

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 21, Judges: Samson, 2 Levites; Ruth

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 21, Judges: Samson, 2 Levites; Ruth, [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org), BeL

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt's Old Testament lecture discusses several key figures and narratives from the Books of Judges and Ruth. The lecture **analyzes the flawed heroism of Samson**, exploring his strength, his weaknesses, and his ultimate demise. It also **examines the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah**, highlighting themes of power, sarcasm, and the complexities of vows. Furthermore, the lecture **covers the "Tale of Two Levites,"** emphasizing the descent into idolatry and the resulting intertribal warfare. Finally, it **concludes with a detailed examination of the Book of Ruth**, focusing on the themes of friendship, loyalty, and the lineage of King David.

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 21 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the [Biblicalelearning.org](https://www.biblicalelearning.org) [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Introduction → Old Testament Literature).



**Hildebrandt_OTLit_
Session21.mp3**

3. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 21, Judges: Samon, 2 Levites; Ruth

Old Testament Study Guide: Judges and Ruth

Short Answer Quiz

1. **What is the significance of Abimelech's name, and how does it relate to the book of Judges?** Abimelech's name means "my father is king," which is ironic because his father, Gideon, was not a king, highlighting the lack of kingship in Israel during the period of Judges. This sets up a contrast with the desire for and failure of leadership during the time.
2. **Briefly summarize Jotham's fable and its meaning in the context of Abimelech's rise to power.** In Jotham's fable, the trees seek a king, but the olive, vine, and fig trees decline because they are too valuable in their own roles. Finally, they choose the useless bramble. This fable is a satire on power, demonstrating how unqualified people, like Abimelech, seek power and rule selfishly.
3. **Explain God's use of sarcasm when speaking to the Israelites in Judges 10:14.** God, being sarcastic, tells the Israelites to go ask the gods they've been worshiping to save them. God is using sarcasm as a form of rebuke to push them to return to him rather than literally intending for them to worship idols.
4. **What is the significance of Jephthah's vow, and how did it impact his life and his family?** Jephthah vows to sacrifice whoever greets him at his house if he is victorious over the Ammonites. His daughter is the first to greet him, and the vow results in a dedication of his daughter to the Lord, a life of service and virginity, leaving Jephthah without an heir.
5. **Define "shibboleth" and explain its role in the story of Jephthah and the Ephraimites.** Shibboleth is a code word used to identify members of a specific group; here, Jephthah used it to distinguish the Ephraimites from his people. The Ephraimites pronounced "shibboleth" as "sibboleth", so those who pronounced it incorrectly were killed.
6. **What are the major themes surrounding Samson's character in the book of Judges?** Samson's character is marked by incredible physical strength, which is endowed by the Spirit of God, but he is also driven by personal desire, a lack of self control and an inability to understand the consequences of his actions.

7. **Describe the main reason that Samson has conflict with his first wife, from Timnah?** Samson's conflict with his first wife was due to a riddle, his anger at her betrayal and her threat of death as a consequence. His actions demonstrate an inability to navigate healthy relationships, he also made his own parents very angry.
8. **Explain the importance of geographical context in the stories of Samson.** The stories of Samson are tightly woven into the geography of the area. His interactions with the Philistines take place within a specific area of land and Samson's birth region and his travels are directly tied to these conflicts.
9. **How do the contrasting stories of the two Levites in Judges exemplify the state of Israel during the time of the judges?** The two stories of the Levites highlight the moral and religious decay of Israel during the time of the Judges. One Levite is willing to become a priest for a private idol and the other treats a concubine horribly. Both scenarios demonstrate the lack of godly leadership and the chaos in the land.
10. **What is the significance of the names in the book of Ruth, and how do they relate to the story?** The names of the characters in Ruth are significant: Elimelech ("My God is king"), Mahlon ("Weakly"), Chilion ("Sickly"), Naomi ("Pleasantness"), Marah ("Bitterness"), Ruth ("Friendship"), and Boaz ("Strength"). These names underscore the character's roles and the narrative's themes such as loss, loyalty, and redemption.

Short Answer Quiz Answer Key

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Marah ("Bitterness"), Ruth ("Friendship"), and Boaz ("Strength"). These names underscore the character's roles and the narrative's themes such as loss, loyalty, and redemption.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the character of Samson, discussing the role of the Spirit of God in his life and the contrast between his physical strength and personal weaknesses. How does his story illustrate the state of Israel during the time of the Judges?
2. Compare and contrast the leadership styles and motivations of Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah. What does the text reveal about the nature of power, authority, and justice during the time of the Judges?
3. Discuss the role of women in the stories of Judges and Ruth, examining how they influence the narrative and challenge or conform to the social and cultural norms of the time.
4. Explore the theological significance of the book of Ruth. How does it present a model of loyalty, redemption, and the role of God in the lives of ordinary people? How does the book of Ruth differ from the stories in the book of Judges?
5. The repeated refrain in Judges is "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." How does this theme permeate the book of Judges and how does it set the stage for the story of the first king, Saul?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abimelech:** Son of Gideon who tries to establish himself as king, a name that means "My father is king."
- **Fable:** A short story, often with animals as characters, conveying a moral or lesson.
- **Jotham:** Gideon's youngest son who escapes Abimelech and tells a fable against him.
- **Sarcasm:** The use of irony to mock or convey contempt; saying the opposite of what is meant.
- **Jephthah:** A judge in Israel who makes a foolish vow and its consequences.
- **Nazirite:** A person consecrated to God who abstains from wine, cutting their hair, and contact with the dead.

- **Shibboleth:** A word or phrase used to identify members of a specific group; a code word.
- **Samson:** A judge of Israel known for his incredible strength, given to him by the Spirit of God.
- **Philistines:** The enemies of Israel during the time of the Judges, who lived on the Mediterranean coast.
- **Delilah:** A Philistine woman who betrays Samson for money.
- **Levite:** A member of the tribe of Levi, who were responsible for religious duties.
- **Danites:** The tribe of Dan, known for setting up idols in the northern part of Israel.
- **Concubine:** A secondary wife or mistress.
- **Gibeah:** A city in Benjamin where a violent act leads to a civil war in Israel.
- **Benjamin:** The smallest of the twelve tribes of Israel, who become nearly extinct after a civil war.
- **Ruth:** A Moabite woman who is loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi, and who becomes the great-grandmother of King David.
- **Elimelech:** Naomi's husband, whose name means "My God is King."
- **Naomi:** A Hebrew woman who travels to Moab with her husband and sons, and who later returns to Bethlehem.
- **Hesed:** Hebrew word for "loyal love," "stubborn love," or "covenant love," demonstrating unwavering kindness and devotion.
- **Gleaning:** The practice of gathering leftover crops after a harvest, a provision for the poor.
- **Boaz:** A wealthy and righteous man who is the kinsman redeemer of Ruth and Naomi.
- **Levirate Marriage:** The practice of a man marrying his deceased brother's widow to continue the family line.
- **Marah** Naomi's chosen name upon her return to Israel that translates as "bitterness."

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpts:

Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas from "Hildebrandt_EN_OTLit_Lecture21_Abimelech_Ruth.pdf"

I. Introduction

This lecture explores several key narratives in the Book of Judges and the Book of Ruth, focusing on themes of power, leadership, faithfulness, and the nature of God's involvement in human affairs. It emphasizes the chaotic period of the Judges, where "there is no king in Israel, and everyone does that which is right in their own eyes." The lecturer, Hildebrandt, uses a conversational style, employing humor, personal anecdotes, and thought-provoking questions to engage the audience.

II. Abimelech: A Failed Attempt at Kingship

- **The Problem of Power:** Abimelech, son of Gideon, whose name ironically means "My father is king," attempts to establish himself as king, highlighting a tension between the absence of kingship in Israel and the desire for it. As Hildebrandt notes: "His name is Abimelech, nevertheless...it clashes with the book, my father is king but he wasn't king." This ambition leads to the brutal slaughter of his siblings, showcasing the corrupting influence of power. "Power is the one that gets Abimelech. He kills his own brothers. So that he can have power and be the next ruler."
- **Jotham's Fable:** Jotham, the sole surviving brother, uses a fable to criticize Abimelech's reign. The fable of the trees seeking a king contrasts the fruitful olive tree and vine who refuse power with the useless bramble bush that accepts, representing Abimelech's corrupt reign. The fable acts as a "satire on power". Hildebrandt emphasizes that the fable is "meant to put down his older brother."
- **Failed Kingship:** Abimelech's story is presented as the first failed attempt at kingship in Israel, connecting to the recurring theme of the absence of a central leader in the book of Judges. The point is that "There is no king in Israel, and everyone does that which is right in their own eyes," but the desire for kingship is there.

III. Jephthah: Sarcasm, Vows, and Sacrifice

- **God's Sarcasm:** God is depicted using sarcasm to rebuke the Israelites for their idolatry, telling them to seek help from the gods they have chosen. "Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble." Hildebrandt points out that God uses sarcasm to do what? "The sarcasm function[s] to rebuke them". This highlights the idea that God communicates in diverse ways, even using tools like sarcasm, which means "you've got to be real careful with sarcasm".
- **The Dangers of Vows:** Jephthah's vow to sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his door highlights the dangers of making rash vows before God. "Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: if you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."
- **Interpretation of Jephthah's Vow:** The lecturer presents a minority view, arguing that Jephthah may not have sacrificed his daughter but dedicated her to the Lord, emphasizing her virginity and lifelong service. Hildebrandt asks, "If he just burned her up, why would you mention right after you burned her up that she's a virgin?" He proposes that the Hebrew word for "and" in the vow could also mean "or", allowing for an alternative interpretation: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's *or* I will offer it as a sacrifice". This interpretation allows for the dedication of his daughter to the Lord instead of burning her, noting that her "line is over" as a consequence.
- **Importance of Context:** The emphasis on determining meaning from context, specifically as it applies to the use of sarcasm in the scriptures. It is critical that context be understood. God "is using sarcasm to rebuke them".

IV. Shibboleth: A Word of Inclusion/Exclusion

- **Regional Dialects and Identification:** The story of "shibboleth" demonstrates how language can be used to identify and exclude groups. The Ephraimites' inability to pronounce "shibboleth" led to their massacre. It also illustrates the power of language as "an in word that gets you in to a group" and "buzzword within a certain group". Hildebrandt points out "every group will have those" buzzwords.

V. Samson: Strength, Weakness, and the Spirit of God

- **Samson's Character:** Samson is depicted as a flawed hero, known for his physical strength, but also his impulsiveness, arrogance, and poor judgment in relationships. He's not only endowed by the spirit of God, but he is "also, really just a strong guy" that "wants to also be the smart guy".
- **Geographical Context:** The lecture contextualizes Samson's story within the geographical landscape of ancient Israel, emphasizing the Philistines' coastal location.
- **The Spirit and Gifts:** The Spirit of God's role in endowing people with specific gifts, like Samson's strength, is discussed. Hildebrandt notes that "The Spirit of God was in the Old Testament endowing people with gifts." The point is that the "Spirit of God came on Samson and he went on and slew the 30 Philistines."
- **Samson's Relationships with Women:** Samson's failed marriages highlight his poor judgment in relationships. Hildebrandt observes that his "wife from Timnah seemed to have an inability to say "no" to Samson. Samson gets what Samson wants."
- His first wife from Timnah is a Philistine and leads him to make a bet with the riddle, which ends with her betraying him in order to get the answer and ends with his father-in-law giving her to Samson's best man.
- The woman in Gaza (whom Hildebrandt comically refers to as "the Gaza Stripper") is where he carries the city gates away.
- Delilah is the final woman who betrays him after he tells her the secret of his strength, who uses the information against him in exchange for money. Hildebrandt points out that "Delilah is selling Samson" which is a reversal on roles of men and women in that period.
- **Samson's Strength:** Samson's incredible strength is highlighted, such as when he carries the door frame "20 miles and it was all uphill" at which point Hildebrandt asks "Is this guy a hulk?"
- **Love vs. Lust:** The lecture introduces the idea that Hebrew lacks a strict distinction between "agape" and "eros" love, suggesting a more complex view of these emotions. Hildebrandt states "the word for love is the word ahav and it includes both love and lust".

VI. Tales of Two Levites: Idolatry and Moral Depravity

- **Danite Levite:** The story of the Danite Levite and the establishment of idolatry at Dan illustrates the moral decay during the Judges period. A Levite becomes the priest for a personal idol and then again for an entire tribe who move north. The idolatry at Dan sets the narrative for future problems with the northern kingdom.
- **The Levite's Concubine:** The second Levite story details the horrific events of the Levite and his concubine, highlighting the violence and lawlessness of the period. This includes sexual assault and the dismemberment of the concubine's body that serves as a call to action for the other tribes.
- **Moral Degeneracy:** The events surrounding the Levite and his concubine demonstrate the extreme breakdown of social norms and the barbarity of the time. Hildebrandt relates the story to that of Sodom and Gomorrah and the violence perpetrated against the concubine.
- **Reconstitution of the Benjaminites** The destruction of the Benjaminites, their rescue, and their "wives from the bush" is a way that Hildebrandt suggests the narrative is establishing the Benjaminites for future narratives. Hildebrandt states, "I believe this story is setting up the reign of king Saul. I believe this story in the book of Judge is put in there to set up the tribe of Benjamin."

VII. Ruth: Loyalty, Love, and Redemption

- **Friendship:** The book of Ruth presents a counter-narrative to the violence and moral decay of the Judges period by highlighting the strong bond of loyalty and friendship between Naomi and Ruth. The lecture emphasizes that this is a "beautiful story of friendship in the book of Ruth." Hildebrandt notes that this is a unique story about "two women [that] you don't often get to see this in Scripture."
- **The Significance of Names:** The names of the characters in Ruth are highlighted, emphasizing their meanings and how they contribute to the narrative (Elimelech – "my God is king"; Mahlon and Chilion – "weakly" and "sickly"; Naomi – "pleasantness", later "bitterness"; Ruth – "friend"; Boaz – "strength"). "Do you see how these names fit incredibly?"
- **Hesed (Loyal Love):** The concept of "hesed" is introduced as a "loyal love" and "a love that won't quit" that is demonstrated between Ruth and Naomi.

- **Loyalty:** Ruth's loyalty to Naomi is highlighted when Ruth vows, "Where you go I will go, where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God," showing Ruth's unwavering loyalty.
- **Impact of Circumstances on Faith:** The lecture poses the question of how circumstances affect one's view of God, exemplified by Naomi's statement "call me Marah because the almighty has made my life bitter." "Do circumstances affect the way people look at God?"
- **Ruth as a Proverbs 31 Woman** Ruth is noted as a "virtuous woman" as seen in Proverbs 31.
- **Redemption and the Levirate Marriage:** The story of Ruth culminates in her marriage to Boaz, illustrating themes of redemption and the practice of the Levirate marriage. The Levirate marriage is where "you have to marry a person and raise children for the person that is dead."
- **Genealogy of David:** The book of Ruth is placed within the broader narrative by noting that Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David, thus emphasizing the importance of Ruth within the narrative of Israel's history. Hildebrandt notes, "Ruth is the great grandmother of guess who? David."

VIII. Conclusion

The lecture provides an in-depth look at several significant biblical texts within the context of the Books of Judges and Ruth, emphasizing both the depravity of the Judges period and the redemptive elements found in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. Hildebrandt's conversational teaching style and his use of humor helps illustrate these complex and sometimes contradictory narratives. This approach is designed to engage the audience and make it more accessible while still addressing the difficult questions the text raises.

5. FAQs on Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 21, Judges: Samson, 2 Levites; Ruth, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Themes and Ideas from Judges and Ruth

1. **Why is Abimelech's name, meaning "my father is king," significant in the context of the Book of Judges?** Abimelech's name is ironic and clashes with the setting of the Book of Judges, where there is no king in Israel and "everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Gideon, his father, was not a king, making the name a self-proclamation of a kingship that doesn't exist. This foreshadows Abimelech's violent and failed attempt to establish himself as ruler, highlighting the instability and chaos of the period.
2. **What is the purpose of Jotham's fable about the trees choosing a king, and how does it relate to Abimelech's rule?** Jotham's fable is a satirical critique of Abimelech's rise to power. The fable portrays the trees of the forest seeking a king and being rejected by the olive tree and the vine, each too valuable in their own right to become king. They then choose the bramble bush (a useless, thorny plant), which represents the character of Abimelech and his tyrannical rule. It's a warning against seeking power through violence and highlights the unsuitability of Abimelech as a leader, further emphasizing that his rule was a poor choice by the people of Israel.
3. **How does God use sarcasm in the story of Jephthah, and what is the function of this sarcasm?** God uses sarcasm when he tells the Israelites to seek help from the idols they have been worshipping. This is not a literal command to worship idols, but rather a sarcastic rebuke for their unfaithfulness. It's a way to illustrate the absurdity and futility of their idolatry and to prompt them to return to Him. God's use of sarcasm is a literary device to highlight the severity of the situation.

4. **What is the debate surrounding Jephthah's vow, and what are the different interpretations regarding his daughter's fate?** The main debate is whether Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering or dedicated her to the Lord's service as a life-long virgin who would not marry. Most Old Testament scholars believe she was sacrificed. However, a minority view, presented by the source, suggests that the Hebrew word "and" (in "will be the Lord's and I will offer it as a sacrifice") can be translated as "or." This interpretation leads to the conclusion that Jephthah dedicated her as a living sacrifice to the Lord, meaning she would never have children, causing great pain to his family lineage. This interpretation also is supported by the comment "she was a virgin" immediately after. This interpretation aligns with the Old Testament passages discussing living sacrifice and highlights the importance of carefully considering vows made before God.
5. **What is the significance of "Shibboleth" in the context of the Book of Judges, and how is it used today?** "Shibboleth" in Judges was a word used to identify the Ephraimites by their pronunciation. They couldn't pronounce "sh" and said "s." It highlights the use of language as a means of distinguishing and excluding people. Today, the term "shibboleth" is used to describe a password or a buzzword that marks one as belonging to a specific group, indicating the power of language in creating social boundaries and identities.
6. **What are some of the key features of Samson's character, and how do they contribute to the narrative of his life?** Samson is portrayed as incredibly strong, empowered by the Spirit of God, but also impulsive and flawed. He is prone to rash decisions and is easily manipulated by women. He acts out of a desire for vengeance and often is controlled by his lusts rather than his devotion to God. His personal failings and lack of discernment despite God's spirit are important themes in the story and highlight human weakness even in someone divinely gifted.
7. **How does the story of the Levite and his concubine demonstrate the moral and societal breakdown in the Book of Judges, and what is the connection to Saul?** The story of the Levite and his concubine vividly illustrates the moral decay and chaos that characterized the period of the Judges. The violent treatment of the concubine and the brutal inter-tribal conflict that resulted underscore the absence of central authority and the resulting lawlessness. This event sets the scene for Saul's kingship, as Saul is from the tribe of Benjamin, which is almost destroyed in the story. The narrative highlights the need for a king to bring order, but it also hints at the flaws that will plague Saul.

8. **What is the significance of the relationships and themes in the Book of Ruth, and what is the role of *hesed* in the story?** The Book of Ruth provides a contrast to the grim stories of Judges, showcasing loyalty, redemption, and divine provision. The close friendship between Ruth and Naomi, who demonstrate *hesed*, is a central theme. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi is shown through her statement "Where you go, I will go; your people will be my people, your God my God," demonstrating a deep, unwavering commitment. The book highlights that despite personal tragedies, it also emphasizes themes of love, faithfulness, and the importance of compassion and kindness. Additionally, the story emphasizes God's faithfulness and redemptive power working through ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. *Hesed*, often translated as "loyal love," is evident throughout the story, particularly in the acts of kindness and redemption by Ruth and Boaz, showing a love that endures.