

THE G O S P E L A C C O R D I N G T O
THE O L D T E S T A M E N T



RIGHT
IN THEIR
OWN EYES

THE G O S P E L A C C O R D I N G T O
J U D G E S

GEORGE M. SCHWAB

RIGHT

IN THEIR

OWN EYES

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
THE OLD TESTAMENT



A series of studies on the lives
of Old Testament characters, written for
laypeople and pastors, and designed to
encourage Christ-centered reading, teaching,
and preaching of the Old Testament

TREMPER LONGMAN III

Series Editor

RIGHT

IN THEIR

OWN EYES

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
THE BOOK OF JUDGES

GEORGE M. SCHWAB

R&R

P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2011 by George M. Schwab

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations either are from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, ©1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, or are the author's modification of the Revised Standard Version. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Stair-climbing icon © istockphoto.com / Kathy Konkle

Page design by Tobias Design

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schwab, George M., 1961-

Right in their own eyes : the Gospel according to Judges / George M. Schwab.

p. cm. -- (The Gospel according to the Old Testament)

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-1-59638-210-7 (pbk.)

1. Bible. O.T. Judges--Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Bible. O.T. Judges--Relation to the New Testament. 3. Bible. N.T.--Relation to Judges.

I. Title.

BS1305.52.S39 2011

222'.3206--dc23

2011031588

This book is dedicated to Mary, the Achsah of my life.

CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction	xv
Abbreviations	xxi

PART ONE—RIGHT READING

1. Juggling Judges	3
2. Significant Stylization	11
3. Authors' Agendas	21

PART TWO—CYCLES OF TWELVE JUDGES

4. A Keen Kenite	41
5. Soiled Southpaw, Rotund Ruler	49
6. Does God Command Jihad?	63
7. The Sissy, the Sisters, and Sisera	77
8. Mastering Midian	99
9. Abominable Abimelech	121
10. Minor Magistrates	131
11. Jephthah's Jaundice	139
12. Philistine Foxes	157

PART THREE—LEVITE LEVERAGE

13. Dan's Dirty Dealings	183
14. Benjamin's Baleful Bent	199
Conclusion	219
Notes	221
Bibliography	229
Index of Scripture	235

FOREWORD



*The New Testament is in the Old concealed;
the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*

—Augustine

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

“In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to

them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:22–27)

The prophets searched. Angels longed to see. And the disciples didn't understand. But Moses, the prophets, and all the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken about it—that Jesus would come, suffer, and then be glorified. God began to tell a story in the Old Testament, the ending of which the audience eagerly anticipated. But the Old Testament audience was left hanging. The plot was laid out, but the climax was delayed. The unfinished story begged an ending. In Christ, God has provided the climax to the Old Testament story. Jesus did not arrive unannounced; his coming was declared *in advance* in the Old Testament, not just in explicit prophecies of the Messiah but by means of the stories of all the events, characters, and circumstances in the Old Testament. God was telling a larger, overarching, unified story. From the account of creation in Genesis to the final stories of the return from exile, God progressively unfolded his plan of salvation. And the Old Testament account of that plan always pointed in some way to Christ.

AIMS OF THIS SERIES

The Gospel According to the Old Testament Series is committed to the proposition that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is a unified revelation of God, and that its thematic unity is found in Christ. The individual books of the Old Testament exhibit diverse genres, styles, and individual theologies, but tying them all together is the constant foreshadowing of, and pointing forward to, Christ. Believing in the fundamentally Christocentric nature of the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, we offer this series of studies in the Old Testament with the following aims:

- to lay out the pervasiveness of the revelation of Christ in the Old Testament
- to promote a Christ-centered reading of the Old Testament
- to encourage Christ-centered preaching and teaching from the Old Testament

To this end, the volumes in this series are written for pastors and laypeople, not scholars.

While such a series could take a number of different shapes, we have decided, in most cases, to focus individual volumes on Old Testament figures—people—rather than books or themes. Some books, of course, will receive major attention in connection with their authors or main characters (e.g., Daniel and Isaiah). Also, certain themes will be emphasized in connection with particular figures.

It is our hope and prayer that this series will revive interest in and study of the Old Testament as readers recognize that the Old Testament points forward to Jesus Christ.

TREMPER LONGMAN III
J. ALAN GROVES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



A number of people added elements to this book that are greatly appreciated. I taught a Judges adult Sunday school class at Greenwood Presbyterian, and the members made valuable and insightful suggestions, some of which are incorporated into this book.

A number of people had insights that were helpful with chapter 6. Among them are Peter Enns, Doug Green, Erika Moore, Mark Ross, Don Fairbairn, Steve Vanderhill, John Schwab, Phil and Kim Monroe, Loyd Melton, and Tremper Longman.

I would also like to thank Neely Gaston and Erskine Theological Seminary for affording me the time to develop and write this material.

INTRODUCTION



The book of Judges is about God's forging for himself a community of worshipers in a time when all people "did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). This indictment was not about the pagan nations surrounding Israel—it was about Israel itself. Can it be said that we live in such an age today? Think of how the gospel falls on deaf ears around the world; think of all the fallen church leaders you hear about and have personally encountered. How can we believe that God sends his Spirit today and is working out his purposes through us? Think of your own heart—the lust and greed and pride that is there under the surface, ready to undercut your witness and cripple your service to God. Judges explores this issue and puts on display how it is that vain and wayward people, who are endowed with the Spirit, yet accomplish the mission God gives them.

Perhaps the best picture of this phenomenon in Judges is seen in the story of Samson and the lion, found in Judges 14:5–9. Here the Spirit comes upon Samson, for the very first time, forcibly. Samson's motive is dubious—to marry a Philistine woman. She was, literally, "right in his eyes" (14:7). This phrase connects Samson with the end of Judges, which says that everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Samson signifies all Israel, doing whatever he pleased.

Along the way, he met a roaring lion and the Spirit came upon him in power, enabling him to easily rip the lion apart. (This is odd. Usually the Spirit empowers judges

to defeat great armies and to deliver Israel. Why would the Spirit waste his power on something so relatively insignificant? For the answer, stay tuned.) Later, Samson found a swarm of bees in the lion's carcass, and from its body he scraped honey that pleased him and his parents.

The word translated "carcass" in verse 8 is found in this form elsewhere only in Proverbs and in prophecy—speaking of the fall of nations or the wicked: "Damascus shall be a *ruin*" (Isa. 17:1). The word always describes the fallen ruin of a nation or of the wicked, and once (Ezek. 32), the fallen nation is called a *lion* of nations. The word *nations* in Ezekiel is *goyim*, which sounds like the rare word in verse 9, glossed the "body" or "carcass" of the lion. So the dead lion is described in language that evokes the wicked, the nations destined for judgment, the heathen Gentiles who are objects of God's wrath. (For you scholars, see Psalm 110:6 in Hebrew for the same wordplay.)

Consider this also: the word translated "swarm" of bees isn't the usual word for *swarm*, but rather *'edah*, which elsewhere always refers to people. It is translated "assembly," as in the "assembly of Israel," or "congregation." Remember that the Promised Land is the land flowing with milk and *honey*; honey is a divine blessing on the community.

Verse 9 says that Samson "scraped" the honey, using the verb *radah*. Elsewhere, this word always means "to rule, to have dominion," as in Genesis 1:26: "let them have dominion" over the animals. Samson *scraped* the honey from the carcass? Or Samson *subdued* and *had dominion* over the honey, once he had vanquished the lion. After all, how did Samson get at the honey? Did he borrow netting? He apparently didn't get stung—he dominated the bees.

So what is the image here? The lion's carcass invokes the nations that are judged by God and fallen to ruin. The beehive represents the community of faith who dwell within the context of seemingly powerful nations—nations that nevertheless cannot stand before one Spirit-empowered man whom God has set apart as consecrated. Samson,

as you know, was consecrated from birth; that's why he never cut his hair. He was a Nazirite (Judg. 13:5). (*Samson* means "little sun," or "one who shines like the sun." When the Spirit flared up, ropes burned off him.) Remember the book of Daniel, and how the aggressive pagan nations that wear out the saints are represented in visions as beasts. Babylon is a lion in Daniel's vision of chapter 7. And one flesh-and-blood example of persecution in Daniel is a literal lions' den. Satan prowls around like a lion, seeking someone to devour.

Jesus Christ is the Nazarene, set apart by God, possessing the Spirit without measure, who overthrows the principalities and powers that threaten to devour the congregation of the saints. Under his sovereign rule, the church thrives in the midst of a hostile world and produces good fruit, sweet like honey, to God.

Samson accomplished the mission that God had planned for him from before his birth. And yet, of all the judges, Samson is the most flawed. He personifies wayward Israel, everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. And in this respect, Samson represents the spiritual reality that you and I experience. What spiritual reality? Only this: that God sends his Spirit into our hearts in such a way that, although we continue to be wayward, and we fail, and we are foolish, and we sleep with the enemy (as Samson literally did), even so God through his Spirit *does accomplish his mission through us*. Unlike Samson, we possess the Spirit our entire lives, and a transformation of character takes place over time as we become more Christlike. (If we don't, there are consequences. Look at how Samson ended up because he despised his calling to be holy.) But meanwhile, we grow in faith and repentance, and God ensures that the mission of the gospel goes forth through us, despite our failings.

All the judges were flawed characters, and these flaws are highlighted in the text, yet every one of them accomplished the mission that God gave them through the

Spirit—to save the people of Israel from the consequences of their sin. God was forging a worshiping community in the midst of the nations, and the judges had their role to play in that effort. Even so, today, God will take you, with all your weaknesses, and will accomplish his saving purposes through you. The kingdom will be built. In the words of the apostle Paul:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor. 4:7–9)

Although we sin and fail, God uses us to advance his kingdom. How then shall we live? Paul says that he forgets what lies behind and presses forward to fulfill God’s calling, because our commonwealth is in heaven.

And it is from there that we await a Savior, who is the Lord, who will return and change us to be like him. On the last day, we will shine like stars, radiating holy fire like Samsons. This ultimate meaning of Judges will be seen when Jesus does away with all his enemies, and all will be golden honey for us. And while we await that day, we are fiery lights on a hill, burning lampstands not hidden. The light is our good works and the gospel we profess, which illumines the world, as we produce something sweet. It is the Spirit of God who accomplishes this mission through us. So take heart and press on, forgetting what lies behind.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The book of Judges shows that God will accomplish his purposes through those with his Spirit. To what

- ministry has he called you? How has the ministry gone forth despite your sin, or the sin of others?
2. Over what spheres has God given you dominion? How are you doing in those areas? Where do you need improvement?
 3. What fruit has sharing your faith with others produced? What about you hinders this mission? What do you plan to do to correct that hindrance?
 4. The world cannot stand up to Jesus. Why then are you so shy to go forward in faith?
 5. What causes doubts in you? How does the image of Samson and the lion help answer those doubts?

ABBREVIATIONS



<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>KJV</i>	King James Version
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NKJV</i>	New King James Version
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>RSV</i>	Revised Standard Version
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

PART ONE

RIGHT READING



Part 1 of this book treats issues that arise from the fact that Judges—a literary work—touches upon real and verifiable history. We will try to provide a reasonable setting for the judges themselves, which inevitably raises matters of interpretation. Part 1 will thus explore how Judges was formed and shaped over time, how it wants to be interpreted, and what principles should guide Christians in that effort.

I

JUGGLING JUDGES



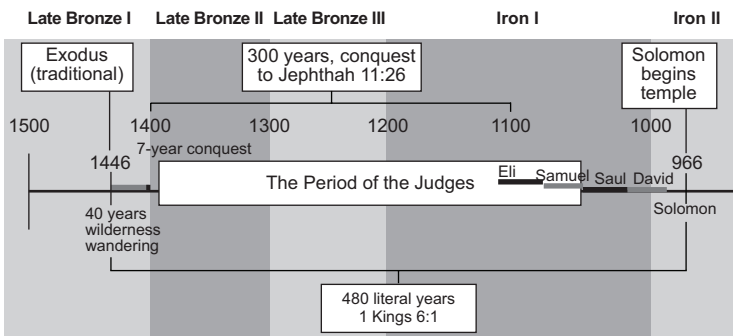
Scholars disagree about how and when various biblical events occurred, such as the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. The traditional view places the exodus at the mid-fifteenth century, 1446 B.C. This was followed by forty years of wandering and then seven years of conquest, taking us up to the year 1400 B.C. It is at this time that the material culture of Palestine changed from Late Bronze I to Late Bronze II.

WHEN THE JUDGES JUDGED

Solomon began construction of Yahweh's temple in the year 966 B.C. According to 1 Kings 6:1, this was 480 years after the exodus. This exactly fits with the traditional date (1446 - 966 = 480). The Merneptah Stele dates to 1230 B.C. and speaks of Israel as a major player in the region. The main wave of Philistines entered Canaan around 1200 B.C., but this group is not an issue in Judges until the time of Samson. Jephthah claimed that he lived three hundred years after the conquest (Judg. 11:26). Solomon began his work in his fourth year. Go back a generation (or forty

years) for David, another for Saul, and again for Samuel (the last judge) and Eli, and you are close to Jephthah's time. So by this analysis, the period of the judges was Late Bronze II until Iron I, about 1400–1100 B.C. A little later and we encroach upon the era of 1 Samuel. Of course, if one opted for an exodus late date, this period would be much more compressed. The late-date view reads Jephthah's 300 years as spurious and the 480-year span as a conventionalized number: 12 multiplied by a stylized 40-year generation. This book does not take issue with the early date. Assuming (for the sake of the argument) literal forty-year spans for Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David, the timeline looks like Figure 1.1.

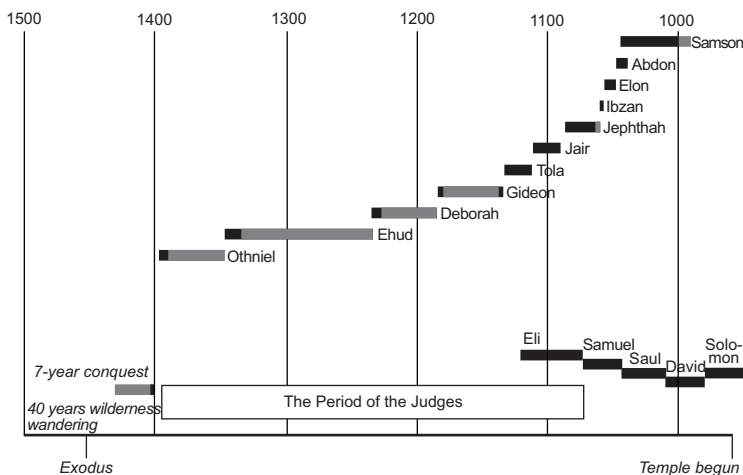
Fig. 1.1. Period Placement



CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDGES

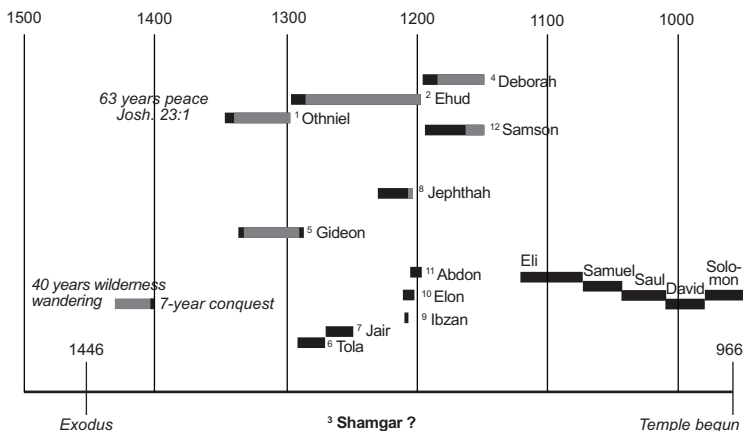
That's the easy part. The hard part is making the tenure of the judges fit into this span of three hundred years plus. The land had peace for forty years after Othniel, the first judge (Judg. 3:11); eighty years after Ehud, the second judge (3:30); another forty after Deborah (5:31); and another forty after Gideon (8:28). With fifty-three years of oppression, this already totals two hundred years. Figure 1.2 is a graph showing them all, and the period of oppression and peace that followed (the bit after Gideon represents Abimelech):

Fig. 1.2. Ordering Ordeal



Well, this is obviously unworkable. Samson is a contemporary of David? Why didn't Samson step up to the plate in the matter of Goliath? And Samuel is supposed to be the last of the judges. By the time one comes to 1 Samuel, this period is supposed to be over; when Saul was anointed as king, the judges were done.

Fig. 1.3. Juggling Judges



So even though the plain reading of the text seems to imply that one judge follows the other in sequence, what “really happened” in history was that the judges overlapped somewhat.

Figure 1.3 (preceding page) is based largely on a recent *JETS* article by Robert Chisholm¹ (Dallas Theological Seminary). The numbers represent the order in which each judge is found in the book of Judges. Chisholm argues that after Deborah, the history rewinds back to the beginning, so that Othniel (#1) parallels Gideon (#5) in history, and at the other end, Deborah is contemporaneous with Samson. In this reading, Jephthah’s words about three hundred years are not to be taken at face value. According to this view, the ordering of the judges in the book should be taken as *two* parallel sequences.

I prefer to: (1) place Othniel’s judgeship much closer to the conquest (he was a contemporary of Caleb), (2) leave open at least the possibility that Deborah judged during the eclipse of 1131 B.C. (see Judg. 5:20), and (3) allow for Jephthah’s time reference to be factual. Keep in mind also that by Gideon’s time, the exodus was a distant memory (6:13), but Chisholm has Gideon as contemporaneous with Othniel, a participant in the conquest.

The impression Judges gives to the reader is that the judges ruled over all Israel. But once we recognize that the judgeships overlap, their jurisdiction must then have been limited. For example, according to the chart above, during the eighty years of peace that followed Ehud, Jephthah fought the Ammonites and the Ephraimites. During Deborah’s peace, Samson fought Philistine tyranny. One must imagine that Samson’s activities were limited to the southern end of Israel, Deborah’s to the northern. When “the land” or “Israel” is mentioned, the reader should be aware that a localized area might have been the historical situation.

MORE DISCHRONOLOGIZATION

The last five chapters of the book treat two stories. But when did they take place? In Judges 18:30, the idolatrous Levite is named as the grandson of Moses. In Judges 20:28, another priest, Phinehas, is identified as Aaron's grandson. Both of these stories are then contemporaneous with Othniel, or even earlier. Phinehas actually took part in the wilderness wandering, acting much the same then as in Judges (Num. 25:7–11). So the last two events of Judges want to be read as taking place right at the start of the period.²

Consider the opening chapters. Joshua is dead and gone at first (Judg. 1:1). But Judges 1:10–19 is a story taken right out of the middle of the book of Joshua (15:15–19). There, of course, Joshua is alive. But after that the settlement is described, with which God is not pleased (i.e., not under Joshua's leadership)—and Joshua is again quite *passé*. But he pops up again in Judges 2:6–10, alive and kicking. After that, he's dead again.

The individual stories in Judges are loosely connected to the sequence of events in history. History is one dimension of the book. But there are other concerns that organize the book and sometimes reorder the sequencing. These will be discussed in the following chapters.

THE TWELVE JUDGES

There are twelve judges. Each one is associated with a different tribe of Israel. The exception is the tribe of Levi, which the last five chapters are about. They can be organized according to the table on the next page.

To anyone familiar with tribal Israel, one alternative to a strict chronological ordering is immediately apparent: some are grouped geographically. The first three are southern; in

	Judge	Tribe	Oppression and Duration
1	Othniel	Judah	8+40
2	Ehud	Benjamin	18+80
3	Shamgar	Simeon(?)	–
4	Deborah/Barak	Naphtali	20+40
5	Gideon	Manasseh	7+40
6	Tola	Issachar	23
7	Jair	Gad	22
8	Jephthah	Reuben	18+6
9	Ibzan	Asher	7
10	Elon	Zebulun	10
11	Abdon	Ephraim	8
12	Samson	Dan	40+20

fact, Simeon lies in the heart of Judah. They are brothers (by Leah), and thought of as acting as a unit in Judges 1:3. The next three are also geographically close, Manasseh bordering the other two. Gad and Reuben form a unit east of the Jordan. Asher and Zebulun share a border. So another level of order we discover with the judges is geographical. Jay Williams³ arranged them in a circle, which reveals other associations. For example, the two half-tribes of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) are diametrically opposite. If one starts with Samson in such an unbroken circle and works one's way around, the first half are the judges associated with multiples of 40 in their peacetime numbers (20, 40, 80), while the second half are not this way. Many such associations affect how the story is told—it is not rigorously chronological. For example, the Spirit comes upon four judges—one from each quadrant. Of course, this is not how a modern-day history book would read. Thus, one should not read Judges as if it were merely a chronicle of historical facts.

But the real answer to why the book does not follow a purely historical sequence is found in its various interests, which are expressed for us in a highly literary and artistic

form. It was theologically important to begin with Othniel; it was important to have Ehud next. The two stories at the end need to be at the end because of what the book wants to convey to you, the reader, beyond simply “what happened.”

The very fact that exactly twelve judges are on display already reveals an agenda. These judges were picked partially because they represent the twelve tribes, and not necessarily in every case because they were historically important. Perhaps some of the minor judges, such as Elon (who gets two verses), are there to help round out the desired number twelve. How far does this concept go? In what other ways are the stories formatted by other considerations? To these matters we now turn.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. The book of Judges rearranged historical sequences for various reasons. Do you think this enhances the book or diminishes it? Now that you know this, what are your expectations when reading it?
2. Much in the story of Samson and the lion pointed beyond itself to spiritual truths. Why is this preferable to simply telling “what happened”?
3. Do you hunger and thirst for reasons that explain why the material is thus rearranged? Try to express the rearrangement issue in your own words.