

Judges

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Book of Judges using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to the Historical Books* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§]And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶]Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

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Prepare

Read the Introduction to Judges, paying particular attention to the *Structure* and *Themes and Characteristics* of the book and the *Christian Perspective* on it. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Judges to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Judges, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Judges as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:1—2:5.** How does the Book of Judges open? What success do the northern tribes and the tribes of Judah, Simeon, Joseph, and Benjamin have in subduing Canaan?
2. **1:1.** What is the importance here of the death of Joshua? What method do the people of Israel use to inquire of the Lord what to do? Where does Israel appear to be gathered?
3. **1:8.** What kind of place is Jerusalem at this point? Who overthrows the city and occupies it for a time? Who later will make it a permanent Israelite city?
4. **1:16.** Who is “the Kenite”? From where does the relationship between Israel and the Kenites stem? What did Moses promise certain Midianites, and in exchange for what? What do scholars infer from the Kenite name? What is the city of palms?
5. **1:23–26.** What does the takeover of Bethel recall? How are both stories similar? What is the critical difference between them?
6. **1:28.** What happens to Canaanites not destroyed or dislodged from the land? Of what does this give evidence, both positively and negatively?

For application

1. **1:1.** Whose death has meant the most to you on a personal level? Did it help to decide the direction of your life? If so, how?
2. **1:7.** Has something you did to others—be it a punishment you inflicted, an act of spite, or an impulsive deed that caused injury—ever been done to you in return? How serious was the matter? What did you learn from it about yourself or about God’s justice?
3. **1:27–33.** What often happens to the culture of immigrants as they try to settle into a new country? What benefits does assimilation provide? What are some of its cultural drawbacks? What is likely to happen to the religious practices of immigrants who settle in places where there is disapproval of either their religion or its cultural expressions?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:1.** What is the “angel of the LORD”, and how may he appear? How is the word *bochim* translated, and to what does it probably refer?
2. **2:11—3:6.** What does this theological preface to the stories in Judges 3–16 briefly outline? What is the twofold lesson? By what theological vision and vocabulary are these verses shaped?
3. **2:11.** Who is Baal? In Semitic mythology, what does he do? Why was Baal extremely important to the agricultural life of Canaan, and why is the name plural here?
4. **2:22.** What are the five reasons why the settlement of Canaan was a long and drawn-out process?

For application

1. **2:4.** Read the note for this verse. What is the difference between *remorse* and *repentance*? How should they be related? In the Passion narrative, which of Jesus’ disciples showed remorse but did not repent, and which showed remorse along with repentance?
2. **2:10.** Because most children of Catholic parents are baptized as infants, what is the parents’ responsibility in regard to their religious upbringing? Assuming the parents teach the faith to their children, what do the children need to do about it as they grow older? What does the expression “God has no grandchildren” mean?
3. **2:14.** What would likely happen to the faith of a Catholic who is irregular or neglectful in its practice if he lived in a culture that was openly unsupportive of his religion? How might such spiritual weakness be overcome?
4. **2:18–19.** It often happens that a person raised under the discipline of a strong tutor abandons that discipline when the tutor is no longer around. Is there anything in your experience that might illustrate this behavior pattern? In your judgment, what might account for it?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:3.** Where was Israel settled? Who are the Philistines, and from where do they come, according to the Bible? When do they establish themselves in southwest Canaan? Where are the Canaanites and the Sidonians located? Where are Baal-Hermon and Hamath?
2. **3:9.** Who is Othniel? What effort is he leading? Why is Othniel (along with Deborah) the most exemplary of the judges in the book?
3. **3:10.** What does the Spirit of the Lord bring to the judges? How does he accomplish this? What does the work of the Spirit in the lives of the judges anticipate?
4. **3:15.** Who is Ehud? How does he free Israel from 18 years of vassalage to the Moabites? In which tribe is being left-handed a common trait, and what is ironic about the name of this tribe? What form of tribute is Israel probably paying?
5. **3:31.** What is known about Shamgar? Since Anath is the name of a Semitic goddess of warfare, what do many surmise about Shamgar? What is an oxgoad? What story does Shamgar's success in wielding this unconventional weapon anticipate?

For application

1. **3:2.** Contrast this verse with Is 2:4; see also Eccles 3:8. When is it necessary to learn war, and when is it important to un-learn it? According to CCC 2307ff., what is the Catholic Church's teaching on the waging of war?
2. **3:4.** Why does God test people? How do you think that he sometimes tests you?
3. **3:6–7.** Why would mixed marriages such as these cause the people of Israel to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord? What dangers arise when people choose spouses who do not share their own religious commitments?
4. **3:8.** What is the "anger of the LORD"? Since Scripture elsewhere describes God as "jealous" (Ex 20:5; Deut 4:24), what is the relation of his "anger" to his infinite love? How does the image of God's anger affect your relationship with him?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:1—5:31.** Of what is the story of Deborah and Barak an account, in both prose and poetry? What do the heroic actions of Deborah and Jael in these episodes show about the role of women?
2. **4:4.** What does Deborah's name mean? What positions and kinds of influence does she hold? From which tribe does she hail? Alongside what other prominent figures of the Bible who perform judicial and prophetic functions does Deborah stand?
3. **4:6.** Who is Barak, and what does his name mean? For what is he later noted? Where are Kedesh and Mount Tabor?
4. **4:17.** What does Jael's name mean? From what ethnic group may she have come? What does the possibility that she might be an Israelite married into a Kenite family explain?

For application

1. **4:8.** Read the note for this verse. Since Barak's hesitation is a "momentary act of disobedience", why might he want Deborah to accompany him? Have you ever sought a similar kind of reassurance before starting a difficult project?
2. **4:9.** Barak's momentary disobedience has a personal consequence, since his success is not as great as it would have been if he had obeyed. Why does obedience require faith? If you distrust a command, how successful are you likely to be in carrying it out?
3. **4:15.** The note for this verse describes how the Lord intervenes to give Barak the victory despite what would ordinarily have been a tactical advantage for the enemy. Has the Lord ever intervened in your life to reverse a situation that appeared hopeless to you? If so, how did you thank him?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:1–31.** What does the Song of Deborah celebrate? Of what is it a classic specimen, and when was it possibly composed? Why are several lines hard to decipher?
2. **5:14–18.** As an assessment of the wartime response of Israel, which tribes are praised, and which are rebuked? Why are two tribes unmentioned? What does the poem make clear about Israel?

Judges

3. **5:20.** What do the stars represent? What does the next verse (5:21) suggest?
4. **5:31.** What does the prayer that Yahweh's friends would be like the sun mean? What does Scripture teach that the saints are destined to do?

For application

1. **5:1–3.** What are some reasons why people compose victory songs after a battle? How many such songs can you think of from the history of our country? How is addressing such a song to the Lord spiritually appropriate?
2. **5:9.** This verse praises the commanders of Israel who took command of a poorly equipped army (see v. 8 and its note). Under what circumstances have you been called on to exercise leadership? Going into the situation, how willing were you to lead? What kinds of strength did leadership call forth from you?
3. **5:20.** Read the note for this verse. How does the Church call on the help of angels to protect her from her enemies, particularly the evil one? Have you ever had occasion to call on your guardian angel for help?
4. **5:26–27.** What effect is the repetition in these verses intended to produce on the reader? How does it enhance appreciation of the Lord's victory in the overall contest?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:1—8:35.** Who is Gideon? What does his name mean? What question is central to this account, and what ideal does Gideon uphold? What do the people desire, however?
2. **6:11–24.** What do these verses recount? What five parallels with the call of Moses at the burning bush are noticeable?
3. **Word Study: Trumpet (6:34).** What is a *shophar*? What are some of its uses, including the most frequent uses? As a liturgical instrument, what is its purpose? As a military instrument, how is it used? How might both aspects be combined?
4. **6:38.** Where was the technique of wringing dew out of fleece used? Allegorically, according to St. Ambrose, what does the dew on the fleece represent? Morally, why was the miracle performed on the threshing floor?

For application

1. **6:12.** How would you respond if an angel addressed you the same way he addressed Gideon? What sort of valor is required of Christians in this century?
2. **6:13.** Gideon's response to the angel is anything but faith-filled. Have the hardships in your life ever prompted a similar cynical response to the Lord?
3. **6:15–16.** Compare the Lord's reply to Gideon with his reply to St. Paul in 2 Cor 12:9. Has the Lord ever worked through your own weakness (e.g., an illness or a personal setback) to strengthen you or others with his grace?
4. **6:34.** Read the note for this verse. How does the Spirit "clothe" a person with himself? Some people are reluctant to allow the Holy Spirit to take possession of them; what do they fear? What changes are likely to occur in a person of whom the Spirit takes possession?
5. **6:36–40.** The expression "laying a fleece" has come to mean asking God for a sign indicating his approval of an intention or direction. When might "laying a fleece" be appropriate, and when might it indicate a lack of faith?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:2.** What was the purpose of Gideon's scaling back his army of 32,000 soldiers to a mere 300 men? What does Israel learn from this?
2. **7:6.** Why does Gideon select men for his army who lapped water from their hands rather than kneeling down to drink?
3. **7:10.** Who is Purah? How is the same Hebrew term rendered in 9:54 and in 1 Sam 14:1?
4. **7:19.** How was the night divided into watches? When did the middle watch begin?

For application

1. **7:2.** Has the Lord ever asked you to trust him rather than rely on your own resources? If so, did you try to bargain or compromise with him about that? When you get into an argument with the Lord, who wins?

2. **7:5.** How would you describe a position of spiritual alertness? For what, in our culture, should one be spiritually alert? What is the difference between a defensive posture of alertness and an offensive one? Which do you think is more necessary?
3. **7:10–11.** Sometimes, circumstances suggest a direction the Lord may wish you to take. How would you recognize such a direction? What role does regular (as opposed to occasional) prayer play in discerning his direction for you?
4. **7:15.** Think of an instance in your life when you knew the time for making up your mind was over and it was time to act. How did you recognize that point? On hindsight, how would you evaluate your decision?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:5.** Where is Succoth? With what modern site is it often identified? Why do city officials in Succoth refuse to supply Gideon's army with provisions? Who might the "kings of Midian" be?
2. **8:13–17.** What does Gideon do to Succoth and Penuel? Who sanctioned this action against Gideon's fellow Israelites? What does it anticipate?
3. **8:22–24.** What do the people want to do with Gideon? Why does he refuse the honor? What does the outcry for an earthly king (monarchy) show about Israel, and when will this be made clear?
4. **8:27.** To what does the term *ephod* typically refer? Why might Gideon have put forward the idea of using an ephod? What actually happens to it? What does collecting gold earrings for the making of a cult object recall about both Aaron and Moses? Despite doing the Lord's work and defending the Lord's honor, how does Gideon end up?

For application

1. **8:2–3.** Compare Gideon's reply to the Ephraimites with Prov 15:1. When faced with someone's anger, how do you typically tend to reply? After the confrontation has ended, how do you tend to judge your own part in it?
2. **8:5–9.** Gideon threatens (and later delivers) revenge on the Israelites who refuse to aid him. According to the Lord's Prayer, what should a Christian's response be? Assuming that someone in authority thinks punishment is necessary, what of a positive nature should it be designed to accomplish?
3. **8:20.** Have you ever been afraid to do what someone told you to? If so, what caused the fear? Has fear ever kept you from doing something you believed to be the Lord's desire for you?
4. **8:22–23.** Look up Deut 33:5, referred to in the note for these verses. What was the legal basis for keeping the Lord as the ruler of Israel? According to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7), on what basis should a Christian community govern its behavior?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:1–57.** What does this chapter recount? In what role is Abimelech cast? What characterizes his rule? What is the point of the story?
2. **9:1.** Where is Shechem? What is its connection with the Deuteronomic covenant under Joshua? What is happening there now, many years later? Who are Abimelech's kinsmen, and what assistance do they give him?
3. **9:7–15.** About what does Jotham's parable warn? What do the noble trees represent? How is Abimelech presented?
4. **9:23.** What does God's sending an evil spirit indicate? In this case, what is the demon given free rein to do? Theologically, what point is being made?

For application

1. **9:7–15.** Why would Jotham choose a parable as a way to deliver his message instead of simply stating his position in non-figurative language? What impact is a parable designed to have that is missing from a more direct approach?
2. **9:23.** The last sentence of the note for this verse raises a theological point about God's use of evil-doing in the working out of his justice. Has an instance of wrongdoing, whether criminal or through negligence or some other cause, ever turned out for the good in your own or your family's experience? If so, what has that taught you about God's love or his mercy?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:1.** Who is Tola? What might his role as a deliverer and judge over Israel indicate? Where is Shamir?
2. **10:6—12:7.** Who is Jephthah? Though adept at diplomacy and military leadership, by what is his career overshadowed? From which tribe is he?
3. **10:6.** What does mention of the gods indicate? To which gods have the covenant people been attached, and which are they now worshipping?
4. **10:13.** For what does the Lord rebuke Israel? Though formally the statement sounds like a divine renunciation of the covenant, what is its aim?

For application

1. **10:6–7.** According to the chart *Victories of the Judges* (see notes for chap. 3), the judgeship of Tola and Jair resulted in 45 years of peace, after which Israel again abandoned the Lord. Why do peace and prosperity, when one is most free to practice his faith, often result in a relaxation of religious observance (see Deut 8:11–20)? How do persecution and oppression work to bring about a return to the Lord?
2. **10:10–16.** According to the same *Victories of the Judges* chart, the next period of oppression and prayer for help lasted 18 years. What shape did the people's repentance take? How long might a national process of putting "away the foreign gods" have taken? What would have been involved? Why do repentance and conversion take so long?
3. **10:16.** The note for this verse discusses what "he became indignant" might mean. As a parent, how would you respond to a child who repeatedly gets into trouble despite your warnings and who always expects you to help? What limits might there be to God's patience?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:15–27.** With what do these verses deal? What arguments does Jephthah use to contest the claim that Israel illegally occupies the lands east of the Jordan?
2. **11:24.** Who is Chemosh? Why might Jephthah make reference to Chemosh instead of the Moabite national god Molech? Who gave the Ammonites their land, according to the Torah?
3. **11:29–40.** What did Jephthah inadvertently but recklessly promise? What did the resulting predicament mean for his daughter and for his family? What are two different ways that commentators have understood the nature of Jephthah's sacrifice? Explain how these different interpretations lead to different assessments of the character of Jephthah.
4. **11:34.** How were victory celebrations traditionally led? The same Hebrew expression for an "only child" is used for what other biblical character? How are the two events, while similar, mirror opposites?
5. **11:37.** Why does Jephthah's daughter lament her virginity? Why was this a painful burden? How did the attitude toward sexual abstinence gradually change?

For application

1. **11:3.** In today's urban environments, what often happens to young men with leadership skills who have nothing to do but roam the streets? What fate often awaits them as a result? Have you heard (or experienced) stories where such young people have been turned into responsible citizens? What role, if any, have you played in this process?
2. **11:30–31.** St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* advise against making vows to the Lord under the influence of spiritual euphoria. If you have ever made a rash promise to the Lord, what was the nature of it? What efforts did you make to fulfill it, and what was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?
3. **11:37.** What is the attitude toward virginity in our culture? What respect have you had toward this virtue? How does the reason for Jephthah's daughter's lament for her virginity challenge our culture's attitudes toward children?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:1–6.** What happens in these verses? Between whom is the clash? Why are the Ephraimites offended? How does Jephthah respond? What does it seem that Ephraim, one of the largest and strongest of the twelve tribes, is challenging?

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2. **12:6.** What does the word *shibboleth* mean? How are fleeing Ephraimites exposed at the Jordan River checkpoint?
3. **12:8.** Who is Ibzan? To which Bethlehem is this probably a reference?
4. **12:13.** Who is Abdon? What do we know about his hometown and the man himself?

For application

1. **12:1–3.** Have quarrels, misunderstandings, or grievances (real or imagined) ever affected relationships in your extended family? If so, how have family members tried to restore peace? Whose responsibility is it to forgive offenses?
2. **12:6.** In this verse, the Gileadites use a password to identify an enemy trying to sneak past them. According to Mt 7:21, how will the Son of Man recognize those who try to gain entrance into heaven?
3. **12:9.** Given the tensions in Israel, what might Ibzan have sought to gain by arranging marriages outside his clan? What is marriage supposed to accomplish between husband and wife? How might the marriage bond help strengthen relationships within an extended family?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:1–16:31.** With what do these chapters deal? What impels Samson, more than his predecessors, to accomplish his mission? What factors make Samson a tragic figure? How does he overcome his many failings in the end? What is one of the many lessons conveyed by his story?
2. **13:4.** Why did the angel of the Lord warn Manoah's wife to eat nothing unclean?
3. **13:5.** What is a Nazirite? From what did Nazirites vow to abstain? How was the vow normally taken, and for how long? Why was Samson unusual in his consecration, and how committed was he to it? How does Samson prefigure John the Baptist? At what does the expression "begin to deliver" hint?
4. **13:24.** To what Hebrew word is Samson's name related? How will the importance of this be revealed later?

For application

1. **13:3–5.** Compare the angel's announcement of Samson's birth to Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah of John the Baptist's birth (Lk 1:13–17). What are the main similarities? What are the main differences? What does the angel say about the role of each child?
2. **13:8.** Compare Manoah's prayer in this verse with his question to the angel in v. 12. For what is the prospective father really asking? If you have children, what do you pray for regarding them?
3. **13:12–14.** What do you think of the angel's answer to Manoah's question? Why does he seem to insist on the *mother's* holiness rather than her son's (review also vv. 4–5 above)?
4. **13:25.** When the Spirit of the Lord "stirs" someone, what is likely to be the result? According to 2 Tim 1:6, what characteristics does the Spirit impart to us? Of these characteristics, which seems to be prominent in the story of Samson?

Chapter 14

For understanding

1. **14:3.** Why do Samson's parents have strong reservations about a mixed marriage? What was the danger? What kinds of marriage were encouraged in Israel? What does the appearance of Samson's idiom "she is right in my eyes" anticipate?
2. **14:9.** Why does Samson not reveal to his parents that he has taken honey from the carcass of the lion and that he has touched the carcass? Allegorically, according to St. Ambrose, what is the lion, and what kind of honey comes from its body?
3. **14:10.** What does the Hebrew word *mishteh* mean specifically? What does it imply that Samson did? What kind of celebration is this?
4. **14:20.** What role does Samson's best man have? In later Judaism, what was the best man at a wedding called?

For application

1. **14:3.** Why has the Catholic Church traditionally urged her members to choose spouses who are Catholic? Although mixed marriages are common in our culture, what difficulties do spouses from different Christian traditions typically face in such marriages? What difficulties might occur if one of the spouses is unbaptized?

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2. **14:4.** Read the notes for vv. 9 and 10. What authority over himself does Samson appear to recognize? What authority over their own behavior do many young people recognize today? How does acceptance of a moral law result in personal freedom, and how does abandonment of such a law restrict or eliminate it?
3. **14:16–17.** Samson's bride pressures her husband through tears and accusations to tell her what she wants to know. How do you usually try to get your way with a spouse, parent, or other authority figure? How have others tried to get their way with you? Assuming the tactics worked, what have been the long-term effects for the relationships involved?

Chapter 15

For understanding

1. **15:1.** When is the wheat harvest? Where does Samson's bride continue to live? Why does Samson bring a kid to her? What is his intent?
2. **15:2.** What does Samson's father-in-law think has happened to his newly married daughter that makes her in need of a new husband? To what might the word "hate" also refer, and how was it used in Jewish divorce certificates?
3. **15:11.** What was the Judahite's willingness to surrender Samson to the Philistines an attempt to avoid?
4. **15:18.** How many times in Judges does Samson become moved to prayer? How does God respond?

For application

1. **15:3.** Samson regards himself as blameless in taking revenge on the Philistines. Do you have any experience with revenge? If so, what excuses were given for seeking it? Why does Scripture say that revenge belongs to the Lord? Since the Lord is a God of mercy and compassion, of what is his revenge likely to consist?
2. **15:8–9.** How do acts of revenge tend to escalate? In Mt 5:9, why does Jesus say that peacemakers will be sons of God? In what ways are they like him?
3. **15:18.** What is the tone of Samson's prayer? How do you approach God when you are in desperate need of something? How do you approach him when you have no need of anything?

Chapter 16

For understanding

1. **16:20.** Where does Samson's physical strength actually reside? Why is shaving off Samson's hair so important in terms of his consecration? Morally, according to St. Paulinus of Nola, how is the spiritual plight of sinners compared to the bodily suffering of Samson?
2. **16:23.** Who is Dagon, and for what is he revered? Why is Dagon praised for the capture of Samson? Ironically, what divinity arranges Samson's apprehension?
3. **16:28.** In weakness, what has Samson come to realize? For what is Samson remembered in the New Testament?
4. **16:30.** How many Philistines does Samson fell in this crowning moment? Allegorically, according to St. Paulinus of Nola, what does the death of Samson prefigure? According to St. Caesarius of Arles, what does the fact that more perished at his death than in his life signify about Christ, the true Samson?

For application

1. **16:6–17.** What is it that so captivates us about other people's secrets? What do we expect to gain by learning them? What harm do we do ourselves through undue curiosity?
2. **16:20.** What gives you your spiritual strength? What would cause the Lord to withdraw his grace or his help in time of need? How would you regain the strength you lost?
3. **16:28.** According to the note for this verse, Samson acknowledges his total dependence on God. Why is such an acknowledgment important for one's spiritual life? Just as Samson's use of his free will gets him into such trouble, how does the surrender of free will to God result in spiritual benefit?
4. **16:30.** Do you interpret Samson's life and its outcome as a success or a failure? Why? What makes one's life a success or a failure, especially in the eyes of God? In which direction do you see your own life going?

Chapter 17

For understanding

1. **17:1—21:25.** As what does this epilogue to Judges serve? If earlier chapters underscored the threat that foreign aggressors posed to Israel, what do these final chapters show? Of what two accounts does the epilogue consist? Around what are these final chapters held together?
2. **17:3.** Though Micah's mother shows commendable devotion to Yahweh, how does she appear to be ignorant of the Torah? Of what is her religion a mixture?
3. **17:5.** While an ephod normally refers to a decorated vestment worn by the high priest of Israel, to what may the reference be here? What are *teraphim*? What made Micah's son ineligible to be installed as a priest?
4. **17:10.** Of what is priesthood a cultic expression? How does this idea have a basis in biblical history? How does the New Testament bear witness to it? What belief has the Church asserted as recently as Vatican II?

For application

1. **17:3.** What does the *Catechism* have to say about superstition (CCC 2110–11, 2138)? Has superstition of any sort affected your faith life? If you have engaged in any sort of superstitious practices, what caused you to turn away from them?
2. **17:5.** Do you have a kind of "sacred space" in your home, such as a shrine to Mary or another one of the saints? What does it contain? What use do you make of it?
3. **17:6.** The note for this verse points to the text as a refrain in Judges. What is the problem with doing what is right in one's own eyes? What role is conscience supposed to play in one's behavior?
4. **17:10.** Read the note for this verse. How do you regard the role of a priest? Is calling him "Father" merely a title or something more? If the latter, how does your regard show itself in the ways you speak about priests to other Catholics or non-Catholics?

Chapter 18

For understanding

1. **18:1–31.** What story does Judges 18 recount? What territory was originally allotted to Dan, and why were the Danites unable to secure it? After spying out the land, what do the Danites opt to do? What does the text of Judges say about God's approval or the motive for the Danites' undertaking?
2. **18:7.** Archaeologically, where is Laish situated? To what does archaeological evidence point in terms of a date for the Danite conquest? How do the Danite spies describe the town? Since Laish has formed no alliances with other city-states, what is its military situation?
3. **18:14–20.** What do the 600 armed Danites do to Micah? How is their thievery an instance of poetic justice?
4. **18:30.** Of what is Dan made the center? What does transfer of the idol and priest from Ephraim to Dan anticipate? Who is Jonathan, and what is his relationship to Moses? How does Judges draw a sharp contrast between Jonathan and Phinehas? Why, according to some scholars, does the Hebrew text substitute the name "Manasseh" for that of Moses? To what does the chronological note "until the day of the captivity" refer?

For application

1. **18:18–20.** What would you say of the loyalty of an employee who was trained for service in one company but, on completing the training, left for employment at a competitor whose wages were greater?
2. **18:24.** If you have had property stolen from you, what primarily concerned you about the theft? How did it affect you personally?
3. **18:30.** Read what the *Catechism* says about graven images (CCC 2129–32 and cross references). How do Catholics justify the veneration of icons of Christ and the saints?

Chapter 19

For understanding

1. **19:1.** Who is the Levite in this verse? What is a concubine? Where is the Bethlehem mentioned in the verse?
2. **19:22–26.** What does Gibeah do to its guests? What do the multiple parallels between the men of Gibeah and the men of Sodom indicate?

Judges

3. **Word Study: Know (19:22).** What does the Hebrew verb *yada'* mean? In Hebrew thinking, how does a person come to possess knowledge? What does it mean to know intellectually? experientially? by revelation? In several passages, for what is the verb a euphemism? How is knowing in this sense gravely sinful?
4. **19:29.** As what does the Levite's ghastly deed function? What was it meant to do?

For application

1. **19:4–9.** What are some of the cultural stereotypes we have of family in-laws? How well do you know your own in-laws or any of the in-laws associated with your family? How would you characterize your relationships with them?
2. **19:15–21.** If you were traveling to an unfamiliar city, would you choose to stay at a hotel, the home of a relative or family friend, or with a member of the local Catholic community? If the last is not on your list of choices, why not? If you knew that a welcoming Catholic community was available for you, what difference would that make?
3. **19:24–26.** How do you react to this story of rape? Why do you think the inspired author included it? What does the *Catechism* (CCC 2356, 2389) have to say about crimes of this sort?
4. **19:29–30.** Read CCC 364 and 2300. What kind of respect do we owe to the bodies of the deceased? Why, according to the Order of Christian Funerals (§417), is the practice of scattering the ashes of cremated remains or keeping them in a private home forbidden?

Chapter 20

For understanding

1. **20:1.** What does the stock expression “Dan to Beersheba” mean? Where is Gilead? What sense about Israel remains despite the intertribal tensions and conflicts throughout the period of the Judges? Where is Mizpah?
2. **20:18.** Where is Bethel, and to what is it host? Most likely, from what sanctuary was the Ark transferred and where was it later returned? How was inquiry made of the Lord? Why is the selection of Judah to lead the attack a logical choice?
3. **20:28.** Who is Phinehas? What is his position in Israel, in contrast to the illegitimate priest Jonathan? What does Phinehas' appearance in this account indicate about the civil war against Benjamin?
4. **20:35.** What is the idea behind Benjamin's defeat, predicted by the oracle? In what guise is Yahweh often depicted, and what is different about this case?

For application

1. **20:12–13.** The *Catechism* lists *fraternal correction* as one of the fruits of charity, or love (CCC 1829), and as one of the forms that conversion takes (CCC 1435). Have you ever been corrected for your conduct by a sibling or a religious peer? If so, did you accept it as an act of love and a call to conversion? The *Catechism* (2540) links humility with the sin of envy; why is that?
2. **20:25.** Read the note for this verse, particularly the last sentence. Why is sin not a private matter? How does your sin bring suffering on others? In that light, then, what virtue should prompt you to go to confession and make reparation?
3. **20:28.** After two failed efforts, taken at the Lord's direction, the Israelites ask the Lord whether a third effort is worth making. Have you ever been tempted to give up after repeated failures, even though you thought you were doing the Lord's will? If so, how did you learn that the Lord wanted you to continue trying?

Chapter 21

For understanding

1. **21:1–24.** To what dilemma did the massacre of the Benjaminites give rise? What oath complicated the crisis? To what strange but creative solution did the assembly resort? What was the Lord's involvement in either tactic?
2. **21:8.** What loophole does the settlement of Jabesh-gilead represent in the sworn pledges made at Mizpah?
3. **21:19.** What feast of the Lord is celebrated here? How do some commentators envision it? What is significant about its occurrence at Shiloh?
4. **21:25.** What is the threefold historical, canonical, and political significance of the refrain that “in those days there was no king in Israel”? What is doing “what was right in his own eyes” a way of saying? From where does the expression come? How will David rise above the chaos of the times?

Judges

For application

1. **21:7.** CCC 2150–55 covers the topic of oaths. Why could the Israelites not have simply dispensed themselves from fulfilling the oaths they took to deny the surviving Benjaminites their daughters in marriage (cf. v. 18)? How serious is the obligation to keep an oath? If you have ever taken a civil or religious oath, how seriously did you regard keeping it?
2. **21:14.** From this verse and the remainder of the chapter, what might you infer was the main purpose of marriage in Israel? How different is that purpose from the purposes of marriage in our culture? Why do you think contraception has taken such a hold in our culture?
3. **21:16–24.** Read the note for these verses. What is the difference between a *reason* for an action and a *rationalization* for it? For what kinds of behavior do people tend to rationalize? What does rationalization do to a person's character?
4. **21:25.** Why is doing what is right in one's own eyes not necessarily a good thing? Why is the formation of conscience important? According to what standard should one's conscience be formed?