

# Conflict (Struggle) and Crisis (Hardship):<sup>1</sup> The Judges



## SABBATH—JANUARY 16

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Judges 4; Judges 6; Judges 14; Hebrews 11:32; 1 Samuel 2:12–25; 1 Samuel 8:1–7.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Then Hannah prayed. She said, ‘The LORD has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong. I can laugh at my enemies. I’m [I am] so glad he saved me’ ” (1 Samuel 2:1, NlrV).

**THE TIME OF THE JUDGES WAS A CHAOTIC PERIOD OF DEEP SUFFERING AND HARDSHIP IN BIBLE HISTORY.** God’s people did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord “sold” them into the hands of an oppressor. Then the people cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up a savior who brought peace to the land. That is, until the same sad cycle started again.

Deborah, one of Israel’s judges, was special. She helped the men around her to feel confident. She and Jael are heroines while the men needed encouragement because of their weak faith. Later, in the story of Gideon, God’s people again faced an almost hopeless situation.

Samson was one of the last judges. After him the nation fell into confusion and hopelessness. He was more interested in chasing women than in following God. Samson’s countrymen were no better. They were more interested in worshiping idols than in serving the Lord.

Samuel brings hope to the nation. Under him a new leadership structure with kings is established at the people’s request. One of Samuel’s last acts was to anoint David as the next king after Saul.

## DEFINITIONS

1. conflict and crisis—time of great trouble, struggle, and danger.

## DEBORAH (Judges 4)

The story of Deborah adds interesting details to the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) theme. Here we find the people of God suffering attacks from an enemy and facing an almost hopeless situation. This same thing happens in Revelation 12. Revelation 12 is about a very unfair contest between a seven-headed dragon and a newborn baby (read Tuesday's study, Lesson 1).

The important characters in this story include Jabin, king of Canaan; Sisera, his army chief; and Deborah, a prophetess (special messenger from God) and a judge (one who settled quarrels between opposing parties). Deborah had an unusual amount of authority and influence for a woman of that time.

**Read Judges 4. In what ways do we find the great controversy theme explained here? In the end, who alone brought victory to Israel, even though the people were unworthy?**



**Heavy rain sweeps Sisera's soldiers away.**

The heroine of the story is Heber's wife, Jael, who is not afraid to be on the side of God's people. She played an important part in defeating God's enemies. Judging her actions from today's standards is not easy. But we should not use her actions as an excuse to tell lies or do violence in order to gain our goals, no matter how right those goals might be.

Deborah promises Barak that the battle will end in God's victory. (It is an echo of the great controversy.) Two verbs are used to describe how God would do this (Judges 4:7). He will "draw" Sisera (the word suggests catching fish in a net) to the Kishon River. There God will "deliver" him into Barak's hand. Deborah's song of thanksgiving (Judges 5) tells some of the details. Sisera's chariots became stuck down in the narrow passes (road; passage) near the Kishon River because of heavy rain. The heavens and the clouds "poured" and the mountains "shook" (rushed with) water (Judges 5:4, 5, NIV). This causes a flash flood that sweeps away many enemy soldiers (Judges 5:21), and Israel is saved.

**Think of the confidence these men of war had in Deborah. In a way, that was good (clearly). But why must we always be careful in how much confidence we put in anyone?**

**GIDEON (Judges 6:1)**

**Read Judges 6:1. What is happening here? Read Judges 6:10.**

After Deborah, the land enjoyed peace for the next 40 years. But soon God’s people were back in the hands of invaders. This time it was the Midianites. They, with their allies, would enter Israel and destroy all the newly planted crops and steal the livestock (Judges 6:3–5). Israel became poor and starved and cried out to the Lord (Judges 6:6, 7). They realized that their false gods were of no use now.

**Read Judges 6:12–16. What did the “Angel of the LORD” say to Gideon? And what was Gideon’s reaction? Should he have known why they were facing what they were facing? Why, or why not? Read Judges 6:7–10.**

The people were disobedient. That is why they were oppressed (attacked by their enemies). But God came to their rescue again. This time He worked through Gideon. How interesting that God would call Gideon a “mighty man of valor [courage].” But Gideon saw himself as something different: “ ‘But, Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I possibly save Israel? My family group is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh. And I’m [I am] the least important member of my family’ ” (Judges 6:15, NIV). No question, an important part of Gideon’s strength was his own sense of unimportance and weakness.

Notice, too, what Gideon had asked of the Lord in Judges 6:36–40. Knowing of his own weakness, Gideon asked for a special sign of God’s presence. So, we have here a man who fully realized his utter dependence upon the Lord. We can read in Judges 7 about Gideon’s amazing success against the invaders of his people and God’s rescue of Israel.

**Why did the Lord choose to use sinful and weak humans in the course of this rescue? Could He have not Himself called “more than twelve legions [large groups] of angels” (Matthew 26:53) to do what was needed for Israel at that time? What part do we as sinful humans have in both the great controversy and the spreading of the gospel?**



**An important part of Gideon’s strength was his own sense of unimportance and weakness.**

## SAMSON (Judges 14:1–4)



Samson pulled down the temple of the Philistines.

The battle lines between good and evil are blurred in the story of Samson. Samson's life has a strong start, with an announcement from the Angel of the LORD that he is to be a Nazirite<sup>2</sup> from birth. The Angel teaches Samson's parents how to prepare for their special baby. The mother is told not to drink alcohol or to eat forbidden food (Judges 13:4, 13, 14; read also Leviticus 11). God had special plans for Samson. But, sadly, things did not work out as well as they could have.

“Samson entered upon manhood, the time when he must do his mission for God. This is the time when Samson should have been true to God. But he connected himself with the enemies of Israel. Samson did not ask whether he could better glorify God or whether he was putting himself in a position where he could not fulfill God's purpose for his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom. But there is no promise for those who seek pleasure for themselves.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Forefathers and Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 563.

**Read Judges 14:1–4. How is it possible that God used Samson's weakness for women to work out “his [God's] plans against the Philistines” (Judges 14:4, NIV)?**

Samson “moved” against the Philistines in many ways. Each action was done out of anger in answer to personal insults. First, Samson killed 30 men and took their clothes back to his wedding feast to pay a debt (Judges 14:19). Then he destroyed Philistine crops when his wife was given to his best man (Judges 14:20; Judges 15:1–5). Then Samson killed many in revenge against the Philistines for killing his wife and her father (Judges 15:6, 7, 8). Then the Philistines tried to get even with him for that action (Judges 15:9, 10). So, Samson killed 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:14, 15). Finally, he pulled down their temple and killed 3,000 people for blinding him (Judges 16:21, 28, 30).

**Talk about a flawed hero. There seems to be very little from Samson that we should try to copy and follow. But he is honored in Hebrews 11:32. Clearly, there is more to this story than we understand at first. Think about what God could have done with Samson. What about ourselves? How much more could we do if we were living up to God's standards?**

### DEFINITIONS

2. Nazirite—a Jew in Bible times who took a vow to God to not drink wine nor cut his hair nor touch a corpse (dead body).



**RUTH (Ruth 1:8, 16, 17)**

The story of Ruth tells of the great controversy on a personal level. This is where it is always going on in each person.

It is no surprise that the land of Judah suffered a famine during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1; Deuteronomy 28:48; Deuteronomy 32:24; read also Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25). This was a sign that the people of the covenant (agreement between God and His people) had forgotten God. Sin and rebellion (war against God) had caused the rich land to become a barren dust bowl. But in the book of Ruth, God “visited” the land and put life back into it, “giving them bread” again (Ruth 1:6).

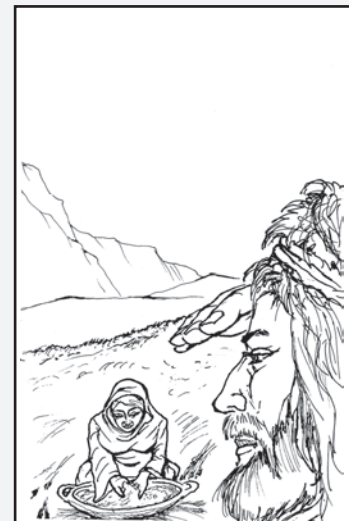
When Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two young sons first went to Moab, they did so because they wanted a future. The land of the enemy gave temporary relief, but with her husband and two sons dead, Naomi finally decided to go back home.

**Read Ruth 1:8, 16, 17. How important is it to us that Ruth wanted to go with Naomi?**

Ruth was from an enemy nation that had many times tried to destroy Israel. But she chose to identify (join) with God’s people and worship their God. In addition, Ruth found favor in the eyes of her adopted homeland (Israel), not just in the eyes of Boaz (Ruth 2:10) but also in the eyes of people who knew of her (Ruth 2:11). Boaz was confident that she also found favor in God’s eyes (Ruth 2:12). Boaz decided to show his admiration for Ruth by marrying her (Ruth 3:10, 11).

But, there was a closer relative than Boaz who had first claim to the land of the dead man (Naomi’s husband, Elimelech) if he married Ruth. The nearer relative was not interested in taking Ruth as his wife because it would cause more financial problems for him (Ruth 4:6). At this point the group of witnesses blessed Ruth. They considered her to be one of the great women of Israel’s history (Ruth 4:11, 12). This opinion was fulfilled when Ruth became part of the family line of the Messiah (Chosen One)(Ruth 4:13, 17; Matthew 1:5, 6).

Talk about a living-happily-ever-after story! Sadly, there are not too many of those in or outside of the Bible. But we can understand how God’s will (plan), in the end, shall succeed. And that is good news for all who love and trust Him.



**Ruth found favor in the eyes of God and of Boaz.**

## SAMUEL (1 Samuel 2:12–25)

What does the beginning of the book of Samuel have to do with the great controversy? There is no clear threat to Israel. The attack of evil is more subtle (“hidden”) but very real.

**Read 1 Samuel 2:12–25. How is the reality of good versus evil shown in these sad verses?**

“He [Eli] had been chosen to govern the people. But he did not rule his own household. Eli was a father who spoiled his children. Loving peace and ease, he did not use his authority to correct the evil habits of his children. He would not deal with them strictly or punish them. Instead, he would give in to their will [desire for what they wanted] and give them their own way.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 575.

Unlike Eli’s children, we find a small boy dressed as a priest (1 Samuel 2:18, 19), who, like Jesus, “continued to grow wiser and stronger. He also became more and more pleasing to the LORD and to people” (1 Samuel 2:26, NIRV; Luke 2:52, NIRV). This Samuel then went on to become a powerful and faithful leader in Israel.

But this does not mean that everything went well. The nation faced war with the Philistines, and the two sons of Eli were killed. The Philistines captured the ark of God, and 98-year-old Eli died when he heard the news (1 Samuel 4:14–18).

Unfortunately, Samuel had the same problem that Eli had. Samuel’s sons did not follow in his footsteps of faithfulness and honesty (1 Samuel 8:1–7).

Samuel marked a turning point in the history of God’s people. He was the last of the judges and was an important person in the growing great controversy. His strong influence guided the people at a critical time. It is a pity his sons did not follow in his steps. But God is not dependent on families. As a result of the backsliding of Samuel’s sons, the elders demanded a king. This was not the best move, as hundreds of years of later history would show.

**No matter what our home life is like, good or bad, we are responsible for whom we serve in the great controversy. Whatever mistakes you may have made, why must you always remember that today, *now*, is never too late to make it right with the Lord? Tomorrow might be too late, but not today. After all, right now is all you have.**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** The Bible is known for not trying to cover up human sin, human evil. If it did, how could it give a good picture of the human condition? An especially sharp description (picture) of human evil is found in 1 Samuel 2:12–25, when the sons of Eli are shown as very different from the young Samuel. First Samuel 2:12 reads, “The sons of Eli were *sons of Belial*;<sup>3</sup> they knew not the LORD.” Notice, first, the difference: family line or family history played an important part in Bible life. And in this one line “the sons of Eli” are now “the sons of Belial.” *Belial* is a rich word, used in many forms and meanings, almost always negative. In fact, it is related to the Hebrew *bl* and *bli*, which mean “no” or “not” or “without.” *Belial* itself means “worthless” and “useless.” In other places the word is used in the same way as it was about Eli’s sons. And other men were also called “sons of Belial” (2 Chronicles 13:7; 1 Kings 21:13). In Proverbs 6:12, being wicked is the same thing as being the “sons of Belial.” (In other Near Eastern literature written during Bible times, *Belial* is another name for Satan himself.) In almost every use in the Bible, the word appears as a negative. As humans, the sons of Eli were created in the image of God. So that means they were created for a purpose and to have meaning. But, according to the Bible, these men were worthless, “sons of worthlessness.” What a tragic waste of life! We are either for the Lord, doing something of meaning and purpose for Him. Or we are, in the end, worthless. That makes sense, because our whole life and its purpose come only from God.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① The Bible makes it clear: there is no middle ground in the great controversy. We are on either one side or the other, Christ’s or Satan’s. But, life as we know it does not always show such clear and sharp differences. Sometimes we are not sure just what is the right decision or what is the wrong one, even with moral (right or wrong) situations, too. It is not always easy to decide what to do. What are some ways we can get wisdom to help us make right choices?
- ② In what ways have people whom you have looked up to somehow disappointed you? At the same time, in what ways have you perhaps disappointed those who once looked up to you? What have you learned from these examples about faith, trust, grace (forgiveness; mercy), and human weakness?

### DEFINITIONS

3. *Belial*—a Greek word that comes from the Hebrew word for worthlessness; also a name the Bible uses for the devil.