

SESSION 3

Days of the Judges – Part Two

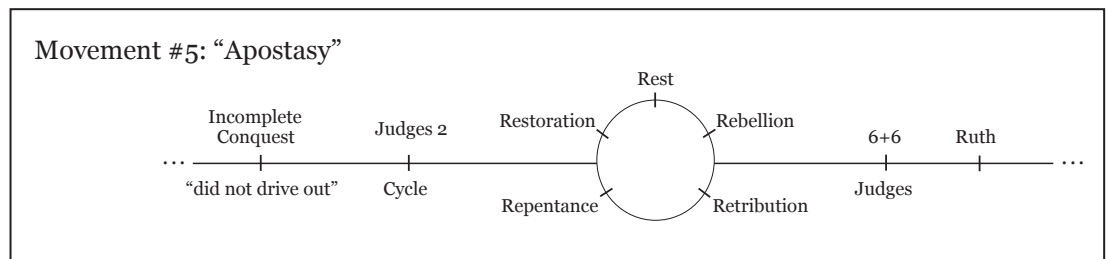
I. PRAYER

II. OVERVIEW OF JUDGES

A. Movements of Panorama of the Bible

Panorama of the Bible	
Movement Number	Movement Title
1	Prologue
2	Patriarchs
3	Redemption/Wandering
4	Conquest
5	Apostasy

B. Movement #5: Apostasy (Timeline)



III. MAJOR AND MINOR JUDGES (in Book of Judges)

A. Major Judges

1. OthnielSession 2 (Judges 3)
2. EhudSession 2 (Judges 3)
3. Deborah/BarakSession 2 (Judges 3)
4. GideonSession 3 (Judges 6-8)
5. JephthahSession 4 (Judges 9)
6. SamsonSession 4 (Judges 13-16)

B. Minor Judges

1. ShamgarSession 2 (Judges 3)
2. TolaSession 3 (Judges 10)
3. JairSession 3 (Judges 10)
4. IbzanSession 4 (Judges 12)
5. ElonSession 4 (Judges 12)
6. AbdonSession 4 (Judges 12)

IV. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT (Judges 6-10)

A. Judgship of Gideon (Judg 6-8)

1. Recurrence of the "Sin Cycle"
 - a. Rest: "Then the land had peace for forty years" (5:31^b)
 - b. Rebellion: "Again the Israelites did evil..." (6:1^a)
 - c. Retribution: "he (God) gave them into the hands of the Midianites" (6:1^b)
 - d. Repentance: "Israelites... cried out to the Lord for help" (6:6)
 - e. Restoration:
 - (1) God "sent them a prophet" (6:8)
 - (2) Angel of the Lord came to Gideon (6:11-12)
 - f. Rest: "the land enjoyed peace forty years" (8:28)

2. Structure of the Story

a. Block (250) suggests a three-fold movement of Gideon's story:

- (1) Judges 6:1-8:3... God's Punishment and Deliverance of Israel
- (2) Judges 8:4-28... Gideon's Punishment and Subjugation of Israel
- (3) Judges 8:29-9:57... Gideon's Legacy

b. Chart of the Gideon story

GIDEON	
Chapters 6-8	Chapter 9
Story of Gideon	Story of Abimelech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sin Cycle • Call of Gideon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambition (Abimelech) to be King (1-6) • Opposition by Jothan (7-21) • Opposition by Shechem (22-25) • Abimelech vs Gaal (26-41) • Abimelech vs Shechem and Thebez (42-51) • Death of Abimelech (52-57)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gideon's army • Gideon's victory 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gideon's pursuit • Gideon's ephod (snare) • Gideon's death 	

3. Story of Gideon: Exposition (Judg 6:1-8:35)

a. "Sin Cycle" begins again.

Judges 6:1-6

*The Israelites **did evil** in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he **gave them into the hands of the Midianites**.² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for*

themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.
³Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they **cried out** to the Lord for help.

- (1) The Israelites “did evil” and were subjugated seven years by the Midianites.
- (2) Midianites were nomadic descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:1-2). They did not pursue land for settlement but only the produce of the fertile Valley of Jezreel (Esdraelon Plain). Thus, they were raiders who descended at harvest time like a “swarm of locusts.”
- (3) The Israelites “cried out” (repentance) to the Lord.

b. The LORD (YHWH) responds.

- (1) First: a prophet is sent (to the people).

Judges 6:7-10

*When the Israelites **cried out** to the Lord because of Midian, ⁸he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”*

- (2) Second: the angel of the Lord comes (to Gideon).

Judges 6:11

*The **angel of the Lord** came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.*

- c. The angel of the Lord calls to Gideon.

- (1) The angel addresses Gideon as a “mighty warrior” (6:12).

- (2) Gideon suggests that God has abandoned his people (6:13).

- (3) The angel (i.e. LORD) commissions Gideon (6:14-16).

- “Go in the strength you have.”
- “Save Israel out of Midian’s hand.”
- “I will be with you.”

- d. Gideon requests a sign.

Judges 6:17-18

*Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me **a sign** that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.” And the Lord said, “I will wait until you return.”*

- (1) A sign requested

- (2) A meal prepared

- (3) A sacrifice consumed

- (4) A “mighty warrior” fearful

- (5) A reassurance he would not die

- e. Gideon responds to the fiery display.

*“Ah, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the **angel of the Lord** face to face” (6:22^b).*

Judges 6:24-26

So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. ²⁵That same night the Lord said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering."

Insight:

To truly be a "mighty warrior" and to be recognized as one of God's appointed judges, Gideon must remove the pagan worship which dominates his village. A true repentance and return to YHWH must be effected by a return to proper worship.

One writer observed:

- (1) Baal must go before Midian can go.
- (2) God's altar cannot be built up until Baal's altar is torn down.

Additionally,

- (3) Repentance/Confession always precedes Restoration.

- f. Gideon fearfully obeys God and destroys Baal's altar.

Judges 6:27

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime.

- (1) Gideon destroyed the altar at night (27).
- (2) The townspeople (Abiezrites) confront Joash, Gideon's father (28-30).
- (3) Joash boldly defends his son with theological insight.

Judges 6:31-32

*But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." ³²So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name **Jerub-Baal** that day, saying, "Let Baal contend with him."*

- g. Invading armies encamp in the Valley of Jezreel.
- h. Gideon summons tribes of Israel to come join him.

Judges 6:34-35

*Then the **Spirit of the Lord** came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.*

- i. Gideon requests a sign.

(1) First request

Judges 6:36-38

*Gideon said to God, "**If you** will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷**look**, I will place a wool **fleece** on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the **fleece** and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." ³⁸And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the **fleece** and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.*

(2) Second request

Judges 6:39-40

*Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the **fleece**, but this time make the **fleece** dry and let the ground be covered with dew." ⁴⁰That night God did so. Only the **fleece** was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.*

Insight: “Putting out a Fleece”

Gideon’s faith was weak, but God graciously acceded to his further requests for confirmation. His lack of personal confidence, fearful nature, and weak faith might cause some to question God’s choice. But Gideon’s destiny is not tied to his abilities but to his availability to follow God’s leadership (and subsequent instructions).

But what of this matter of “putting out a fleece”? The fact that God condescended to Gideon’s request does not make this kind of request prescriptive (an action expected to be followed). As New Testament believers, we have the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, wise counsel, and prayer to determine our course. As Wiersbe notes, “‘Putting out a fleece’ is not only an evidence of our unbelief, but it’s also an evidence of our pride. God has to do what I tell him to do before I’ll do what he tells me to do!” (Quoted by Constable, 55)

- j. Gideon defeats the Midianites: an army assembled.

Judges 7:1-2^a

*Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ²The Lord said to Gideon, “**You have too many men.** I cannot deliver Midian into their hands,*

- a. From 32,000 to 10,000

As God had informed Gideon, “In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her” (7:2^b), the army was reduced in size. The fearful were released to return to their homes.

- b. From 10,000 to 300

Judges 7:5-6

So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those

who kneel down to drink.”⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

- (1) Three hundred fighting men have been identified.
 - (2) The Midianite army and support personnel number 135,000 (a large number being actual soldiers).
 - (3) The test of drinking separated the alert and fearless (note the first test); it pared the army of Gideon to an elite fighting force, agile and alert. But as the story unfolds, the victory was to be the Lord’s, not man’s.
- c. From 300 to Gideon and Purah, his servant
Gideon and his servant are instructed by God to go to the Midianite camp by stealth. Overhearing a conversation about a dream a Midianite had encouraged Gideon in the seemingly insurmountable task ahead. A wavering faith was again strengthened.
- k. Gideon defeats the Midianites: a strategy effected
Judges 7:15-21
*When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands.”¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed **trumpets** and **empty jars** in the hands of all of them, with **torches** inside. ¹⁷“Watch me,” he told them. “Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’”¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They **blew their trumpets** and **broke the jars** that were in their hands.²⁰ The three companies blew the*

trumpets and smashed the jars. **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!" ²¹While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

- (1) The weapons: trumpets, jars, torches (swords)
- (2) The strategy: three companies of 100 men each encircling the resting, sleepy camp
- (3) The signal: trumpets, broken jars, torches (surrounding the camp)
- (4) The effect: pandemonium, Midianites killing Midianites in the confusion
- (5) The result: the Midianites flee in confusion and fear; the 300 pursue
- (6) The battle: See map, page 54.

l. Gideon calls for reinforcements

Judges 7:24-25

Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah." So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they seized the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. ²⁵They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

m. Gideon and the aftermath of victory

- (1) Ephraim resents not being called to help; Gideon smooths over the controversy (8:1-3).
- (2) Gideon and the exhausted 300 continue the pursuit of the Midianite kings (Zebah and Zalmunna) (8:4-9).
 - (a) The officials of Succoth will not help.
 - (b) The officials of Peniel will not help.
- (3) The Midianite kings are captured and executed (8:10-21).

n. Gideon and his ephod

(1) He refuses kingship.

Judges 8:22-23

*The Israelites said to Gideon, “**Rule** over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.” ²³But Gideon told them, “I will not **rule** over you, nor will my son **rule** over you. The Lord will **rule** over you.”*

(2) He requests earrings of gold.

Judges 8:26-27

The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels’ necks. ²⁷Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

(a) Ephods were vestments prescribed only for priests.

(b) This ephod became an object of worship.

Gideon who had torn down the altars of Baal now enables a new false shrine around the ephod. It is possible that Gideon wore it (like the High Priest).

o. Death of Gideon

(1) His accomplishment

Judges 8:28

Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon’s lifetime, the land had peace forty years.

(2) His lifestyle (patterned after pagan kings)

Judges 8:29-32

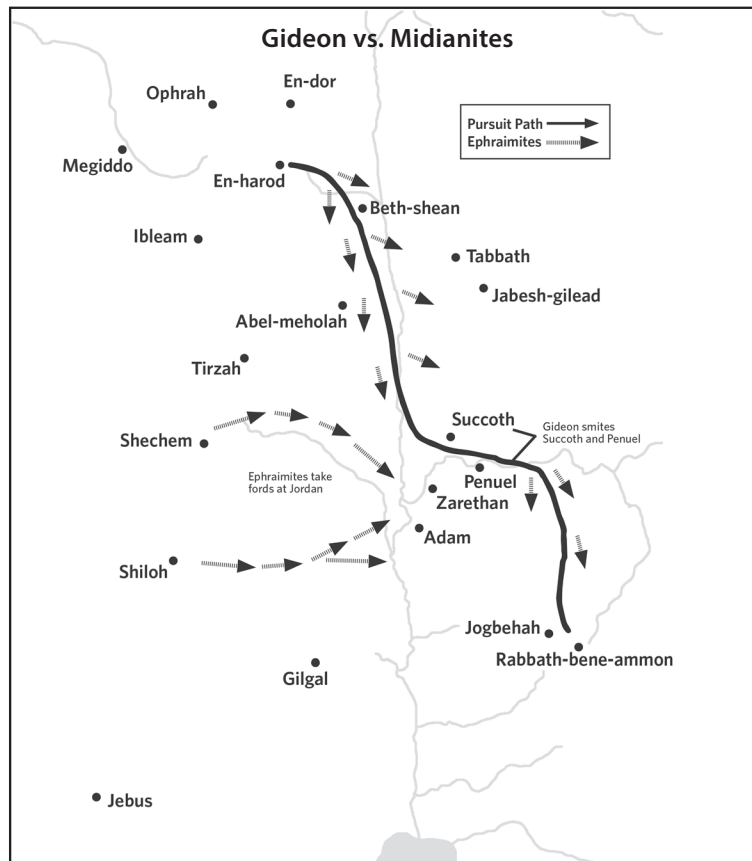
***Jerub-Baal** son of Joash went back home to live. ³⁰He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives. ³¹His concubine, who lived in Shechem,*

also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelek (or "Abimelech," some translations).³² Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

(3) His Legacy

Judges 8:33-35

No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god³⁴ and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.³⁵ They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of **Jerub-Baal** (that is, **Gideon**) in spite of all the good things he had done for them.



(L. Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, 223)

B. The Story of Abimelech (Judg 9)

1. Ambition to be king (1-6)

Judges 9:1-2

Abimelek (or Abimelech) son of Jerub-Baal went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan,² "Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?' Remember, I am your flesh and blood."

- a. Jerub-Baal (i.e. Gideon, 7:1) had refused the title of king (8:22-23) though he acted like a king.
- b. Jerub-Baal had seventy sons, many wives, great wealth. His lifestyle and demeanor mirrored that of many ancient Near Eastern monarchs.
- c. Jerub-Baal had at least one concubine (if not more); one resided at Shechem who bore him a son, Abimelech (Heb. "my father is king").
- d. Jerub-Baal's death caused a crisis of succession. Abimelech has ambitious plans (3-6).

(1) Abimelech hired "adventurers" (mercenaries) (4).

(2) Abimelech murdered all his brothers except for one, Jotham (5).

(3) Abimelech was crowned king (first time in recorded Biblical history) by the citizens of Shechem and Beth-Millo (6).

2. Opposition by Jothan (7-21)

a. Declared by a parable (7-15)

Judges 9:8-15

One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.'⁹ "But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?'¹⁰ "Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.'¹¹ "But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?'¹² "Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.'¹³ "But the vine answered,

*'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway over the trees?' ¹⁴"Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.'
¹⁵"The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!"*

(1) "Olive, fig, and grapevine" represents productive (capable) people.

(2) "Thornbush" represents Abimelech, an image to represent non-productive, harmful, dangerous, and destructive attributes.

b. Discussed after the parable (16-20)

Jothan questioned the motives and behavior of the people of Shechem and Beth-Millo. He further questioned the treatment of Jerub-Baal's family and murdered sons.

Judges 9:19-20

So have you acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal and his family today? If you have, may Abimelek be your joy, and may you be his, too! ²⁰But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelek and consume you, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelek!"

c. Departure of Jothan

Judges 9:21

Then Jotham fled, escaping to Beer, and he lived there because he was afraid of his brother Abimelek.

3. Opposition by Shechem

Judges 9:22-25

After Abimelek had governed Israel three years, ²³God stirred up animosity between Abimelek and the citizens of Shechem so that they acted treacherously against Abimelek. ²⁴God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelek and on the

citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers.²⁵In opposition to him these citizens of Shechem set men on the hilltops to ambush and rob everyone who passed by, and this was reported to Abimelek.

- a. After three years great discontent arose against Abimelech (as Jothan had declared – cf. 9:19-20).
- b. God sent a “spirit of discontent” as an act of judgment on the crimes against the sons of Jerub-Baal.

4. Abimelech vs Gaal (26-41)

Judges 9:26

Now Gaal son of Ebed moved with his clan into Shechem, and its citizens put their confidence in him.

- a. Gaal and his brothers are opportunists who gain favor with the citizens of Shechem.
- b. Gaal takes advantage of the political instability to challenge Abimelech's leadership and particularly, Zebul, the governor of the city (27-29).

c. Zebul responds:

Judges 9:30-33

When Zebul the governor of the city heard what Gaal son of Ebed said, he was very angry.³¹Under cover he sent messengers to Abimelek, saying, “Gaal son of Ebed and his clan have come to Shechem and are stirring up the city against you.³²Now then, during the night you and your men should come and lie in wait in the fields.³³In the morning at sunrise, advance against the city. When Gaal and his men come out against you, seize the opportunity to attack them.”

- d. Gaal and his men were ambushed by Abimelech (aided by Zebul) (36-38).
- e. Gaal and citizens of Shechem were decisively defeated by Abimelech.

Judges 9:39-41

So Gaal led out the citizens of Shechem and fought Abimelek.⁴⁰Abimelek chased him all the way to the entrance of the gate, and many were killed as they fled.

⁴¹Then Abimelek stayed in Arumah, and Zebul drove Gaal and his clan out of Shechem.

5. Abimelech vs Shechem and Thebez (42-51)

Abimelech and his soldiers exacted revenge on the people of Shechem, defeating them decisively and destroying the city of Shechem (42-45). Fleeing the destruction many Shechemites sought refuge in the temple of El-Berith, but Abimelech torched the tower and about a thousand men and women of Shechem died there (46-50).

Next, Abimelech went to nearby Thebez (who had apparently joined Shechem in the revolt against Abimelech). Abimelech besieged the city and captured it (50). The people fled to the safety of the city tower (51).

6. Death of Abimelech (52-57)

a. Described (historically)

Judges 9:52-55

*Abimelek went to the tower and attacked it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, ⁵³**a woman** dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull. ⁵⁴Hurriedly he called to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, '**A woman** killed him.'" So his servant ran him through, and he died. ⁵⁵When the Israelites saw that Abimelek was dead, they went home.*

b. Interpreted (theologically)

Judges 9:56-57

Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelek had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷God also made the people of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them.

C. The Judgship of Tola (10:1-2)

Judges 10:1-2

*After the time of Abimelek, a man of Issachar named **Tola** son of Puah, the son of Dodo, rose to save Israel. He lived in Shamir,*

in the hill country of Ephraim.²He led Israel twenty-three years; then he died, and was buried in Shamir.

1. Tola (Heb. “worm”) was a minor judge (few details, short narrative).
2. Tola was a contemporary of Abimelech.
3. Tola was of the tribe of Issachar (son of Puah, son of Dodo).
4. Tola “saved” or delivered Israel (hill country of Ephraim) though details are omitted. (Oppressor? Military feats? Sin cycle elements?).
5. Tola “led Israel twenty-three years.”
6. Tola was buried in Shamir (location unknown).

D. Judgship of Jair (10:3-5)

1. Jair (Heb. “he enlightens”) was also a minor judge (for listing, see III. Major and Minor Judges, page 38).
2. Jair was wealthy and prominent (“thirty sons” and “thirty donkeys” and “thirty towns”).
3. Jair was a Gileadite of the tribe of Manasseh.
4. Jair led Israel twenty-two years. No oppressors or military deliverance is recorded. However, due to the structure of Judges and the stories of other judges, it is presumed that some kind of deliverance did occur and Jair is accorded by the Biblical writer a place in the stories of the judges.
5. Jair was buried in Kamon in the territory of Manasseh southeast of the Sea of Galilee.

V. TAKEAWAYS

A. From the Story of Gideon

1. God uses whom He chooses.
Gideon was initially fearful and timid. Like Moses with his flimsy excuses to avoid God's calling, Gideon also needed confirming signs. God graciously provided for both men.

2. Worship encounters demand response.

When Gideon saw the fire consume the meal (virtually a food offering), he acknowledged the Lord's presence and feared for his life ("I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face"—6:22). So in response Gideon built an altar.

Note the parallel to Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3. A minority with God is better than a majority without God.

The vast Midianite army was no match for God's army (Gideon and 300 men).

4. Humility can turn to arrogance.

Like King Saul (1 Sam 9:21), Gideon was initially quite humble. But later, though he denied the formal kingship, he arrogantly acted in the manner of ancient, Near-Eastern kings (multiplied gold, wives, wealth).

B. From the Story of Abimelech

1. Selfish ambition will lead to troubles.

Abimelech's thirst for power, for kingship led to the slaughter of his brothers.

2. Choosing leaders requires great care and discernment.

The people of Shechem rashly bowed before the intentions of Abimelech. The payment for their poor choices was deadly.

3. The law of the harvest is evident.

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.