Right in His Own Eyes

The Spirit of the LORD in Judges — a 10-minute class, Pleasant Springs Church, Discipleship School

The full study online: ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-13-1-16-31 (Samson) and the whole book of Judges on the Deep Research shelf

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **10 minutes** at a normal teaching pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. The **[7:00] paragraph on Abimelech is the one to cut** if you are short — it saves about forty-five seconds, and nothing later depends on it except one half-line of the close ("Abimelech's evil came back on his own head"), which you can drop with it. **Never cut the close** — it is where the lesson says plainly that God is never the author of the sin.

What this lesson is. Judges is the darkest book in the Old Testament, and its heroes are not heroes. Yet the Spirit of the LORD comes upon them. This class asks how both are true: **how God accomplishes his purposes through people who are doing wrong, without turning them into puppets.** It walks through the seven places Judges says "the Spirit of the LORD," then lands on Samson, where the text says it outright: Samson's choice was his own, *and* "it was from the LORD" (14:4).

The church's position, for you, not for the room. Pleasant Springs is Molinist on God's sovereignty and human freedom: God knows not only what we *will* do but what we *would freely do* in any situation, and he governs the world by arranging situations — never by forcing the choice. The script says this once, in plain words, at [5:30]. **Do not use the word "Molinism" from the lectern** unless someone asks; the idea matters more than the label. Hold both sides —

real sovereignty, real choice — and resolve the tension with no slogan in either direction.

What not to say. *"The Spirit made Samson do it"* — the text gives Samson's motive in his own words: "she is right in my eyes" (14:3) · *"God approved of Jephthah's vow"* — the Spirit comes in 11:29; the vow is Jephthah's own, in 11:30, and the text keeps them apart · *"God caused Samson to sin"* — "God … tempts no one" (James 1:13) · *"If God uses it, it wasn't really wrong"* — Abimelech was used and judged in the same chapter · *"The Spirit's power proves God's approval"* — Gideon was clothed with the Spirit and still made the idol that snared his family (8:27).

Language notes behind the script. All the Hebrew and Greek work is done; the script says it in English. (1) "The Spirit of the LORD" stands **seven** times in Judges: 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14. (2) Samson's "she is right in my eyes" (14:3) is **the same Hebrew phrase** as the book's closing verdict, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25). (3) The verb "stir" in 13:25 is built on the Hebrew word for a **time / a beat**; the same word comes back in 16:20 ("as at other times") and 16:28 ("only this once"). (4) In 6:34 the two Greek texts of Judges differ: one says the Spirit **clothed** Gideon, as the Hebrew does; the other says the Spirit **strengthened** him. In 14:4 both Greek texts read "he himself seeks" — repayment / vengeance — from the Philistines.

Scripture. All English, ESV. The Hebrew and Greek are shown in full on the Deep Research pages.

Time of day. The script is deliberately time-neutral, so it reads correctly in any service.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — the verdict on the whole book

The book of Judges ends with one sentence that sums up everything before it:

> **Judges 21:25** — "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

That is the verdict. Twenty-one chapters of people doing exactly what they wanted.

And yet — in that same book, seven times, the Bible says **"the Spirit of the LORD"** came upon someone. Came upon *those* people.

So here is the question for today: **How does God get his work done through people who keep doing wrong — without turning them into puppets?** Ten minutes, four men, and one verse in the middle of Samson's story that answers it out loud.

[1:00] One — the Spirit comes for God's purpose

Look first at *why* the Spirit comes. Here is the first time:

> **Judges 3:10** — "The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand."

That is Othniel. And here is the pattern of the whole book, laid out in chapter 2:

> **Judges 2:18** — "Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge."

Go through all seven — Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and four times with Samson — and you will find the same thing every time. **The Spirit's power is aimed at the oppressor.** Even before Samson was born, the angel said why he was coming: "he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (13:5). Not

once does the Spirit come to build a man's house, or found his dynasty, or keep his private promise.

Now, the men did not always share that aim. One time the Spirit rushed on Samson and he struck down thirty Philistines — because he owed thirty garments on a lost bet, and he was angry (14:19). **Samson's motive was a grudge. The Spirit's aim was the oppressor.** Same moment, two purposes.

The Spirit has a purpose, and it is God's. Hold on to that. Because the men he comes upon have purposes of their own.

[2:30] Two — empowered, but still themselves

Gideon:

> **Judges 6:34** — "But the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet..."

Clothed. The Spirit put Gideon on like a garment. One of the ancient Greek translations puts it another way: the Spirit *strengthened* him.

And within two verses, what does Gideon do? He asks for a sign. The fleece. Clothed with the Spirit of God — and still Gideon. Still afraid. And at the end of his story, Gideon takes the gold of the victory and makes an idol out of it:

> **Judges 8:27** — "And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family."

Then Jephthah. Listen to how carefully the text sets two verses side by side:

> **Judges 11:29–30** — "Then the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah... And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD..."

The Spirit came upon Jephthah. **And Jephthah made the vow.** The Bible does not say the Spirit made the vow. It was rash, it was his, and it cost him his only

daughter.

The Spirit empowered these men. He did not overwrite them. They were still free — free to doubt, free to bargain, free to fail.

[4:30] Three — "it was from the LORD"

Now Samson, and the verse I promised you. Samson sees a Philistine woman and demands her. His parents protest — marry one of your own people. And Samson answers:

> **Judges 14:3** — "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes."

Did you hear it? **Right in my eyes.** In Hebrew that is the very same phrase as the book's last verse — "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Samson is the book's verdict walking around in sandals.

And then this:

> **Judges 14:4** — "His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel."

Both things are true in two verses. Samson wanted what he wanted, for his own reasons — his eyes. And God was at work in the very same event, for God's reasons — the freeing of his people.

[5:30] How can both be true?

Here is how many Christians — and this church — put it. **God knows not only what you will do. He knows what you *would* freely do in any situation.** And he governs the world not by forcing your choices, but by **arranging the situations.** He did not push Samson toward Timnah. He knew who Samson was, and he knew what Samson would freely do — and he wove that free choice into his plan to set Israel free.

Joseph said it to the brothers who sold him:

> **Genesis 50:20** — "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good…"

And Peter said it about the worst sin ever committed:

> **Acts 2:23** — "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

God's plan. Their hands. Both real. The cross was God's definite plan — and the men who did it were still lawless, and still answerable.

But hear the guardrail, plainly:

> **James 1:13** — "…God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."

God is never the author of the sin. He is the author of the story the sin cannot escape.

[7:00] Free means answerable — (cut the Abimelech paragraph first if short on time)

Because the choice is real, the consequences are real.

Abimelech murdered seventy of his brothers to make himself king, and the Spirit of the LORD never came near him. Instead the Bible says that God "sent an evil spirit" of distrust between Abimelech and the men who helped him, and closes the story this way:

> **Judges 9:56** — "Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers."

Used by God — and judged by God. In the same chapter.

And Samson. The first time the Spirit moved him, the Bible says the Spirit "began to stir him" (13:25). That word "stir" comes from a Hebrew word meaning *a time, a beat*. Watch it come back. Delilah has cut his hair, the Philistines are at the door, and Samson wakes up and says:

> **Judges 16:20** — "'I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him."

As at other times — the same word. He had grown so used to the power that he forgot whose it was. And the man who lived by what was right in his eyes lost his eyes.

But listen to his last prayer:

> **Judges 16:28** — "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God..."

Only this once — the same word, the third time. And God answered him. Even at the bottom, even blind and chained, **God was still not finished using Samson.**

[9:00] Close — what to take home

So what does Judges teach us about the Spirit and our plans?

> **Proverbs 16:9** — "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

One — the Spirit's power is for God's purpose. In Judges it is aimed at setting people free. Power from God is not God's approval of everything we do with it — ask Gideon.

Two — God uses even our wrong choices, and they are still our choices. Samson chose by his eyes; it was also "from the LORD." God is never

the author of the sin — and Abimelech's evil came back on his own head.

Three — it is never too late to pray "only this once." The book of Hebrews lists Gideon, Samson and Jephthah among the faithful (11:32). Not because they were good. Because God was.

Let's pray.

> *Father, we confess that we too have done what was right in our own eyes. Thank you that our wrong choices have never once been bigger than your purpose, and that you work through us without ever making us less than free. Keep us from mistaking your power for your approval. Where we have grown used to your gifts, wake us before we forget whose they are. And where we have fallen far, teach us to pray "remember me." In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

If you only remember three things

1. **"The Spirit of the LORD" appears seven times in Judges — and every time, his power is aimed at the oppressor.** Never at building a man's own house, even when the man's motive was a grudge (14:19).
2. **"She is right in my eyes" … "it was from the LORD" (14:3–4).** Samson's choice was his; the purpose was God's. Both are true, and God is never the author of the sin.
3. **"As at other times" … "only this once" (16:20, 28).** Grown used to the power, Samson lost it; at the bottom he prayed, and God answered.

The full study — Judges on the Deep Research shelf

The Deep Research pages have the Hebrew, the Greek Old Testament and the ESV side by side, and go much further than ten minutes can:

	Passage	Where the Spirit appears
1	**Judges 3** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-3-1-31	Othniel — the first "Spirit of the LORD" (3:10)
2	**Judges 6–8** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-6-1-8-35	Gideon "clothed" (6:34), the fleece, the ephod
3	**Judges 9** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-9-1-57	Abimelech, the evil spirit, and the evil returned
4	**Judges 10–12** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-10-1-12-15	Jephthah — the Spirit (11:29) and the vow (11:30)
5	**Judges 13–16** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-13-1-16-31	Samson — "stir," "rushed upon," and "the LORD had left him"
6	**Judges 19–21** · ps-church.com/deep-research/judges-19-1-21-25	"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. Gideon was clothed with the Spirit and still asked for a fleece. What does that tell you about how God treats our doubts?
2. Why do you think the text keeps the Spirit (11:29) and Jephthah's vow (11:30) in two separate verses?
3. Can you look back on a choice you made for the wrong reasons that God still worked into something good? Does that make the choice right?
4. "God is never the author of the sin. He is the author of the story the sin cannot escape." Where does that comfort you, and where does it warn you?
5. Samson said "as at other times." What gifts of God have you grown so used to that you could forget whose they are?

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