

## The Books of Judges and Ruth

By Joelee Chamberlain

Why don't I tell you some more stories from the Bible? Would you like that? (These are all true stories, aren't they?) Let's see, now. We've talked about the stories in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus-Numbers-and-Deuteronomy, and Joshua, haven't we? So what is the next book of the Bible, do you know? That's right. It's the book of Judges. So today let's talk about the stories in the next two books of the Bible after the book of Joshua. These next two books are Judges and Ruth, and we'll talk about them together because they are connected. I'm going to tell you several exciting stories in just a minute.

But first, you remember, of course, that in the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, that it told about not only the beginning of the world and everything in the world, but also about the beginning of the Jews. How Abraham had a son named Isaac, and Isaac had a son named Jacob, and Jacob had 12 sons (Judah and Joseph and Benjamin and Dan and others). And how God changed Jacob's name to Israel. And that Jacob and his family went down into Egypt because of the great famine and Joseph took care of them there. And that there in Egypt is where they had lots and lots of children and grandchildren and became the Jewish nation. We call them the Jews, or the children of Israel, or the Hebrews, don't we?

Then later after Moses led the children of Israel, the Jews, out of Egypt, he was their leader for 40 years in the wilderness, remember? But when it was time for Moses to die and time for the children of Israel to go into the promised land of Canaan, who was their leader then? Why, God had Joshua made to be the leader of the children of Israel then, didn't He? And then with Joshua leading them, they had crossed the Jordan River and conquered the land of Canaan, hadn't they? But how were they able to do this? Because God was with them and helped them, right?

God was their king. But the different leaders of the Jews under God were called judges. Moses had been the first judge, and Moses had other men under him who were also called judges. Then Joshua had been the next big judge. But God was still their king. And God loved the Jews and was taking care of them, and God told them to be very careful to obey Him. If they disobeyed, God would have to punish them to teach them to obey Him, to do what was right. Just like your parents have to punish you if you disobey.

Well, all of the time that Joshua and the leaders under him were alive, the Jews followed God. But they hadn't gotten rid of all of the wicked people living in the land of Canaan who worshipped false gods and idols, had they? Instead, the children of Israel just made some of the wicked cities give them money and then just let the bad people stay there and keep on worshipping their false gods. And after Joshua and the leaders under him all got old and died then the children of Israel began making agreements with these bad people. And then the Jews began doing something really, really bad. What do you think that was? Why, they just forgot all about God and began worshipping idols like the wicked people around them did! Can you imagine that?? Why, God had taken such good care of them. And God had kept all of His promises to them. (God always keeps His promises,

doesn't He?) God had taken them out of Egypt where they had been slaves. God had made a dry path across the Red Sea for them and then drowned the Egyptian army. God had taken care of them in the wilderness, even feeding them the manna, the miracle food, for 40 years. Even their clothes and shoes hadn't worn out in all of that time, remember? God had given them laws and warned them to obey these laws. And then God had made a dry path for them so they could cross the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan, and then God had given them the land of Canaan, just as He had promised. But now they were forgetting all of that and worshipping things that weren't God at all, just statues. That was not only very wicked, it was silly, too, wasn't it? How can a man make a statue and then say it's God?! How silly!! But that's what the children of Israel started doing. Worshipping things that weren't God at all, just like the bad people around them were doing.

So God kept another of His promises to the Jews. He had promised them that if they obeyed Him, He would help them. But if they did not obey Him, then He would not help them but that He would have their enemies come in and conquer them as a punishment and to make them turn back to God. And that's what happened. And that is what the book of Judges is about.

The book of Judges tells how the Jews would start worshipping idols, then God would have their enemies come in, and God wouldn't help the Jews fight these enemies. Instead the enemies would conquer the Jews and take their food and make the Jews give them money. After a while, the Jews would realize how very bad they were being, and they would be sorry, and they would repent and ask God to forgive them and to be good to them again. So God would send a person to deliver them from their enemies. And that person was called a judge. That judge would chase the enemies out and then lead the Jews in that part of the country and help them be good, and the Jews there would worship God as they should as long as that judge was alive. But after that judge died, then the Jews would start worshipping idols again, and God would have to punish them again. So then another enemy would come and conquer the Jews there and be mean to them. This happened over and over again, and that's what almost the whole book of Judges is about. And that's why it's called the book of Judges. It's about the judges who delivered the children of Israel from their enemies when they repented of worshipping false gods. There are lots of exciting stories about these judges, and I'm going to tell you some of those stories right now.

Who were some of those judges? Well, Othniel was one of the judges. Do you remember Othniel from the stories in the book of Joshua? Othniel was the nephew of the good spy Caleb. Caleb had said that whoever conquered a certain city for him could marry his daughter, so Othniel had conquered the city and married Caleb's daughter. Do you remember that? Well, later when the children of Israel were worshipping idols and their enemies came and then they repented, the Lord made Othniel become a judge, and Othniel delivered the Jews from their enemies, and that's all we're told about it. But there were 4 big judges that we're going to talk about now, 3 men judges and one woman judge. The men judges are named Ehud and Gideon and Samson, and the woman judge is named Deborah.

Let's start with Ehud, okay? Well, the children of Israel were worshipping idols, and the Lord had Eglon, king of Moab, come in with his big army and conquer them, and Eglon then set up his throne there in the land of the Jews. And Eglon was a very fat man. After a while the children of

Israel were really sorry for having sinned against God, and they cried out to the Lord, and the Lord had a man from the tribe of Benjamin named Ehud come up with a plan to save them. Now, what was this plan? Well, the Jews had to take presents to Eglon, king of Moab, and they gave a present to Ehud to take to Eglon. But first Ehud made a short sword and made it sharp on both sides. Now, most people use their right hands, but Ehud could use his left hand. So Ehud tied this sword to his right thigh under his robe where he could reach it with his left hand. Then Ehud and some other Jews took the present to give to Eglon, the fat king of Moab, and Ehud was secretly wearing the sword under his robe.

Well, Ehud got to where Eglon was and gave him the present. Then Ehud and the other Jews left and went a ways away. But then Ehud went back to Eglon and said, "I have a secret message for you, o king." Well, Eglon wanted to hear the secret message, so he said, "Shh!" and he sent everyone else out of the room. Ehud said, "I have a message for you from God." So then Eglon started to get up from his chair to hear the secret message. And what do you think Ehud did? Why, he just reached in under his robe and pulled out that short sword and stabbed bad king Eglon really hard with it! Ehud stabbed him so hard that the sword went clear into Eglon's stomach, and Eglon's fat stomach covered over the blade of the sword, and Ehud didn't pull the sword back out. Then Ehud quickly went out of the room and shut and locked the doors behind him without saying anything and went away.

After a while Eglon's servants came back, and they found the door locked. They thought, "Oh, maybe Eglon is using the toilet." So they waited. They waited and waited, but still Eglon didn't open the doors to the room. Finally, the servants unlocked the doors, and what do you think they saw? They saw their king, Eglon, lying dead on the floor! And then the Moabites all started running away, because their king was dead. The whole Moabite army began running down to the Jordan River, hoping to cross it and get back to their own country of Moab on the other side of the river.

Well, Ehud had gotten away safely by then, and he blew his trumpet, and lots of the children of Israel came to him. Ehud said, "Follow me! For the Lord has given your enemies, the Moabites, to you!" And they all followed Ehud down to the Jordan River to the fords, the places where the water was shallow enough for people to cross over. And they got there to the fords before the Moabite army did. Well, when the Moabites got there and tried to cross at these fords, the Jews killed them all. So, you see, when the children of Israel had turned back to God, God had delivered them from their enemies, using Ehud as their leader, the judge, hadn't He? And no one bothered them again for a long time. And all the time that Ehud was alive, the Jews were good.

But after Ehud died, the children of Israel started being wicked again. This time the Lord let other enemies come in and conquer them. This enemy king had a general named Sisera. Sisera had lots of iron chariots, 900 of them! (That would be sort of like having lots of tanks now.) And Sisera was like a mean king to the Jews for many years. It wasn't even safe for the Jews to walk along the big roads anymore. They went on the little side roads.

Well, after a while, the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, and God sent another judge. This judge was a woman! She was a wife and a mother, named Deborah, and she had judged the children

of Israel when they would come to her. But now God gave Deborah a message and told her how He would save the Jews from Sisera and his army. So Deborah sent for a man named Barak, and she said to Barak, "The Lord God of Israel says that you are to take an army of Jews with you and go to Mt Tabor." Then Deborah said to Barak, "God is going to have Sisera and his great big army and his chariots all come out to the river near Mt. Tabor, and then God will deliver them into your hand." That meant that Barak would win against Sisera and his army and chariots.

But Barak said to Deborah, "I won't go unless you go with me."

Deborah said, "All right. I'll go with you. But you won't get honor from this. The Lord is going to give General Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah got up and went with Barak. And Barak called some of the Jews to come with him.

Someone told Sisera that Barak had gathered an army and was going over to Mt. Tabor. So Sisera got all 900 of his iron chariots together and his big army, and he started out toward where Barak was and got to the river near it. Now, how was Barak with his much smaller army going to win against Sisera with all of those chariots and soldiers? Well, God was on the side of Barak and the Jews, wasn't He? And God sent a great, big rain storm. And this made it hard for Sisera's chariots and army to move around, and they all started running away. Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! The Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand!" So Barak and his little army ran down Mt. Tabor and attacked General Sisera's army in the valley and killed them all as they ran away.

Well, Sisera's chariot couldn't go in all of that mud and water, could it? So Sisera got down out of the chariot and started running away, too. And he went to where a man named Heber lived. Now, Heber wasn't a Jew; he was descended from Moses' father-in-law, and Heber had made peace with Sisera. So Sisera ran to Heber's tents. As Sisera came running up there, Heber's wife came out to meet him. Her name was Jael. Jael said to Sisera, "Here, come on in, sir. Don't be afraid." So Sisera went into Jael's tent. Sisera was all tired from running, so he lay down, and Jael put a blanket over him. Sisera said, "Please give me a little water to drink, as I'm thirsty." But instead Jael brought him some nice milk and gave him something like yogurt or cottage cheese in a beautiful dish.

Sisera said to Jael, "Now, you stand there in the doorway of the tent, and if anyone comes and asks if there is any man in here, you tell him that there isn't."

Now, does that sound nice to you that Jael was helping wicked Sisera, the enemy of God's people? Well, let's see what happened next! Jael waited until Sisera was fast asleep, and then she took a tent peg in one hand and a hammer in the other hand, and she crept softly up to where Sisera was fast asleep. Then Jael put the tent peg up against Sisera's head -- and she hit the tent peg hard with the hammer, nailing Sisera's head to the ground and killing him!! So she was on the side of God's people, the Jews, after all, wasn't she?

Well, after a while, here came Barak chasing after Sisera and trying to find him. Jael came out to meet Barak, and she said to him, "Come in here, and I will show you the man you're looking for!" So Barak went into Jael's tent, and there lay Sisera all dead!

So that day the children of Israel won against their mighty enemy, because God was with them. And Deborah and Barak sang a song praising God. (We can read this song in the Bible.) And the honor of killing Sisera went to a woman, Jael, just as Deborah had said, didn't it? Of course, whatever God has a prophet say will always come true, won't it?

Well, after a while the children of Israel began sinning against the Lord again, worshipping idols again. You'd think they'd have learned better by now, wouldn't you!? But they hadn't. So, again God had some of their enemies, this time the Midianites, come and conquer them. Lots of the Jews went to live in caves then and to hide. And whenever the Jews planted crops and were raising food, why the Midianites would bring their cows and sheep and camels and come camp there and eat all of the food. So the children of Israel had trouble even getting enough food for themselves or for their own animals.

And then the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. And God sent a prophet to them who told them, "God says this, I'm the one who brought you out of Egypt from your slavery and drove people out of this land and gave you this land. I told you that I am the Lord your God and that you weren't to pay any attention to the false gods that the people here have. But you disobeyed Me." But remember, the Jews, the children of Israel, were God's special people, and He loved them, and He was having these enemies come in to punish them when they were bad so that they would know how bad they were being and would turn back to Him, the only real God.

Well, there was a man from the tribe of Manasseh whose name was Gideon. And one day Gideon was out by a winepress and he was threshing wheat. Threshing wheat means that you have cut the wheat plant down after it was all ripe, and then you take and hit the wheat stalks to make the wheat seeds fall out so that you can use the seeds. Anyway, there was an oak tree near the wine press, and Gideon was trying not to let the Midianites know what he was doing. While Gideon hiding and threshing his wheat, the angel of the Lord came to him, but Gideon didn't know it was an angel. The angel said, "The Lord is with you, you brave man."

Gideon said, "Oh, if the Lord is with us, why are we having all of this trouble? And where are all of the miracles that our fathers told us about that God did in Egypt? Why has God forgotten us and not delivered us from these Midianites?" (Now you know why they were having all of those problems, don't you? It was because they were worshipping idols, something besides God.)

Then the angel said to Gideon, "You go in your strength and you will save the children of Israel from the Midianites. I'm sending you."

Well, Gideon said to the angel, "Oh, sir, how could I save Israel?! Why my family is poor, and I'm the least important in my father's house."

The Lord said to Gideon, "I will be with you, and you are going to strike the Midianites as if they were just one man."

Gideon then said, "Please show me a sign. Please don't leave yet. I'm going to go get an offering for you."

The angel said, "I'll wait here for you."

So Gideon went and got a lamb and some bread that would be sort of like pancakes. He cooked the lamb and put the meat in a basket and then put the juice from the meat in a pot, and he took all of this over to the oak tree where the angel was waiting for him. And the angel said to Gideon, "Put the meat and the bread on this rock and then pour out the meat juice." And Gideon did as the angel said.

The angel of God had a staff in his hand, like a walking stick, and he put the staff out and touched the meat and the bread, and suddenly what do you think happened? Why, fire came up out of the rock and burned up the meat and bread! And what do you think the angel did then? He just disappeared!! Gideon didn't see him anymore!

Then Gideon knew that this had been the angel of the Lord, and he was scared! He said, "Alas! I've seen an angel of the Lord face to face!"

But God spoke to Gideon and said, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid. You aren't going to die." Then Gideon built an altar to the Lord, the only real God, there.

Well, that night the Lord spoke to Gideon again. The Lord told Gideon, "You take your father's young bull. Then you go and tear down the altar to that false god, Baal, that is in your father's yard, and cut down the grove that is there by it." (This grove was probably a bunch of poles stuck up in the ground around the idol's altar.) And the Lord said to Gideon, "And you build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock. Build it in an orderly way and then kill the young bull and put it on the altar and burn it with the wood that you cut down."

Imagine that! Gideon's father evidently had a big place on his own property where people used to come and worship Baal, that false god!! Anyway, Gideon got up and took 10 of his men servants with him, and he did just what God had told him. He did this at night, because he didn't want the others in his father's house or the people of the city to see what he was doing. He knew they wouldn't like it.

Well, the next morning, the men of that city got up, and what do you think they found? Why their altar to their false god had been all thrown down, and their grove had all been cut down and burned up! And the other altar had been built and a sacrifice made on it!

These men said to each other, "Who did this?!" They asked around, and they found out that Gideon had done this.

Well, the men of that city were really mad! They went to Gideon's father and said to him, "Bring your son out! We're going to kill him! We'll kill him because he tore down Baal's altar and he cut

down our grove!!"

Now, even though Gideon's father had had this altar to the false god and the grove on his property, do you think he wanted his son Gideon to die? No. So he said to the men of the city, "Why do you have to stand up for Baal? Can you save Baal? Let Baal stand up for himself. Why, anyone who thinks he has to stand up for Baal should be killed! After all, if Baal is a god, he can stand up for himself if he doesn't like it that someone threw down his altar." (But, of course, Baal couldn't stand up for himself, could he, since he wasn't a real god!!)

So the men of the city didn't kill Gideon.

Well, about that time a whole bunch of the enemies of the children of Israel, the Midianites and some others, all gathered together and set up their camp in a valley there in the land of the Jews. Now, do you remember what the angel of the Lord had first said to Gideon? He had told him, "Go in your strength, and you will save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. I am sending you." Do you remember that? So now Gideon thinks that maybe it is the time that he should start being a judge of Israel, the deliverer from their enemies. And the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and Gideon blew on his trumpet and called lots of the Jewish men to come to him.

Then Gideon said to God, "If you really are going to save Israel by me as you said, please really show me. I'll put a fleece (a wooly sheep skin) out tonight on a flat piece of dry ground. In the morning if the fleece is all wet with dew but the ground it's on is still all dry, then I'll know that you really are going to save Israel by my hand as you said." He was asking for a sign that God really wanted Gideon to lead the Jews into battle against their enemies and that God would be with them and they would win against their enemies.

So Gideon put the fleece out on the dry ground, and the next morning when Gideon got up, what do you think he found? Why, the fleece was all wet with dew, but the ground was all dry. The fleece was so wet that when Gideon wrung it out, he got a whole bowl of dew, of water! But the ground had been dry. That was a miracle, wasn't it? Because otherwise the fleece and ground would both have been wet or both have been dry, wouldn't they?

Well, Gideon still wasn't quite sure, so he asked God again. He said to God, "Please don't be mad at me, God. I'll only ask you something one more time. Please, this time I'll put the fleece out again, and will you make it so that this time the fleece will be dry but the ground will be wet with dew?"

So Gideon put out the dry fleece again that night, and in the morning the fleece was still dry, but the ground was all wet. That was another miracle, wasn't it? So now Gideon knew for sure that the Lord was with him. And then Gideon and all of the Jewish men with him got up early and set their camp up sort of near the Midianites.

The Lord spoke to Gideon and said, "You have too many soldiers with you. I want you all to know that I am giving the Midianites to you. I don't want all of you thinking that you are beating them yourselves." And the Lord said to Gideon, "You go tell your army that whoever is scared should go

back home." So Gideon did, he told them that anyone who was scared should go back home, and a whole bunch of them went back home.

The Lord spoke again to Gideon and said, "There are still too many soldiers with you. Take them down to where the water is, and then I'll tell you which ones are to go with you."

So Gideon did as the Lord had said. He took his much smaller army down to the water. The Lord said to Gideon, "All right. Watch how they drink the water. The ones that pick up the water in their hands and lap it up like a dog, put those in one group. And the ones that kneel down and drink right from the water, put them in another group." So Gideon did. And only 300 men picked the water up in their hands and drank from their hands.

The Lord said to Gideon then, "I'm going to save you with only those 300 men. I will deliver the Midianites into your hand. Have the others all go back." And Gideon did that. Then Gideon and the 300 men took their food and their trumpets, and they were camped on a hill with the Midianites in the valley below. But the rest of the Jews went home.

Well, that same night, the Lord spoke to Gideon again and said to him, "You get up with your army, for I'm going to give that enemy army into your hands. But if you're still afraid, you take your servant with you and go down to the enemy army and listen to what you hear, and then you'll feel braver."

So Gideon took his servant and went quietly down the hill to the Midianite camp. There were thousands and thousands of Midianites, and they had thousands and thousands of camels. And Gideon heard two of the Midianites talking together. One of them said, "I had a dream. A little barley bread came rolling down the hill into our camp and hit a tent, and the tent fell down flat." The other man said, "Oh, that means Gideon, a man of Israel. For God has delivered Midian and all the armies into his hand."

Well, Gideon knew for sure then that God was with him, and he worshipped God. And Gideon went back to his tiny army and said, "Get up! For the Lord has delivered the army of Midian into your hand!"

And Gideon told them the plan they would use, and they obeyed him. And what do you think that plan was? Well, you just fast forward this tape to the end and turn it over, and I'll tell you what the plan was!

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So what was the plan that Gideon had? Well, I'll tell you! Now, remember, Gideon and his few men were up on a mountain, and the Midianites were down in the valley. So first Gideon divided his 300 men into 3 groups, and he had them go all the way around the great, big camp of the Midianites. Each man had with him a trumpet and a torch and an empty clay pot. "Now," said Gideon, "you wait and do just what I'm going to do. When my group and I blow on our trumpets, you blow on



your trumpets and start shouting, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

Now why would Gideon have them all take a trumpet, a torch, and a clay pot? Well, first let me explain something before I go on. You see, in an army, not everyone usually had a trumpet or a torch. Usually only the leader of a big group of soldiers would have a trumpet. So if it were night time and you were camped in the valley and you heard a few trumpets and looked up on the hill and saw a few torches, what would you think? Why, you'd think that there were lots of soldiers up there, wouldn't you? And if you heard a lot of trumpets and saw a lot of torches, 300 of them, all around you, you'd think you were surrounded by a really great big army, wouldn't you? But what about the clay pots? Well, let's go on with the story and find out, okay?!

So the 300 men of Israel each took a trumpet and a torch and a clay pot. They lit the torches and then put the clay pots over the torches so that the light didn't show. The men of Israel were up the hill, and they sneaked around until they had surrounded the great big Midianite army camped down in the valley.

It was the middle of the night. It was all dark and quiet, and everyone in the enemy camp was asleep except the guards, and they had just changed their guards. Well, suddenly out of this quiet darkness, there came all around the camp the loud blowing of 300 trumpets, the 300 clay pots were smashed down on the ground with a loud noise of breaking, the 300 torches were waved, and there was a great shouting, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

Well, the Midianite army woke up! They all jumped up and grabbed their swords and began running around! They were still half asleep, and they didn't know what was happening! Up on the hill the Jews kept blowing their trumpets with one hand and holding up their torches with the other hand, while down in the dark valley the Midianites began bumping into each other. And God made it so that as they bumped into each other, the Midianites thought the Jews were right there in their camp fighting them, so the Midianites began fighting there in the dark with each other, and they began killing each other!! Then after they'd killed a lot of each other, the Midianites that were left all began running away. Then the men of Israel began chasing the Midianites. And Gideon sent messengers out to other Jews saying, "Come out against the Midianites and get down to the rivers before they do! Take control of the fords!" And that's what they did. The men of Israel had control of the fords, the places where the Midianites would try to cross the Jordan River and another big river to get back to their homes in Midian. And the men of Israel killed the Midianites.

Gideon had some more adventures as he chased the Midianite army home, killing them as they ran. But we aren't going to tell about them here; there just isn't time. But sometime you can read them in the book of Judges in your Bible. Anyway, after the Midianites were all beaten and killed and chased home, the men of Israel wanted to make Gideon like their king to rule over them and then his son and grandson to be kings after him, but he wouldn't let them. Instead, Gideon told them, "No. I won't rule over you, and my son won't rule over you. The Lord will rule over you." And Gideon went home and lived to be an old man, and the Jews didn't worship the idols of the other nations all the time that Gideon was alive.

Before we run out of time here today, though, let's talk about one more of the judges. Do you remember which one I said that would be? Why, Samson, right? You've heard about Samson before, haven't you? What an exciting true story! Well, the children of Israel were worshipping idols again. And you'd think they'd have known better by this time, wouldn't you? But they were being very wicked. So the Lord had the Philistines come and rule over them this time. And that's the way things were during the time of Samson; the Philistines were ruling the Jews there. The Philistines were very wicked people. They didn't worship God; they worshipped idols and did other terrible things.

But first let's talk about Samson's father and mother. They were from the tribe of Dan. (Remember, the tribes were named after the sons of Jacob.) Samson's father's name was Manoah. Before Samson was born, Manoah and his wife didn't have any children at all, though they wanted some. One day the angel of the Lord came to Manoah's wife. The angel of the Lord said, "You haven't been able to have any babies, but you're going to have a son. But you do what I'm going to tell you. Don't drink any wine or liquor and don't eat anything unclean. When you have this son, you aren't to cut his hair, either. He is going to be special, and he's going to begin to deliver the children of Israel from the Philistines."

Manoah's wife thought the angel of the Lord was a prophet of God. She went and told her husband Manoah what the angel had said. She also told him, "I asked him where he was from and his name, but he didn't tell me."

Well, Manoah then prayed to God. "O my Lord," Manoah prayed. "Please let the man of God come again and teach us how to raise this child that we're going to have."

And God did just that. The angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting out in the field. And Manoah, her husband, wasn't with her again. So she ran and told him, "The same man is here again!" So Manoah went back with his wife to where the angel was. "Are you the same man who talked to my wife before?" Manoah asked the angel. You see, Manoah didn't know this was an angel, either. He just thought he was a prophet.

"Yes," said the angel, "I am."

"Oh, I hope what you've said will really happen," said Manoah, meaning that he hoped they'd really have a son. "How shall we raise this child?"

The angel said to Manoah, "Just have your wife do everything I told her before. She's not to eat anything from the grape vine nor drink wine nor strong drink nor eat anything unclean."

Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "Please stay here a while until I get some meat ready for you."

The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Even if I stay, I won't eat your bread, and if you are going to offer a sacrifice, you must offer it to the Lord."

Manoah asked the angel of the Lord his name, but the angel didn't tell him what it was. Then Manoah took a meat offering and a bread offering, and he offered them to the Lord on a rock by burning them. And what do you think the angel did as Manoah and his wife were watching? Why, as the flames of the fire of the offering were going up toward the sky, the angel of the Lord went up toward heaven in the fire! And they didn't see the angel of the Lord again!

Then Manoah was scared! He and his wife fell on their faces to the ground. They knew then that this had been the angel of the Lord. Manoah was sure they were going to die. But his wife said, "If the Lord had wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted our offering. Besides, He wouldn't have told us what was going to happen to us." She meant about having the baby boy.

Well, after a while, Manoah and his wife had a baby boy just as the angel had told them, and they named him Samson. And the Lord blessed Samson as he grew up, and the Lord made Samson very strong.

Well, one day when Samson was grown up, he went down and saw a woman who was a Philistine, and he liked her. He wanted to marry her, so he went back home and told his father and mother about it. Well, they wanted him to marry a Jewish woman; they didn't want him to marry a Philistine woman, but he really wanted to. So Samson and his father and mother all walked back to the town where they arranged for Samson to marry her.

Later at the wedding feast, Samson told a riddle to the 30 Philistine men at the party. He told them that if they guessed the answer to the riddle, he would give each of them some clothes. If they couldn't guess it in 7 days, then they would each have to give him some clothes. Well, the 30 Philistine men couldn't guess the answer to the riddle, and that made them mad. So they got hold of the Philistine woman Samson was marrying and told her, "You find out the answer to the riddle or we will kill you and your family." So she begged Samson to tell her, and she cried and cried and he finally got so tired of her crying that he told her the answer to the riddle -- and she told the Philistine men. Then when the Philistine men told Samson the answer, he knew that they had gotten the answer from his wife. Samson got very angry. And now he had to give the 30 Philistine men each some clothes, so how do you think he got all of those clothes? Why, he went to a big Philistine city, and the Lord gave Samson extra strength, and Samson killed 30 of the Philistine men in the city. Then he took their clothes and gave them to the 30 Philistine men who had been at his wedding party. Samson was still mad, so he left his wife there and went back home to his parents. But what he didn't know was that his wife's father, then had his wife marry somebody else!

Well, a while later Samson decided to go see his wife and try to make up with her. But when he got there, the father said to Samson, "Oh, I thought you didn't want her anymore, so I had her marry someone else. But you can marry her younger sister. Why, she's even prettier."

Samson was really mad now! So he went out, and he caught 300 foxes and tied them together by their tails, two at a time, tail to tail. Then Samson took 150 torches, and he tied a torch to the tails of each of the pairs of foxes. Then Samson turned the foxes loose in the fields of the Philistines. The

foxes ran and ran. And what do you think would happen as those foxes with the burning torches tied to their tails ran through the fields? That's right! The torches set everything on fire! The crops in the fields, and the vineyards where the grapes grew, and the olive trees all burned up. Of course, the Philistines didn't like this at all! And when the Philistines found out that it was Samson who had done this, they killed Samson's wife and her father.

Well, that made Samson mad again. So he went out and killed a whole bunch of Philistines and then he went up on top of a big rock or hill. The Philistines then took their army and were going to fight the Jews, but when the Jews found out that it was all because of Samson, the Jews went up to Samson and asked him to let them tie him up and give him to the Philistines.

Samson said, "All right. You can tie me up and give me to the Philistines. Just don't kill me yourself." So they tied Samson up and took him down to the Philistines. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Samson and gave him extra strength, and Samson broke the ropes on him, grabbed the jawbone of a donkey, and killed 1000 Philistines with it.

Samson was doing as God had said he would do before he was born, wasn't he? He was beginning to deliver the children of Israel from the wicked Philistines by killing lots of them.

Later Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. When the Philistine leaders found out about it, they offered Delilah lots of money if she would find out why Samson was so strong and how to make him not strong. Delilah tried all sorts of ways to find out, but each time Samson told her the wrong thing. Finally she began crying and saying that he didn't love her. Samson got so tired of her crying and nagging that finally Samson told Delilah the truth, that if his hair were cut then he wouldn't be strong anymore. (Remember, the angel of the Lord had told his mother not to cut his hair at all. His hair was very long and fixed in 7 long locks, perhaps braids. Of course, it was the Lord Who really made Samson strong, but for some reason God made it so that Samson's hair had something to do with his strength.)

Delilah knew that Samson had told her the truth this time, so after Samson was asleep, she had a barber come and cut Samson's hair. After it was all cut, Delilah said, "Samson, the Philistines are here!" Samson didn't know that he wasn't strong anymore. He got up and was going to fight them, but the Philistines were able to take Samson this time. They took him and made him blind and tied him up and took him to jail and made him grind grain.

Well, after a while Samson's hair began growing again, but the Philistines didn't think about that. One day thousands of Philistines were going to have a big party and worship their false god. They decided as part of their celebration to have Samson brought out and make fun of him. So they had a boy lead poor, blind Samson out and into the temple of this false god. And the people were all making fun of Samson. The whole big temple was full of people, and there were even 3000 Philistines up on the roof of the temple, and they could watch too, while Samson was being made fun of.

Samson told the boy to take him over to the pillars that held the building up so that he could lean on

them, and the boy did. Then Samson prayed to God. He said, "O Lord God, please remember me and make me strong again just this one time so that I can get even with the Philistines for making me blind." Then Samson took hold of the two pillars and prayed again, "And let me die with the Philistines." Then Samson pulled as hard as he could -- and the pillars fell down, and the whole temple of this false god fell down and killed thousands of the Philistines and killed Samson. Samson's family came then and took his body home and buried him. But for 20 years Samson had been a judge of Israel.

And that is all of the book of Judges that I'm going to tell you about. But remember, there were other judges besides the ones here in the book of Judges. Moses and Joshua were judges, leaders of the Jews, weren't they? And there were even other judges in the book of Judges, that we didn't talk about this time. And we'll find out the next time that I tell you stories that there were even two more judges in the next book of the Bible. But today we only talked about some of the judges that are told of in the book of Judges, and I chose some exciting stories, didn't I?!

So who have we talked about today, which judges? There was Ehud who made the sharp sword and stabbed Eglon, the wicked king of Moab. There was Deborah who went with Barak against the wicked Sisera and how Jael killed Sisera with the tent peg. There was Gideon who burned his father's idol and then tricked the wicked Midianite army with just a few soldiers who all had trumpets and torches and clay pots. And there was Samson whom God made strong so that he could kill lots of wicked Philistines. All of these men and Deborah were judges of the children of Israel, the Jews, and had delivered the children of Israel from their enemies. And they had done this because God helped them to do it. They couldn't have done it by themselves, could they?

But why had the Lord let their enemies come and conquer them in the first place? Do you remember? It was because the children of Israel would forget about the real God who had taken them out of Egypt and had taken care of them and had kept all of His promises to them, and when they had forgotten God, then they had begun worshipping idols and false gods. That was the reason, wasn't it? So God had had their enemies come as a punishment to them so they would turn back to the real God, hadn't He? Then later when the Jews had gone back to God and called on Him, then the Lord God had sent these judges as deliverers to save them from their enemies. This happened many times. The children of Israel would start worshipping idols; God would have their enemies come against them; they would be sorry and turn back to God; God would send a judge to save them from their enemies; and then the children of Israel would worship God and be good while that judge was alive. After that judge died, they would start worshipping idols again, and it would all start all over again.

So, what can we learn from the book of Judges? The biggest thing to learn is that we must always worship only the real God, the Lord. The Lord is the only real God. There are no other gods. God is very good, and He loves us, and He takes care of us. And do you remember what is the very biggest way that God showed that He loves us? That's right. God sent His Son the Lord Jesus Christ to earth as a Saviour to die for us so that if we trust in Jesus, He will save us, deliver us, from our sins, and we can go to heaven to be with our dear, loving God forever and ever when we die. That is the most important thing in the whole Bible. It is the most important thing in the whole world, isn't it?!

Just as God had sent all of these judges to save Israel when they were sorry for their sins, so God sent Jesus to us to save us forever from our sins when we are sorry for our sins and trust Him to save us.

Now there is just a tiny book of the Bible that comes right after the book of Judges. Do you remember what that is? Yes, it is called the book of Ruth. Remember, I said at the beginning here today, that the books of Judges and Ruth are connected? Well, in the book of Ruth we have the story of a family who lived during the time when the book of Judges was happening. So let's talk just a little about the book of Ruth, about this family that lived during the time of the judges, all right?

Well, there was a certain family from the tribe of Judah who lived in Israel (that is what they sometimes called the promised land of Canaan now). They lived in Bethlehem. This family had a husband, and his wife Naomi, and their two sons. Well, a famine came to where they lived, so they decided to move over to the country of Moab where there wasn't any famine. After they moved there, though, the husband died. And Naomi's two sons each married a Moabite woman. One of these new wives was named Ruth. Then after a while Naomi's two sons died, and poor Naomi was just left with her sons' wives, her two daughters-in-law.

Well, after a while Naomi heard that the famine was gone from her old home in Israel, so she decided to go back home to Bethlehem. Her two daughters-in-law were going to go with her, but she said to them, "No, dear daughters, you just go back to your own families, and may the Lord give you new husbands." So after Naomi talked to them, one of the daughters-in-law went back to her own family. But the other daughter-in-law, the one named Ruth, cried and said to Naomi, "No, don't ask me to leave you. I will go anywhere you go and stay with you, and I will worship your God. I won't leave you until we die."

So Ruth went with Naomi back to Naomi's home in Bethlehem in the land of Israel. They were poor, so Ruth went out at harvest time to pick up any leftover grain that the reapers, the workers in the fields, had dropped. That's called gleaning, to pick up the leftover food after the workers have gone through the fields or vineyard. In fact, God in His law had told the Jews not to pick up any grain they dropped and not to pick all of their grapes, but to leave them for the poor to get. Wasn't that kind of God to make a way so that poor people could get their food, too? Anyway, so Ruth went out gleaning to get food for Naomi and herself.

Ruth worked and worked gleaning, picking up the leftover grain. The owner of this field was named Boaz. Boaz came out and saw Ruth and asked who she was. When he found out that she was Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, Boaz said to Ruth, "I've heard about you and how good you are to Naomi, your mother-in-law. You stay here in my fields and do all of your gleaning here. You will be safe here. And go ahead and have your meal here with my workers." Then Boaz told his workers, "You drop some of the grain on purpose so that she will have more to glean. And don't bother her at all. Let her glean wherever she wants to."

So Ruth gleaned all morning. Then at lunch time she ate with the reapers, and Boaz gave her some

food. There was more than she could eat, so she tucked some away to take home to Naomi. Then Ruth gleaned all the rest of the day. At the end of the day she threshed out the stalks of grain she had gleaned. You remember what threshing is, don't you? That's where you take the stalks of the plants and hit them and hit them until all the little grains, the seeds, all fall out. So Ruth threshed all the grain she had gleaned, and she got a great big bag of grain-seeds.

When Ruth took home to Naomi all of the grain she had gleaned and threshed out and then gave her the extra food from lunch, Naomi was surprised and asked Ruth, "Whose field did you glean in?" Ruth said, "In the field of a man named Boaz."

Then Naomi said, "Oh, how good the Lord is to us! Boaz is a relative of my dead husband! You only glean in his fields." So Ruth did.

Now, the Jews had a law that if a man died and his wife had no children to take care of her, then one of the man's close relatives should marry that woman and take care of her and have children by her. Well, later Naomi had Ruth remind Boaz of that, and Boaz ended up marrying Ruth. And Boaz took care of Ruth and Naomi. And after a while Boaz and Ruth had a baby boy.

Now, I'm going to tell you something really interesting. Do you remember back in the book of Joshua where we talked about Rahab, the woman who had hidden the two Jewish spies in Jericho? Well, Rahab was Boaz's mother!!!! Aren't you surprised?? And I'll tell you something else really interesting. I told you that Boaz and Ruth had a baby boy. Well that baby boy grew up and had a baby boy named Jesse, and Jesse grew up and had a baby boy and who do you think that baby boy, was? Why he was David!! The same David who would later kill Goliath and become the great king of the Jews!!!! So Rahab was the mother of Boaz. Boaz married Ruth and they became the great-grandparents of David. And who do you think they all became the ancestors of many, many years later? Jesus!!!! Yes, Rahab, Boaz, and Ruth were great-great-great-great-grandparents of the Lord Jesus, our Saviour!! And do you want to know something else?! Jesus was born many, many years later in that very same town of Bethlehem where Naomi and Boaz and Ruth had lived! I think that's all very interesting, don't you?

And that's the end of the stories I'm going to tell to you today about the book of Judges and the book of Ruth which happened during the period of the Judges. ((And now, Laszlo...)) I hope you've enjoyed hearing them. Some of them were pretty exciting, weren't they?! If you want to hear about them all again, just fast forward to the end of this tape and turn it over.