: "I will never marry").*



“When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.”

Judges 11:34

Brother Against Brother

Judges 12:1-15

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you witnessed or been part of a “civil war”—perhaps a split in your family, church, civic organization or workplace? What started it? Could it have been prevented?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What complaint did the Ephraimites, a tribe of Israel, have with Jephthah?

2. What response did he give and what action did he take? How did his reaction differ from that of Gideon in 8:1?

3. How long did Jephthah rule as Israel’s judge? Who followed him? Any noteworthy accomplishments?

4. Who are the last two judges cited in this chapter, and what distinguished them?

LIVING
out the Word

1. The Ephraimites were apparently resentful of other people’s success. How do you feel when someone you know has an outstanding success?

2. Consider verses 4-6. When was the last time you made an evaluation or judgment about another person based on his or her accent or appearance?

3. The final three judges in this chapter are noted very briefly. If a similar record were being written about you, what brief distinguishing statements could be made?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Evidently many of Israel’s judges were **wealthy and powerful men**. Although not much information is provided about Ibzan and Abdon, the text makes clear they had great wealth. Ibzan had 30 sons and 30 daughters (v. 9) while Abdon had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, who rode on 70 donkeys (v. 14). Such large families and numbers of livestock were marks of only the wealthiest citizens in ancient times.*

The Birth of Samson

DAY 13

Judges 13:1-24

What kind of family did you grow up in? Lots of rules? Poverty? Hard-working? Religious? Christ-followers? How did your early family life have an impact on your adult years?

1. When Israel became corrupt yet again, who became her oppressor?
2. Who were the main characters in this chapter? How did they affect the story? What were their strengths and weaknesses?
3. What information was brought by the angel to Manoah's wife? When she told her husband, what was his response?
4. What questions did Manoah ask the angel? What did the angel tell Manoah to do?

1. The angel of God promised a sterile woman that she would conceive a child. God can create life, even new spiritual life, where there is none. Have you witnessed such a spiritual transformation in your life or in the life of someone you know?
2. Consider the spirituality of your parents. In what ways is your relationship with Jesus similar to, or different from theirs?
3. Manoah became alarmed when he thought that he had seen God— "We are doomed to die!", he exclaimed. Yet his wife was calm and rational in the presence of fear. Are you more like Manoah or his wife?

*A person who was consecrated as a **Nazirite** (v. 5) became part of a religious order (Nu 6:1-8). That group lived a life of total dedication to God. The outward signs of their commitment included: (1) abstaining from grape products, (2) avoiding certain foods, (3) avoiding haircuts of any kind, (4) avoiding contact with corpses.*

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Lust at First Sight

Judges 14:1-11

OPENING
up to the Word

Do you know anyone who has married outside their faith? What issues and tensions do people of different faiths face as a couple? What common beliefs help to unite them?

DIGGING
into the Word

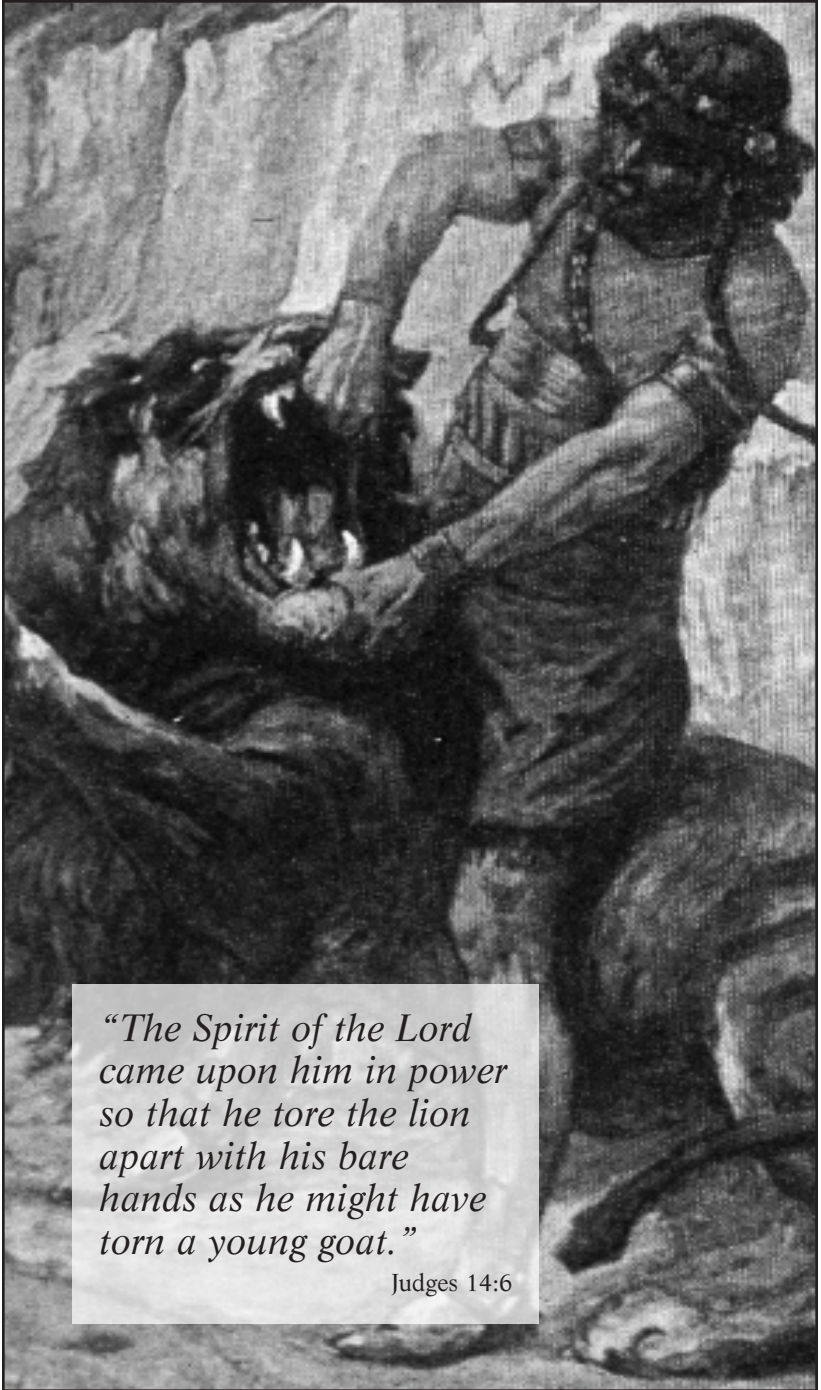
1. How long had Samson known the woman he wanted? What do you think he saw in her that appealed to him?
2. How did his parents respond? What did Samson's quick response to his parents say about him as a son?
3. What do verses 1-10 reveal about Samson's character and personality?
4. Why didn't Samson tell his parents about the source of the honey?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Have you found a life mate? Was it love at first sight? What was your family's reaction?
2. When your parents have offered you advice, has it usually been helpful or irrelevant? How have you usually responded?
3. Have you ever acted against the wishes or instructions of your parents? How did that work out? Have parental wishes ever conflicted with God's instruction in the New Testament?

WINDOW
on the Word

Samson is one of the most dramatic and fascinating biblical characters. As you read this story, watch for Samson's strengths and weaknesses. Among his feats of strength: he killed a lion with his bare hands (14:6); he killed 30 Philistines single-handedly (14:19); he broke the cords that bound him and slew 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:14-16); in a daring escape, he carried off the gates of Gaza (16:3); he broke seven fresh bowstrings as if they were pieces of thread (16:9). Among his weaknesses: he had a "fondness" for women (14:1-3); he disobeyed his parents (14:3); he practiced deceit (14:9; 16:7, 11, 13); he gave way to temper and revenge (14:19; 15:4, 5); he had a cruel streak (15:4, 5).



*“The Spirit of the Lord
came upon him in power
so that he tore the lion
apart with his bare
hands as he might have
torn a young goat.”*

Judges 14:6