

Supplemental Notes:

The Book of Judges

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Acknowledgments

These notes have been assembled from speaking notes and related materials which had been compiled from a number of classic and contemporary commentaries and other sources detailed in the bibliography, as well as other articles and publications of Koinonia House. While we have attempted to include relevant endnotes and other references, we apologize for any errors or oversights.

The complete recordings of the sessions, as well as supporting diagrams, maps, etc., are also available in various audiovisual formats from the publisher.

Audio Listing

Judges 1

Introduction. Fighting the Enemy. Sparing the Enemy. Neglecting God's Word.

Judges 2 - 3

Imitating the Enemy. Obeying the Enemy. The Insidious Cycle.

Judges 4 - 5

Sisera and Jael: "Nailing down the Details." The Song of Deborah.

Judges 6 - 7

Gideon—God's Man in Manasseh. Gideon's Fleece.

Judges 7 - 8

Gideon's Army. Winning the War but Losing the Victory.

Judges 9

Abimelech's political career: Seizing the Kingdom; Defending the Kingdom; Losing the Kingdom.

Judges 10 - 11

The Dismal Pattern Continues. Jephthah's Four Arguments.

Judges 11 - 12

Jephthah's Vow. A Resolution. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

Audio Listing

Judges 13 - 14

The Philistines. Samson. A Child of Promise. Nazarites.

Judges 15 - 16

Samson and the Jawbone Defeat a Thousand Philistines. Delilah.
Parallels between the Life of Samson and the Legends of Hercules.

Judges 17 - 18

Confusion in the Home. Confusion in the Ministry. Confusion in Society.

Judges 19 - 20

The Levite and his Concubine. The Civil War Against the Tribe of Benjamin.

Judges 21

What to do with the remaining Benjamites? Finding wives for them.

Judges Summary

Incomplete Obedience. The Cycle of Sin. Practical Applications.

Ruth 1-2

Introduction. Ruth Stays with Naomi. Boaz: "Let her Glean."

Ruth 3 - 4

The Threshing Floor. Hems. The Kinsman Redeemer. Types.

Judges 1

“No King”

Some Headlines:

“Family Feud Leaves 69 Brothers Dead!”¹

“Powerful Government Leader Caught in ‘Love Nest’”²

“Gang Rape Leads to Victim’s Death and Dismemberment”³

“Girls At Party Kidnapped and Forced to Marry Strangers”⁴

“Woman Judge Says Travelers No Longer Safe on Highways”⁵

These headlines are from not supermarket tabloids! Warren Wiersbe opens his commentary on the Book of Judges suggesting that they characterize some of the events of this very book!

The Most Colorful Book

Frankly, you can find few books anywhere that can compete for color and intrigue. You’ll wince as you read how Ehud goes to visit the king in his summer palace and slides his dagger between the king’s 5th and 6th ribs so that the flesh closes around it and the knife cannot be withdrawn... You’ll cringe when Jael drives the tent stake through the skull of Sisera and pins him to the ground.

You’ll bit your fingernails alongside Gideon as God introduces deep military cutbacks, reducing Israel’s army from 32,000 to 300—then sends this vastly outnumbered miniature army into battle! Your heart will sink with mine when Jephthah’s daughter comes out to meet him on his return from battle, and he remembers his hasty vow to sacrifice the first person he meets to God—and then fulfills that dreadful vow.

You’ll glory with Samson as he wreaks havoc among the Philistines, but wonder at his folly in allowing the Philistine temptress to worm from him the secret of his strength. You will undoubtedly turn with revulsion from the story of the Benjamite perversion that marks perhaps the blackest chapter in Israel’s history. Fans of historical romance, military history, soap operas, conspiracy theories, spy novels, swashbuckling adventure, or political intrigue will find it all here in the Book of Judges!

But from a broader and deeper perspective, Judges is essentially the story of a deteriorating nation—and it serves as a sober warning against deterioration in our own nation, and in our own personal lives...

Leadership Issue

The Book of Judges is the book of “no king.” [I Samuel is the book of “man’s king” (Saul). II Samuel is the book of “God’s king” (David).]

The world today is living in the Book of Judges because there is no king in Israel. When presented with their rightful King, they exclaimed, “We have no king but Caesar (John 19:15).”

Next on the agenda is “the world’s king”: the Antichrist. Then God’s King will appear, defeat His enemies, and establish His kingdom.

[The Book of Ruth takes place during the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). It is a story of love and harvest. God’s people are living in the Book of Ruth, sharing in the harvest and waiting for the wedding.]

Whereas the Book of Joshua closes with a nation resting from war and enjoying the riches of the Promised Land, the Book of Judges sees the nation suffering from invasion, slavery, poverty, and civil war. What happened?

Joshua: Victory Incomplete

Joshua, Moses’ successor in charge of the Conquest of Canaan, spent seven years and completed his basic mission. However, as we’ll see, they did not completely deal with their enemies—to their dismay.

The boundary lines for the 12 tribes had been determined (Joshua 13-22), but the people had *not* fully claimed their inheritance by defeating and dislodging the entrenched inhabitants of the land.

*Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him,
Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land
to be possessed.*

Joshua 13:1

The people *owned* the land, but they didn’t *possess* all of it; therefore, they couldn’t *enjoy* all of it.

Introduction to Judges

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

George Santayana

Hegel said the same things a bit differently:

History teaches us that man learns nothing from history.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

We are living in a period similar to that described in the Book of Judges since:

There is no king in Israel.

People are doing what is right in their own eyes.

God's people can't seem to work together.

People are in bondage to their various enemies.

The introduction to the entire book is best summarized in the last half of Chapter 2 (2:6-9 corresponds with Joshua 24:29-31, linking the two books):

- 8] And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.
- 9] And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath Heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

(Timnath Heres: called elsewhere, Timnath Serah.)

- 10] And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.
- 11] And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

Baalim (Plural of Baal): name for many variations of pagan worship, but principally the “god of storms” (often, Mars); that's why Elijah challenged the priests of Baal for rain.

- 12] And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.
- 13] And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

Ashtaroth: the moon goddess of the Phoenicians; Ashtoreth of the Zidonians; Ishtar of the Accadians and Assyrians; and Astarte of the Greeks (Jer 44:17; 1Kgs 11:5,33; 2Kgs 23:13). She was called the “queen of heaven” (Jer 44:25).

- 14] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.
- 15] Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.
- 16] Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

(“delivered”: Hebrew, “saved.”)

- 17] And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.
- 18] And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.
- 19] And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.
- 20] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;
- 21] I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:
- 22] That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.
- 23] Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

(“...left”: or suffered; permitted.)

So indeed, it was the worst of times. Instead of spiritual fervor, Israel sank into apathy. Instead of obeying the Lord, the people moved into apostasy. Instead of enjoying law and order, the land was filled with anarchy. [Analogous to the classic paradigm of the cycle of nations: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from

courage to freedom; from freedom to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependency; from dependency back to bondage (Alexander Tyler, 1750).]

One of the key verses characterizes their predicament:

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21:25

Cf: Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1.

- At Mt. Sinai, the Lord had taken Israel to be His “kingdom of priests,” declaring that He alone would reign over them (Ex 19:1-8).
- Moses reaffirmed the kingship of YHWH when explained the covenant to the new generation before they entered Canaan (Deut 29ff).
- At the conquest of Jericho, Joshua declared to Israel her kingdom responsibilities (Josh 8:30-55). And he reminded them again before his death (Josh 24).
- Even Gideon refused to set up a royal dynasty: “I will not rule over you, neither my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (Judg 8:23).

Deuteronomy 6 outlined the nation’s basic responsibilities:

- | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| vv.1-5 | Love and obey only YHWH; |
| vv.6-9 | Teach your children God’s laws; |
| vv.10-15 | Be thankful for God’s blessings; |
| vv.16-25 | Separate yourself from pagan worship. |

Israel failed in each of these responsibilities. As a result, Israel plunged into moral, spiritual, and political disaster. [Do you see any parallels in our own land?]

But here and there, God is raising up men and women who believe Him, confront the enemy, and win the victory.

The Book of Judges challenges us to be available—no matter what! God will work through people who will trust His Word, yield to His Spirit, and do His bidding.

Will *you* be among them?

Judges 1

The Book of Judges is the record of Israel's decline and fall: The first two chapters describe four stages in that fall:

I) Fighting the enemy (Judg 1:1-21)

- 1] Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?
- 2] And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

Initially the people of Israel wisely sought God's guidance and asked which tribe was to engage the enemy first. Perhaps Judah was to go first as it was destined to be the kingly tribe (Gen 49:8, 9).

- 3] And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

Judah and Simeon were blood brothers since Leah had given birth to both of them (Gen 35:23). The tribe of Simeon actually had its inheritance within the tribe of Judah (Josh 19:1).

- 4] And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.
- 5] And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.
- 6] But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

The idea was that without thumbs he couldn't wield a weapon; without toes, his gait was unsure. Being unfit for battle, he was also deemed unfit to lead or rule.

- 7] And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered *their meat* under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

(Adoni-Bezek was "de-feeted." All he could do at this point was to call a "toe truck." – Jon Courson.) This was apparently retribution for his previous wrongs. (For other examples of disablement, see Samson's blindness, Judg 16:21; Nahash's condition for a covenant with the men of Jabesh (at Bezek), 1 Sam 11:2; and Zedekiah's blindness, 2 Kgs 25:7.)

These seventy kings illustrate the sad plight of anybody who has given in to the enemy: They couldn't walk or run correctly; they couldn't use the sword effectively; they were in the place of humiliation instead of on the throne; and they were living on scraps and leftovers instead of feasting at the table.

What a difference it makes when you live by faith and reign in life through Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28-39).

- 8] Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

Jerusalem was their next trophy but although they conquered it, they didn't occupy it (v.21). That wasn't done until the time of David (2 Sam 5:7) when it became "the city of David" and the national capital (something that Zech 12:2, 3 predicts will be a primary challenge in the last days). Next, they attacked south and west of Jerusalem, which included Hebron.

- 9] And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley.
10] And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjath-arba) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

Arba was the father of the giant Anak, the father of the Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. The descendants of Anak (the *Anakim*) were the *Nephilim* who had frightened 10 of the 12 spies who first explored the land (Num 13:22, 28, 33).

Joshua had promised Hebron to Caleb because of his faithfulness to the Lord at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 13-14; Josh 14:6-15; Deut 1:34-36), but his descendants didn't follow through. [Hebron is still a fortress of Israel's enemies today.] However, faith must have run in Caleb's family, because the city of Debir was taken by Othniel, Caleb's nephew (Judg 3:9; Josh 15:17).

- 11] And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher:

Debir means "City of Books."

- 12] And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

- 13] And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife.
- 14] And it came to pass, when she came *to him*, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off *her* ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?
- 15] And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs.

Since water was a precious commodity and the land was useless without it, Achsah petitioned her father to give her the land containing the springs that they needed. [Water in that very area is a major issue between Israel and Jordan to this very day.]

- 16] And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which *lieth* in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

These Kenites were descended from Moses' *brother-in-law*, and were thus allies of Israel. (In Hebrew, the words "brother-in-law" and "father-in-law" use the same letters; this helps explain the problems connected with the names Reuel, Jethro, and Hobab (Ex 2:18; 3:1; Num 10:29; and Judg 4:11). Some think that Moses' father-in-law had two names, Hobab and Jethro; and that Reuel was Jethro's father, or possibly some other distant relative.

The "city of palms" was Jericho, a deserted and condemned city (Josh 6:26), so the Kenites moved to another part of the land under the protection of the tribe of Judah. [Current Jericho (*Bet-Yerah*, "House of the Moon God") is adjacent to ancient Jericho, and is also a fortress of Israel's enemies today.]

- 17] And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah.

In all of these exploits, Judah was joined by his blood-brother Simeon; cf. comments, v. 3. They now turned their attention to the Philistine cities of Gaza, Asheklon, and Ekron.

- 18] Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof.
- 19] And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out *the inhabitants* of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.

Because of the iron chariots, Israel couldn't defeat them on level ground, but they did claim the hill country. The Philistines' sea-based trade gave them a local monopoly in the use of iron weapons, which they used to their advantage against Israel (1 Sam 13:19-21). Israel eventually gained access to carburized iron (steel) under Samuel, Saul, and David, who was ultimately successful in subduing the Philistines.

What is significant about the military history is that "the Lord was with Judah." Cf. Num 14:42-43; Josh 1:5; 6:27; Judg 6:16. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).

- 20] And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.
- 21] And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.

["Sparing the enemy" will be explored further below.]

- 22] And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them.

Ephraim and the western half-tribe of Manasseh joined together and took Bethel, which was important to them because of its connection with the patriarchs (Gen 12:8; 13:3; 28:10-12; 35:1-7).

- 23] And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.)
- 24] And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.
- 25] And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family.

Reminiscent of the episode with Rahab at Jericho (Josh 2, 6).

- 26] And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day.

II) Sparing the Enemy (Judg 1:21, 27-36)

(The second of four stages of failure.)

- 27] Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her

- towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land.
- 28] And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out.
- 29] Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.
- 30] Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries.
- 31] Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob:
- 32] But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.
- 33] Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them.
- 34] And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley:
- 35] But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries.
- 36] And the coast of the Amorites *was* from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.

The tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan all failed to overcome the enemy and allowed these godless nations to continue living in their tribal territories. The enemy even forced the tribe of Dan out of the plains into the mountains.

(The Jebusites remained in Jerusalem (v.21) and the Canaanites who remained were finally pressed into forced labor when the Jews became stronger (v.28 NIV). Eventually Solomon conscripted these Canaanite peoples to build the Temple (1 Kgs 9:20-22; 2 Chr 8:7-8) but this was no compensation for the problems the Canaanites caused the Jews.)

This series of tribal defeats was the first indication that Israel was no longer walking by faith and trusting God to give them victory.

Neglecting the Word of God

The priests were commanded to read the Book of Deuteronomy publicly to the nation every Sabbatical Year during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31:9-13). Had they been faithful to their job, the spiritual leaders would have read Deut 7 and warned the Israelites not to spare their pagan neighbors. They would have reminded the people that God promised that He would help them defeat their enemies (Deut 31:1-8). It was by receiving and obeying the Book of the Law that Joshua had grown in

faith and courage (Josh 1:1-9; Rom 10:17). That same Word would have enabled the succeeding generation to overcome their enemies and claim their inheritance.

The same steps toward defeat and slavery are being taken by the church today.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

2 Timothy 4:3,4

Too many believers today are relying on religious “fast food” being dispensed for easy consumption by entertaining teachers who give people what they want rather than what they need. Is it any wonder that few are experiencing God’s power in their lives? Isn’t the teaching of evolution in our schools teaching the ultimate fable? To prepare for modern science career, you need to emulate the White Queen’s advice to Alice:

“One can’t believe impossible things,” Alice laughed.

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for have-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll⁶

Sparing the Enemy

Wasn’t it cruel and unjust of God to command Israel to *exterminate* the nations of Canaan? Not so! God had been patient for centuries, withholding His judgment (Gen 15:16; 2 Pet 3:9). Their society—especially their religion—was unspeakably wicked (Rom 1:18ff). It should have been wiped out years before Israel appeared on the scene.

[On America:]

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that His justice will not sleep forever.

Thomas Jefferson

The Canaanite nations had also been warned by the judgments God had inflicted on others, especially on Egypt and the nations east of the

Jordan (Amorite kings Sihon and Og, Josh 2:8-13). Rahab and her family had sufficient information to be able to repent and believe and God saved them (Josh 2; 6:22-25). We have every right to conclude that God would have saved anybody who had turned to Him. The King of Nineveh repented “on the speculation” that God might spare them from the 40-day deadline Jonah was called to declare! (Jonah 3:4-10).

God did not want the filth of Canaanite society and religion to contaminate His people Israel. They were His special people, chosen to fulfill His purposes in this world. They had to be separated from all other nations to bring the world the Scriptures and the Savior.

God is perpetually at war with sin. That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites.

G. Campbell Morgan

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student)

- 1) Explain how the lessons at Ai (Josh 7) might have spared Israel its failures in Judges 1.
- 2) Summarize the repeated *cycles* that characterize the experience of Israel as they occupied the Land.
- 3) Who were the *Nephilim* that greeted Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13:33? Where did they come from?
- 4) Compare or contrast the instructions to exterminate the Canaanites with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) How should Deuteronomy 7 affect Israel *today*?
- 2) What should Israel do regarding the resident terrorists in the land?
- 3) What should America be doing regarding Israel?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Compare the *Nephilim* of Genesis with the *Rephaim*, *Emim*, *Zamzummim*, the *Anakim* and the other native Canaanites encountered in Joshua and Judges.
- 2) Compare the islands of hostile presence (Hebron, Nablus, Jericho, Gaza, Golan Heights, et al.) within Israel today with the failures to root out the *Nephilim* and other enemies of Israel in ancient times.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 2 & 3.

Notes:

1. Judges 9.
2. Judges 16.
3. Judges 19.
4. Judges 21.
5. Judges 5:6.
6. Rev. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, writing under the name of Lewis Carroll, produced incomparable playful jests with hidden meanings. See *The Annotated Alice*, by Lewis Carroll, with annotations by Martin Gardner, Mathematics Editor for *Scientific American*, Clarkson N. Potter, New York, 1960.

Session 2 Chapters 2 & 3

Review

The Hebrew name is *Shophetim*: rulers; from the verb שָׁפַט *shaphat*, “to put right” and then rule. The Book of Judges characterizes a time in which:

- 1) There was no king in Israel;
- 2) Everyone did what was right in their own eyes;
- 3) There was a disregard for the Word of God;
- 4) They were enslaved by their enemies.

This characterizes our own world today. This is a book for our times.

Since a portion of Chapter 2 was used as a preview in our introduction, it can also serve as our review for this session. The first two chapters of Judges describe four stages in Israel's decline and fall:

- (1) Fighting the Enemy
 - a. The victories of Judah (1:1-20)
 - i. Bezek
 - ii. Jerusalem
 - iii. Hebron
 - iv. Debir
 - v. Hormah
 - vi. The Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron
 - b. The victory of Joseph (1:22-26)
 - i. Bethel
- (2) Sparing the Enemy (1:21, 27-36)
 - a. Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan, all failed to overcome their enemies.
 - b. Neglecting the Word of God
 - i. Failure to read Deuteronomy each Sabbatical Year during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31:9-13).
 - 1. Deut 7: not spare their pagan neighbors
 - 2. God promised to help defeat their enemies (Deut 31:1-8).
- (3) Imitating the Enemy (2:1-13)
- (4) Obeying the Enemy (2:6-23)

Chapter 2

(Summarizes the events from Judges 3:1 to 16:1, 1434 B.C. to 1100 B.C., a period of 331 years.¹)

Imitating the Enemy (2:1-13)

- 1] And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

Bochim means “weeping.” [Sin always causes sorrow. Refusal to do battle with the Canaanites in our own lives always leads to Bochim: the place of sorrow and weeping.]

The Angel of the Lord

A Theophany: a visible and bodily appearance of the second person of the Trinity (before incarnation). Prominent during the time of Moses (Ex 3:2-15; Num 22:22-35) and Joshua (Josh 5:13-15). Also appeared to Gideon (Judg 6:11-24) and to the parents of Samson (13:3-21).

He was Deity for He was called YHWH (Josh 5:13-15; Judg 6:11-24; Zech 3) and God (Gen 32:24-32; Ex 3:4), with divine attributes and prerogatives (Gen 16:13; 18:25; 48:16). Yet He was distinct from YHWH, thus indicating a plurality of Persons within the Godhead (Cf. Num 20:16; Zech 1:12-13).

New Testament allusions suggest that the Angel of the Lord in the OT was Jesus Christ (Cf. Jn 12:31; 1 Cor 10:4; Jn 8:56; Heb 11:26). Note the 1st person grammar in this passage (“I,” “my,” et al.)

- 2] And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?
- 3] Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

Compromise is alien to the commandments of God.

- 4] And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.
- 5] And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

Obeying the Enemy (2:6-23)

The sin in our lives we fail to conquer will eventually conquer us. The people of Israel found themselves enslaved to one pagan nation after another as the Lord kept His word and chastened His people.

- 6] And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.
- 7] And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.
- 8] And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.

- 9] And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

“Timnathhares”: called elsewhere, Timnathserah. About 18 miles north by northwest of Jerusalem.

- 10] And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

They forgot what the Lord had done. How often this is the pattern in our lives, also.

Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.

George Orwell, 1984

[Revisionists are at again throughout our culture...]

- 11] And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:
12] And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.
13] And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.
14] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

They forsook what the Lord had said, so they forfeited what the Lord had promised. After succumbing to sin, they became enslaved by sin.

- 15] Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

(Psalm 106:34-42 is a poetic paraphrase of Judges 2:11-15.)

- 16] Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

“delivered”: יָשַׁע *yasha`* saved, delivered, liberated.

“judges”: שֹׁפֵט *shaphat*, to save, rescue, vindicate, govern.

To put right what was wrong. This book will chronicle 13 of those “judges” (leaders); all diverse; all with limited victories; but, nevertheless, spelling out a symphony of defeat...

The Insidious Cycle

They failed to learn from what the Lord did. Whenever Israel turned away from the Lord to worship idols, He chastened them severely; and when in their misery they turned back to Him, He liberated them. But as soon as they were free and their situation was comfortable again, they went right back to their same old sins.

As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

Proverbs 26:11

- 17] And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.
- 18] And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

This book will chronicle 13 of them (12 men and one woman).

- 19] And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

The dismal cycle continues. And it does in our lives as well, unless we diligently maintain our priorities in His Word, and “take every thought captive” (2 Cor 10:5).

- 20] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;
- 21] I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:
- 22] That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep *it*, or not.
- 23] Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

So indeed, it was the worst of times. Instead of spiritual fervor, Israel sank into apathy. Instead of obeying the Lord, the people moved into apostasy. Instead of enjoying law and order, the land was filled with anarchy.

Chapter 3

In this chapter, we will encounter the “five lords of the Philistines,” (v.3) and king of Moab called “lord” (v.25); however YHWH, *The Lord*, is named 15 times in 30 verses. He is who is really in charge.

History is His Story.

A.T. Pierson

Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen.

T. S. Eliot

God never violates human responsibility, but He does rule and overrule the affairs of individuals and nations to accomplish His great purposes on this earth.

- 1] Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, *even* as many *of Israel* as had not known all the wars of Canaan;
- 2] Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

(This could be a training ground; both Saul and David would need effective armies to overcome their enemies and establish the kingdom.)

- 3] *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

The Sidonians were also known as the Phoenicians. The Hivites are thought to be the Horites who were previously associated with the Upper Mesopotamians kingdom of Mittanni. The Horites were best known In Joshua’s time as the Gibeonites, a confederacy of city-states (Josh 9:7, 17). The tribe of Judah was not able to hold on to the key Philistine cities they had taken (1:18); and other tribes failed to conquer the Canaanite nations. The surviving nations adopted a “good neighbor” policy toward Israel that eventually defeated Israel from within. Sometimes Satan comes as a lion to devour, and often he comes as a serpent to deceive (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Cor 11:3).

- 4] And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Collapse in the life of the believer is rarely the result of a blowout, but almost always the result of a slow leak. As we continue in the Book of Judges, we'll see the collapse of the people of God. It won't happen in a single decisive battle; it will erode slowly by compromises with their enemies. A slow leak will dissipate their spirituality and destroy their potency...

- 5] And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

They were supposed to destroy their enemies. When they failed to do so, God used their enemies to reveal their heart.

- 6] And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Contrary to God's law, Jewish men married pagan wives, and Jewish women married pagan husbands (Gen 24:3; 26:34-35; 27:46; Ex 34:15-16; Deut 7:3-4; Josh 23:12).

- 7] And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

Groves: *Asherim*; phallic symbols for their immoral religious rites. The idolaters gradually stole the hearts of their mates from worshipping YHWH. King Solomon—the wisest of men—made the same mistake. Relationship led to service... we dwell with the world; we relate to the world; we end up worshipping with the world. [We become like the things we worship: Ps 135:18.]

- 8] Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-Rishathaim eight years.

Since Israel was acting like pagans, God had to treat them like pagans. They acted like slaves, so God sold them as slaves. (Had they been faithful, God would have sold their enemies into their hands.) Four times in the Book of Judges we're told that God "sold" His people to the enemy (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7. Cf. also 1 Sam 12:9; 1 Kgs 21:20, 25; Ps 44:12).

Chushan-Rishathaim means “double darkness,” or “doubly wicked.” “King of Mesopotamia”=“king of Aram Naharaim” (NIV); Lit. “Syria of the Two Rivers.” A distant king to be plundering Israel. He had come a long way, probably attacking from the north. Since the deliverer that God raised up was from Judah, it suggests that they had penetrated all the way to the south when God decided to intervene on behalf of His people...

Othniel

- 9] And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.

God responds to His people when they cry out. This is one of the key messages in the Book of Judges (James 5:16).

The first of the “judges”: Caleb’s son-in-law, the man who captured Hebron and married Caleb’s daughter. (The exact blood relationship is obscured: Was Othniel Caleb’s nephew—the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother—or was he simply Caleb’s younger brother? From the text either interpretation is possible. If he was Caleb’s brother, then why was his father’s name Kenaz instead of Jephunneh? (1 Chr 4:13; Josh 14:6). Perhaps Jephunneh had died, and Caleb’s mother married Kenaz and gave birth to Othniel; thus Othniel would have been Caleb’s half-brother. 1 Chronicles 4:13 indicates that Othniel was the “son” of Kenaz, but the word “son” is used rather broadly in Hebrew genealogies and doesn’t always mean a direct father-son relationship.) Fortunately, we don’t have to untangle these branches to understand his example; he came from a family noted for its courageous faith and its willingness to face the enemy, depending upon God for victory.

- 10] And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-Rishathaim.
His secret: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.”

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6

Jesus said,

You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses...

Acts 1:8

This was the secret of Othniel's strength, as it was with Gideon (Judg 6:34), Jephthah (11:29) and Sampson (14:6, 19; 15:14); and it must be for us today (Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:8, 31; Eph 5:18).

- 11] And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Othniel not only rescued his nation from bondage, he also served as judge for 40 years. Never underestimate the impact that one person can have who is filled with the Spirit of God and obedient to His will.

Ehud

But the dismal cycle continues... and they would have been a forgotten nation if God hadn't loved them and chosen them for Himself (Deut 7:1-11). They would have perished in Egypt or the wilderness if God hadn't cared for them. They would have died on the battlefields of Canaan if God hadn't given them victory over their enemies. They would be wallowing in moral sewage if God hadn't given them His Law and priests to teach it to them. Where was the breakdown? *In the families*: the parents were to teach their children the ways of the Lord (Deut 6:6-25; 11:18-21. Cf. Gen 18:17-19; Job 1:5).

- 12] And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

The armies of Mesopotamia came a long distance to invade Israel (v.8), but the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites were not only neighbors but they were also *relatives* of the Jews. (Lot, the nephew of Abraham was the ancestor of both Moab and Ammon (Gen 19:30-38); and Esau, the brother of Jacob, was the ancestor of Amalek (Gen 36:12, 16; Deut 25:17, 19).

Eglon "was a very fat man." [He is the only man in the Bible designated as such (v.17)]. Some historians speculate that he may have had a 400 inch waist; he would have been "the Olympic champion of the Long Belt Society." He could have been the inspiration for Stephen Spielberg's Jabba the Hutt. We'll see how to pierce the defenses of the heavy-weight opponents...

- 13] And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

Eglon, the king of Moab, organized the confederacy and made Jericho his headquarters. (It remains today as the HQ of the PLO.) City of Palm Trees = Jericho (Deut 34:3).

- 14] So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

Any time under oppression is a long time; but 18 years is a very long time...

- 15] But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

A subtle contradiction here: Benjamin means “son of my right hand.” Benjamites were known for their ambidexterity. (Cf. Judg 20:16; 1 Chr 1:2).

עִטָּר *‘itter*, bound, impeded (on the right, thus, left-handed), shut, shut up. This could be translated, “a man handicapped in the right hand.” Ehud was not ambidextrous, but able to use *only* his right hand. He will turn that liability into a key asset.

- 16] But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

While the children of Israel prepared the catering (assuming the tribute also included a present of food), Ehud went to his workshop to fashion a double-edged sword, about 20 inches long (Cf. Heb 4:12). Hiding his sword on his right side was the opposite of convention: most warriors, right handed, would carry their sword on the left side. This concealment, by a handicapped, would evade the traditional frisking of guards.

- 17] And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon *was* a very fat man.

In addition to the required tribute, it likely included some gourmet items for the gourmand...

- 18] And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

Ehud set up a private audience...

- 19] But he himself turned again from the quarries that *were* by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

“Quarries”: פְּסִיל *peciyl* image, idol, or graven image. Could be a reference to the memorial of 12 stones which Joshua’s men had taken from the Jordan River (Josh 4:1-7).

- 20] And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of *his* seat.

Eglon received him in the cooling *aleah*, the rooftop sitting room of his palace. Ehud had a secret message to share... what harm could come from a cripple...

- 21] And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

His weapon was hidden on the unaccustomed side; his left hand, however, was most effective...

- 22] And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

A 20-inch blade and a 10-inch handle would imply a 30-inch penetration! “dirt”: פֶּרֶשֶׁדוֹן *parshedon* excrement, feces. Some translators infer that the word refers to “entrails” or intestines.

- 23] Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.
24] When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour *were* locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

“He covereth his feet” is a euphemism for an act performed while stooping, and causing feet to be covered (“He’s in the bathroom...”)

- 25] And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened *them*: and, behold, their lord *was* fallen down dead on the earth.

Three “behold” statements declare their three surprises: The doors were locked; the king didn’t respond to their calls; their king was dead. Their delay was Ehud’s opportunity for escape.

- 26] And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

His next challenge was to rally the troops and attack.

- 27] And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

Ephraim was one of the most powerful tribes in Israel.

- 28] And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

By guarding the fords, the Israelites prevented the Moabites from escaping or receiving reinforcements.

- 29] And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

The tables were turned by that victory: the Moabites became subject to Israel. Apparently their allies, the Ammonites and Amalekites, left early.

- 30] So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Ehud was the instrument through which God brought 80 years of peace to His people.

Shamgar

- 31] And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

One verse; but a relevant achievement. Martial arts with whatever was on hand. (The 600 may not have been all in one engagement, but our unsung hero must have been astonishing to watch!)

We know little about this overlooked hero. He apparently was “the son of Anath” (5:6-7) which might mean he was from the town of Beth Anath in Naphtali (1:33), which was also the tribe Barak came from (4:6; cf. 5:18); or, since Anath was the name of a Canaanite goddess of war, “son of Anath” might have been a nickname for a warrior, or “son of battle.”

An ox goad was a strong pole, about 8 ft. long, with a sharp metal point for prodding oxen, and often a spade on the other end for cleaning the

dirt off a plow. It would have been the closest thing to a spear, since the enemy had confiscated the weapons of the Israelites (5:8; cf. 1 Sam 13:19-22).

The Weapons of Our Warfare

“...The foolishness of God”: When God goes to war, He usually chooses the most unlikely soldiers, hands them the most unusual weapons, and accomplished, through them, the most unpredictable results.

- Shamgar: an ox goad; killed 600 men (Judg 3:31);
- Jael: a hammer and tent peg to kill a captain (4:21);
- Gideon: pitchers and torches, to rout the whole Midianite army (7:20);
- Sampson: a jawbone of an ass, to slaughter 1,000 Philistines (15:15);
- David: a stone from a shepherd’s sling, to kill the giant Goliath (1 Sam 17).

...And the ultimate “foolishness”: a wooden cross, erected in Judea, to save the world—or all who would accept it.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar have shown us the way. Will we follow?

Opportunity

This I beheld, or dreamed it in a dream:
There spread a cloud of dust along a plain;
And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
Shocked upon swords and shields. A prince’s banner
Wavered, then staggered backward, hemmed by foes.

A craven hung along the battle’s edge
And thought, “Had I a sword of keener steel—
That blue blade that the king’s son bears—but this
Blunt thing—!” He snapt and flung it from his hand
And, lowering, crept away and left the field.

Then came the king’s son, wounded, sore bestead,
And weaponless, and saw the broken sword,

Hilt-buried in the dry and trodden sand,
And ran and snatched it, and with battle-shout
Lifted afresh, he hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

Edward Rowland Sill

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What is a Theophany?
- 2) Contrast Baal and Ashteroth, and paganism today.
- 3) What is the “cycle of sin” as exemplified in the Book of Judges? How does it impact our personal lives today?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Discuss examples of the “foolishness of God” in the Bible.
- 2) Discuss the four characteristics of the time of the Judges, and compare them to Israel today. Compare them to America today.
- 3) Compare the “cycle of sin” and the “cycle of nations” as summarized by Alexander Tyler. How does this relate to our times today?
- 4) Discuss other occasions where one man can make a significant difference.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore (list) other theophanies in the OT.
- 2) Explore the role of “groves” in the OT. What were they? What did they signify? Why were they so difficult to eliminate?

Preparation for Next Session:

The next judge will be a woman. Read Chapters 4 - 5.

Notes:

1. Bullinger, p.327.

Session 3

Review

Israel, in the Book of Judges, illustrates the difference between “religious reformation” and “spiritual revival.” Reformation temporarily changes outward conduct while revival permanently alters the inward character (i.e., the “altered” life).

Ehud had removed the idols and commanded the people to worship only YHWH, and they obeyed him. But when that constraint was removed, the people obeyed their own desires. [Remember the parable of the man who got rid of one demon, cleaned house, and then ended up with seven more worse than the first! (Mt 12:43-45).] The empty heart is prey to every form of evil.

In the next two chapters we have another drama or oppressive servitude, a cry to the Lord for deliverance, the raising of a hero (a heroine, in this case) and a dramatic military trap for the bad guys. There is also some violence to assure a “R-rating” for this study...

Chapter 4

The Cast of Characters

Jabin:	The King Of Hazor, a Canaanite tyrant;
Sisera:	Captain of Jabin’s army;
Deborah:	A Jewess judge of faith and courage;
Barak:	A reluctant Israelite general;
Heber:	A Kenite neighbor, at peace with Jabin;
Jael:	Wife of Heber; handy with a hammer;
YHWH:	in charge of wars and weather.

Act One (vv. 1-3)

- 1] And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

After 80 years, the longest period of peace recorded in the Book of Judges, the leadership of Ehud came to an end.

- 2] And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host *was* Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

Two hundred years earlier, God had delivered them from the slavery of Egypt. Now, He “sold” them into the hands of the Canaanites as punishment for their sins (Cf. 2:14; 3:8; 1 Sam 12:9). Canaan was made up a number of city-states, each ruled by a king (Cf. Joshua 12). “Jabin” was the name (or title) of the King of Hazor (Josh 11:1). He was also called “King of Canaan,” which suggests that he was the head of a confederacy of kings. Hazor was the primary stronghold, about 8 ½ miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Joshua had burned Hazor (Josh 11:13), but the Canaanites had rebuilt it and occupied it.

Sisera’s base was at Harosheth Haggoyim, located by the narrow gorge where the Kishon River enters the Plain of Acre about 10 miles NW of Megiddo.

- 3] And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

With his large army and 900 chariots of iron, Jabin was securely in control of the land. (From the text you can get the idea that Sisera, captain of Jabin’s army, was the real power in the land. Jabin isn’t even mentioned in Deborah’s song in Judges 5.) Once again, Israel cried out to God—not to forgive their sins, but to relieve their suffering. Comfort rather than cleansing simply sows the seeds of selfishness that will produce a bitter harvest. (Contrast David’s prayer in Psalm 51:10...)

Act Two: (vv.4-7)

- 4] And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

Deborah: “honeybee.”

Bees

The wax in a beehive is heat resistant up to 140 degrees. However, at 141 degrees, the wax begins to melt, so the bees begin to cluster around their hive and fan it by fluttering their wings 190 times/sec, 11,400 times/minute. They are, indeed, industrious.

They are also discerning: their antennae contain 2,000-3,000 plates through which they identify the proper flower from which to draw their nectar. They are also known for the sweetness of the honey they produce. Deborah had the same three characteristics: very industrious, discerning, and very sweet.

A courageous woman; an act of grace, but also an act of humiliation for the Jews: a male-dominated society wanting only mature male leadership:

As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them.

Isaiah 3:12

- 5] And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Deborah's court was located about 9 miles N of Jerusalem, in the hill country of Ephraim. Deborah was both judge and a prophetess. But she saw herself as a *mother* ("to," not "of," her people).

Other prophetesses: Miriam, Moses' sister (Ex 15:20); Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14); Noadiah (Neb 6:13); Anna (Lk 2:36); and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).

- 6] And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-Naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, *saying*, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

Kedesh was also near the site of Heber the Kenite's tent. He was in a position to provide valuable intelligence in his collaboration with Jabin (v. 11, 12). Mt. Tabor rises to 1,300 ft. and was strategically located at the juncture of the tribal areas of Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar, in the NE part of the Jezreel Valley, not far from the Kishon River. It was a relatively safe place from the Canaanite chariots, and from which to launch an attack an enemy below.

- 7] And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

God revealed to Deborah that Barak was to assemble and lead the Israelite army and draw Sisera's troops into a trap near Mount Tabor, and there the Lord would defeat them.

Act Three (v. 8-10)

- 8] And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, *then* I will not go.

Barak was not the "judge"; he got his orders from Deborah, God's appointed leader in the land. (His name means "lightning," but perhaps it should have been a nickname for staying in the "barracks"!) Barak was from Naphtali, one of the tribes that would send volunteers to the battlefield. Barak's hesitation was not unprecedented: Cf. Abraham (Gen 12; cf. Acts 7:2-4); Moses (Ex 3, 4); Gideon (Judg 6); and Jeremiah (Jer 1). Was it evidence of unbelief or humility? Or was it precaution in case he should need a word from the Lord? We know it was not out of God's will because Deborah agreed to go. (It is significant that Barak is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32.)

- 9] And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

(Watch carefully the precision of this prophecy! It wasn't Deborah...)

- 10] And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Ten thousand from his own tribe, Naphtali, and that of his neighbor, Zebulun. Later, volunteers from the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh west (5:14), and Issachar (5:15) joined, for a total of 40,000 men. (It's probable that the initial 10,000 lured Sisera into the trap, and the 30,000 joined them for the decisive part of the battle.)

The tribes that declined the summons were Reuben, Dan, Asher, and Manasseh east (v.15-17). Weapons were scarce in Israel (5:8; 1 Sam 13:19-22), and there was no standing army. What Deborah and Barak did was an act of faith; they were depending upon His promise.

Sisera Warned

- 11] Now Heber the Kenite, *which was* of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which *is* by Kedesh.

We first met the Kenites in 1:16 and discovered that they were distant relatives of Moses.

- 12] And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

It was Heber and his family that first warned Sisera that the Israelites were mustering for revolt. It seems strange that Heber would separate himself from his people, who worshipped YHWH, and collaborate with idolatrous tyrants like Jabin and Sisera (Cf. v. 17). But even this treachery was part of God's plan in order to lure Sisera into the trap. [But this point will be "nailed down" in a few more verses...]

Sisera Defeated

- 13] And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, *even* nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that *were* with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

The Canaanites depended on 900 iron chariots (Cf. 1:19; Josh 17:18). The Israelites were depending upon the Lord.

- 14] And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this *is* the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.
15] And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away on his feet.

The Lord sent a fierce rainstorm that would make the Kishon River overflow and turn the battlefield into a sea of mud (Judg 5:20-22). In addition to the storm, they were thrown into panic.

“discomfited” הָמָם *hamam*, to move noisily, confuse, make a noise, discomfit, break, consume, crush, destroy, trouble, vex. This is what God had done to Pharaoh's charioteers in the Red Sea (Ex 14:24), and would later do to the Philistines in Samuel's day (1 Sam 7:10).

What helped to confuse and frighten the Canaanites was the sudden appearance of torrential rain during the traditional dry season (June – Sept). Sisera wouldn't have taken his chariots to the fields if there was any hint of bad weather. When you remember that to them Baal was the god of storms, you can imagine how this impacted the superstitious Canaanites.

- 16] But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left.

With the battle already lost, the wisest thing to do was flee...

Nailing Down the Details

- 17] Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for *there was* peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

Running for his life, Sisera headed toward Kedesh (a city of refuge, but not for him!), probably on his way to Hazor, Jabin's stronghold. He managed to get near the oak of Zaanannim (v.11), on the border of Naphatali (Josh 19:33), about six miles east of Mt. Tabor, and the site of the tents of Heber. Sisera knew that Heber and his family were friendly toward Jabin, and regarded it as a safe house.

- 18] And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.

In that culture, nobody would dare enter a wife's tent except her husband; entering into a woman's tent, itself, brought Heber under the death penalty.

- 19] And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.

(Probably buttermilk or yogurt.) Sisera had no reason to suspect danger: Heber's clan was friendly; Jael had shown hospitality and kindness; no pursuing Israelite soldier would force his way into a woman's tent. He was now confident that he had found a dependable ally and where he could rest in peace. (And he would...!)

- 20] Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

He makes the mistake of asking her to lie if anyone asked for him. She then realizes that the battle was lost, the grip of the Canaanites was broken, and he was “on the run.” If she protected Sisera, she’d be in trouble with the Israelites, her own relatives. Anyone chasing Sisera wouldn’t be satisfied until the captain was dead.

- 21] Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

[When you have a point to make, it’s important to know how to drive it home with vigor. That’s called nailing down a problem...] In the eastern nomadic cultures, the women put up and took down the tents; she knew how to use a hammer. What Sisera didn’t know was that God had promised that a woman would take his life (v.9).

[He was “fast” asleep: the navy sense of that word makes an interesting pun. The *Reina Mercedes* was known as the fastest ship in the navy: it had been “fast” for the better part of a century!]

- 22] And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her *tent*, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail *was* in his temples.

She flags down Barak in his pursuit of Sisera. Should we blame or bless Jael? She invited Sisera into her tent, treated him kindly, told him to not be afraid: she was deceitful. The Kenites were at peace with Jabin, so she violated a treaty. She gave Sisera the impression that she would guard the door, so she broke a promise. She killed a defenseless man who was under her protection, so she was a murderess.

Yet, Deborah sang,

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

Judges 5:24

Let’s keep in mind the terrible bondage because of Jabin and Sisera, the mistreatment of the Jews for years; if the Canaanites had won the battle, hundreds of Jewish girls would have been captured and raped (5:30). There was a war going on.

- 23] So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.
24] And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Judges 5

The Song of Deborah

The writer shifts from narrative prose to jubilant poetry. (For other examples, see Ex 15, Deut 32, 2 Sam 1:17-27, and Ps 18.) From the personal pronouns (vv. 7, 9, 13) it appears that this was Deborah's victory song, but just as Barak joined her in battle, so he joined her in the celebration.

- 1] Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying,
2] Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

(Verses 2 and 9 point to the unity of the leaders so that Barak could assemble an army.)

- 3] Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, *even* I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing *praise* to the LORD God of Israel.
4] LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water.
5] The mountains melted from before the LORD, *even* that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

The same God who gave victory in the past would give them victory again.

- 6] In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways.

Outside the walled villages, and on the roadways, life came to a standstill due to the oppression by the Canaanites...

- 7] *The inhabitants of* the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.

(Not a mother *of* Israel, a mother *in* Israel. Indeed, always a most honorable profession!)

- 8] They chose new gods; then *was* war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

The enemy had taken over because the people had turned from YHWH to worship false gods.

- 9] My heart *is* toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.
10] Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

“ye that...”: the nobles as well as the common travelers.

- 11] *They that are delivered* from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, *even* the righteous acts *toward the inhabitants* of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

Now the streets were safe again...

- 12] Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.
13] Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

The nobles did their share in recruiting soldiers...

- 14] Out of Ephraim *was there* a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer.

Except for the town of Meroz (v.23), the men of Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh west (Machir) responded. Machir: a division of the tribe of Manasseh (Num 26:29; 27:1).

(“The pen of the writer,” the staff of a scribe, may refer to the recruiting officers writing the names of soldiers.)

- 15] And the princes of Issachar *were* with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great thoughts of heart.
16] Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben *there were* great searchings of heart.

There were four tribes that didn’t volunteer. The tribe of Reuben pondered the call but finally stayed home.

- 17] Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches.

Manasseh east (Gilead) was on the other side of the Jordan, they also stayed home. Dan and Asher also passed on the opportunity.

- 18] Zebulun and Naphtali *were* a people *that* jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

They were contrasted to the shirkers. When Joshua commanded Israel's armies, all the tribes participated. When Barak summoned his volunteers, only half of them went to war against Jabin.

- 19] The kings came *and* fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.

The organized alliance of the Canaanite kings, with their united forces and 900 chariots, met the Israelite volunteers at Megiddo on the plain of Jezreel. (This is the same place that is in view in Rev 16:16.) Taanach is 5 miles SE of Megiddo.

- 20] They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

Possibly simply poetic language; yet, it is hazardous to underestimate the Scriptures' literalness! What caused the *unseasonal* torrents of rain? Cf. Joshua 10:12 notes...

- 21] The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.
22] Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones.
23] Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Notice that it wasn't Deborah cursing Meroz, but the "Angel of the Lord." It wasn't for failing to assist Israel; they failed to help the Lord!

- 24] Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.
25] He asked water, *and* she gave *him* milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish.
26] She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples.
27] At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

An ostensible discrepancy may be explained by his having raised himself up after being struck before sinking at her feet...

- 28] The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot *so* long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?

The pathos of the fallen general is amplified by an ironic description of the awaiting mother clinging to hopeful excuses of his delay...

- 29] Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself,
30] Have they not sped? have they *not* divided the prey; to every man a damsel *or* two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, *meet* for the necks of *them that take* the spoil?

A pathetic picture of hope where there is no hope...

- 31] So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but *let* them that love him *be* as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

The battles between the forces of darkness and the forces of light at Megiddo are not yet over...

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List examples where God “sold” His people.
- 2) Explain the geographic significance of the following locations in light of chapters 4 and 5: Hazor; Harosheth; Megiddo; Bethel, Ramah; Kadesh; Kidron River; and the strategic and tactical implications of Mt. Tabor.
- 3) Why did the Canaanites (and the Philistines) have a monopoly on iron?
- 4) List nine prophetesses in the Bible.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Was Jael justified in deceiving, violating hospitality, and murder? Does the ends justify the means?

- 2) Why did Balak decline to go alone?
- 3) Why did Heber reveal the plans of Israel, his own relatives?
- 4) What do you think Judges 5:20 means?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Summarize the various military (and other) events that occurred at Megiddo.
- 2) List other places where the weather, or cosmic disturbances, were a major factor in God's plans.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 6 through 8: Gideon, God's man in Manasseh.

Session 4

Gideon

God's Man in Manasseh

Two hundred years had passed since Joshua led the children of Israel in the conquest of the land. But because they failed to obey the Lord fully, because they failed to totally drive out the pagan people of Canaan, like a disease in remission, two centuries later the pockets of remaining Canaanites regained strength and began to dominate and regulate the lives of the people of Israel.

In Chapter 6, for seven years, the Midianites raided the Israelites, right after their harvests, taking all their produce by force, leaving them destitute. They were an arrogant, brutal people—apparently among the first to develop the camel as a military advantage: its speed (100 mi/day) and mobility proved formidable.

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), and were defeated by Israel during their wilderness wanderings (Num 22:4; 25:16-18). They were a nomadic people from near the Gulf of

Aqabah and apparently had subdued the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites as they crossed the Jordan into Canaan as far north as the Jezreel Valley (6:33) and as far south as Gaza (v.4). This relatively brief seven-year period of oppression was sandwiched in between two 40-year periods of peace (5:31; 8:28).

At about the time for the 8th annual invasion, God called a farmer in Manasseh named Gideon to be to become a deliverer of His people: He started his career as a *coward* (Judges 6); then became a *conqueror* (7:1-8:21); and ended his career as a *compromiser* (8:22-35). But more space is given to Gideon than to any other leader; and he is the only one whose personal struggles with his faith are recorded.

Gideon is a great encouragement to people who have a hard time accepting themselves and believing that God can make anything out of them or do anything with them. But before the Lord could use Gideon for His service, He had to deal with four doubting questions that plagued him and were obstacles to his faith.

1. "Does the God really care about us?" (6:1-13)
2. "Does God know what He's doing?" (6:14-24)
3. "Will God take care of me?" (6:25-32)
4. "Does God keep His promises?" (6:33-40)

Chapter 6

1. "Does the God really care about us?" (6:1-13)

- 1] And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.

Israel had already experienced 43 years of suffering under the harsh rule of the neighboring nations, but they hadn't yet learned their lesson and turned away from pagan idols.

Chastening is evidence of God's hatred for sin and His love for His people. We can't conceive of a holy God wanting anything less than His very best for His children, and the very best He can give us is a holy character like that of Jesus Christ. God is not a "permissive parent" who allows His children to do as they please (Cf. Rom 8:29; Mt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). Obedience builds character; sin destroys character; and God cannot sit by and watch His children destroy themselves (Cf. Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11).

Unless our suffering leads to repentance, it accomplishes no lasting good; unless our repentance is evidence of a holy desire to turn from sin, not just escape from pain, repentance is only remorse.

- 2] And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: *and* because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which *are* in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

Talk about men becoming mice: the Israelites had descended lower than mice; they became moles, hiding in underground caves, holing up in dens, totally terrified and humiliated.

- 3] And *so* it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

The Midianites organized a coalition of nations to invade the land, and all Israel could do was to flee to the hills and hide. The Amalekites (from the south of Judah) and other “children of the east” were nomads of the Syrian desert, possibly including some Edomites and Ammonites.

- 4] And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.
5] For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; *for* both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

Living on the land, they were compared to swarms of locusts (7:12). They traveled with camels, whose range and speed (as much as 100 miles/day) made them a formidable military threat. This is the first reference to camels as a military element.

- 6] And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD.

Returning to their homes, the Israelites found only devastation; and to face another year without food. When we cry out to the Lord, He harkens to our cry and answers our prayers. When we get to the place of total desperation and brokenness, He always responds.

- 7] And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,
8] That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;

Previously (Judg 2:1-5) an Angel of the Lord (probably the Son of God) came to Bochim to reprove Israel; now an unnamed prophet comes to repeat the message. We usually call Samuel the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24), but there were unnamed prophets earlier; Deborah was labeled a prophetess.

It is interesting how often the Lord points to the deliverance from Egypt as a mark of His commitment to them.

- 9] And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land;
- 10] And I said unto you, *I am* the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Gideon Called

- 11] And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which *was* in Ophrah, that *pertained* unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide *it* from the Midianites.

Gideon was hiding behind a winepress. Threshing his wheat there implies a meager crop; normally wheat was threshed in an open area by oxen pulling threshing sledges over the stalks.

The Angel of the Lord (again, a Christophany) appeared as a sojourning stranger sitting under an oak. (Probably about 6 mi E of Megiddo; or 8 miles NW of Beth Shean.)

Joash was an Abiezrite, a clan of Manasseh (Josh 17:2).

Have you ever wondered at the resumes of the men God chooses?

- Moses was 80 years old and wanted for murder;
- Jacob was a schemer and a con artist;
- Elijah and Jeremiah both suffered from depression;
- Hosea couldn't keep his marriage together;
- Amos was a farmer with no ministry training;
- Peter tried to kill a man with his sword;
- John Mark was a quitter;
- Paul couldn't get along with his partner Barnabas, and couldn't stay out of prison.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

- 12] And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

Satirical? Or prophetic; not earned yet! But it's like that with us: He sees us as completed, finished products (Cf. Romans 8:28-30). That's a fabulous passage of Scripture. I am one of the few, throughout the history of humanity, that has been selected, elected, chosen by God to be part of His eternal family. *So are you!*

- 13] And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

The first question of doubt: "Does God really care about us?" Gideon's lack of faith is self-contradicting, but ours usually is also upon examination...and if he remained that way he would never have been named among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

2. "Does God know what He's doing?" (6:14-24)

- 14] And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

The Lord doesn't answer Gideon's question. He simply tells him to get going. "Don't philosophize, theologize, question, or analyze: just get going! There's work to be done."

- 15] And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Gideon's first response was to question God's concern for His people; and then he questioned God's wisdom in choosing him! But so did Moses (Ex 3:7-12) and others... Gideon may have been an outcast among his family since he did *not* worship Baal as his family did! (vv.25-32).

His claim to poverty seems perplexing in that he had 10 servants in v.27. It may be that the clan of Abiezer was not important in Manasseh; or perhaps was simply a style of an etiquette of humility. Gideon surely felt that God could *do* nothing because he and his family *were* nothing.

- 16] And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as [if] one man.

God often chooses the “weak things of this world”; but He is always ready to work patiently with us if we are willing to submit to His will (Eph 2:10; Phil 2:12-13).

“God’s commands are God’s enablements.”

- 17] And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

Cf. 1 Cor 1:22. God graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon’s unbelief.

- 18] Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set *it* before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.
19] And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought *it* out unto him under the oak, and presented *it*.

This was a costly thing to do at a time when food was desperately scarce. An ephah of flour (about ½ a bushel) could make bread for a family for several days. It would have taken him an hour to prepare it, but God waited.

- 20] And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay *them* upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.
21] Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that *was* in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.
22] And when Gideon perceived that he *was* an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

They believed it was fatal for sinful man to look upon God and Gideon was sure he would die (Ex 33:20).

- 23] And the LORD said unto him, Peace *be* unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.
24] Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it *is* yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Recognize Gideon's situation: his family worshiped Baal. If he challenged the Midianites in the name of the Lord, it meant defying his father, his family, his neighbors, and all the others involved in paganism. But whenever God calls us to a task that seems beyond us, we must look to God, not ourselves: God asked Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14); and the answer comes, as it did to Mary, "For God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

Job discovered that God could do everything (Job 42:2). Jeremiah admitted that there was nothing too hard for God (Jer 32:17). Jesus told His disciples, "With God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). Paul testified, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

3. "Will God take care of me?" (6:25-32)

- 25] And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that *is* by it:
- 26] And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down.

Destroy the altar of Baal (a massive task in itself), build an altar to the Lord, sacrifice one of his father's bullocks, and use the wood of the Asherah pole for fuel! (Cf. Isa 4:13-20). Gutsy move! [You can't build an altar to the Lord unless you first tear down the altars to the false gods being worshiped. Our God is a jealous God (Ex 20:5).]

Gideon had every right: this was commanded in God's law (Ex 34:12-13; Deut 7:5). He had the right to stone everyone involved in Baal worship (Deut 13), but that wasn't in his instructions. Yet. But this was a good beginning. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." Before David killed the giant Goliath in the sight of two armies, he learned to trust God by killing a lion and a bear in a field where nobody saw it but God (1 Sam 17:32-37).

- 27] Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and *so* it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do *it* by day, that he did *it* by night.

Well, even Nicodemus began by seeing Jesus at night (John 3). [How much to *we* trust the Lord?]

- 28] And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that *was* by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar *that was* built.
- 29] And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

They considered this a capital offense —although *they* were the ones who should have been slain (Deut 13:6-9).

- 30] Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that *was* by it.

Joash had every reason to be upset with his son: He had smashed his altar to Baal; replaced it with an altar to YHWH; sacrificed his prize bull, and used the sacred Asherah for fuel.

- 31] And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst *it is yet* morning: if he *be* a god, let him plead for himself, because *one* hath cast down his altar.
- 32] Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Jerubbaal = “Baal’s antagonist.” Epithets can become badges of honor:

- The “Yankee Doodles” of the Revolutionary War;
- The “Quiz Kids” became the Whiz Kids at Ford;
- The “Jesus Freaks” of the 70s have become some of the leading pastors of the 90s...

(Gideon will be referred to by this nickname in subsequent chapters.)

4. “Does God keep His promises?” (6:33-40)

- 33] Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.

The Midianites and their allies prepared for their annual invasion and plunder with more than 135,000 men (7:12; 8:10)! (This is the first mention of camels being used in warfare: speed (100 mi/day) and mobility on the battlefield.) They gathered in the Valley of Jezreel, the same locale of Jabin’s defeat in the previous chapter, and the site of the final world battle: Megiddo overlooks this very valley.

- 34] But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.

It was time to act, and Gideon had a secret weapon: the Spirit of God “came upon” Gideon. He was supernaturally empowered! That’s what the baptism of the Spirit is all about (Cf. Judg 3:10; 11:19; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.

Zech 4:6

Blowing the trumpet in his home town brought the men of Abiezer rallying behind him. (This was a sound that they probably hadn’t heard for 7 years!) His stand against Baal for YHWH had begun to bear fruit!

- 35] And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

These four tribes were adjacent to the Valley of Jezreel, and 32,000 men responded. Impressive, but what were they against an equipped army five times as large?! [They are 100 times larger than necessary!!...]

Gideon’s Fleece

But Gideon needed reassurance. Did God really want *him* to lead the army? What did he know about warfare? He was only a farmer. [God used a group of fishermen to turn the entire world upside down—but we’re getting ahead of the story...]

- 36] And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said,
37] Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; *and* if the dew be on the fleece only, and *it be* dry upon all the earth *beside*, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.
38] And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

“Putting out the fleece” has become an idiom in religious circles. *But it isn’t a necessarily an appropriate method for determining the will of God.* It may be only evidence of unbelief. It has its dangers. It can be an approach used by people, like Gideon, who lack the faith to trust God to do what He said He would do. Gideon admitted—twice—what God had already said (6:36, 37), and asked for a miracle to reconfirm it.

The fact that God stooped to Gideon's weakness demonstrates that God is gracious and understands how we're made: we are but dust (Ps 103:14). There are, however, a number of similar incidents in Scripture:

Genesis 24: Abraham's servant Eliezer confirms an identification of the bride for Isaac by seeing if a woman who came to the well offered to draw water for him and his camels (Gen 24:12-21).

1 Samuel 14: Jonathan and his armorbearer determine whether or not to take on the entire Philistine army by the sentries' response to a challenge (1 Sam 14:8-10).

Isaiah 7: God Himself instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him.

But there are some serious cautions:

- A fleece before the Lord is only valid if the Word of God has not already spoken to the issue.
- A fleece should not be limiting the Lord. Many err here.
- A fleece should be confirming only if you are really serious.

39] And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.

40] And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Gideon spent two days playing the fleece game on that threshing floor. First, it was a wet fleece on a dry floor. Then it was a dry fleece on a wet floor. Gideon was cornered. Nothing left to do but confront the enemy.

Judges 7

1] Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley.

The spring of Harod winds from the foot of Mt. Gilboa eastward to the Jordan River through the Harod Valley. 32,000 (v.3), against 135,000 (8:10), still too many? Even so, God didn't want Israel to be able to take personal credit for the victory. [Compare that with Israel's attitude toward the five miraculous deliverances in recent decades!]

3] Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

22,000 fearful recruits were summarily dismissed (in harmony with Deut 20:8) and allowed to go home (at least for a brief leave of absence. They apparently will join in the subsequent rout).

The reference to Mt. Gilead is puzzling since the presently known Mt. Gilead is east of the Jordan. Some scholars view “Gilead” as a copyist’s error for “Gilboa”; or perhaps there was another Mt. Gilead nearby, since some of Gilead’s descendants lived on the western side of the Jordan.

- 4] And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

10,000 against 135,000 trained warriors were still too many. (This is also a comment on God’s view of Israel’s audacity: would they still take credit for a victory against 14:1 odds?)

- 5] So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappedh of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.
- 6] And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

9,700 apparently less-watchful men failed a simple test and were also discharged—at least for a brief leave of absence (v.23). (Exactly what was involved in the test is debatable. Josephus argues that it was the 300 that were the less watchful, to cause an even greater recognition of God’s power...)

The odds went from 4:1, to 14:1, and now, it seems, God seems to prefer 450:1 odds! (This was the same odds in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah alone was victorious over 450 priests of Baal!)

- 7] And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place.
- 8] So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest of* Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.
- 9] And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.
- 10] But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host:

- 11] And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that *were* in the host.
- 12] And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.
- 13] And when Gideon was come, behold, *there was* a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

The barley loaf was an apt symbol of the Israelites; the tent, the nomadic Midianites.

- 14] And his fellow answered and said, This *is* nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.

This interpretation may have been an evidence of fear; perhaps Gideon's reputation had spread throughout the region. Or, more probably, the response simply intended as a disparaging, cynical jest; but, in any case, it was an encouraging sign to Gideon. [Often God will use even an adversary's off-hand comment as a prophecy: Cf. Caiaphas' remark that "It is expedient for one man to die for the people..." (Jn 11:50; 18:14).]

- 15] And it was *so*, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Interpretation: Heb. שֶׁבַר *sheber*, breaking, like that of a code.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List examples where obedience builds character.
- 2) List examples where sin destroys character.
- 3) Why was Gideon so hesitant or uncertain? What are the lessons for *ourselves*?
- 4) Why did Joash go to his son's defense? What does this tell us about Gideon's family?

- 5) Why does God use such unlikely methods to accomplish His deliverances?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) When you come to decision points in your life, how do you go about discerning God's will for you?
- 2) Are fleeces a valid way to discern the will of God? What are the hazards? Give examples.
- 3) What are the significance of dreams as signs *today*?
- 4) What are the parallels in the Book of Judges and the battles of Israel since 1948? What are the implications of the downsizing of Gideon's forces and Israel today?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Profile the factors of Gideon's career as a *coward* (Judg 6); *conqueror* (7:1-8:21); and *compromiser* (8:22-35).
- 2) List examples in Scripture where suffering led to repentance.
- 3) List examples of "Christophanies" in the Scripture.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 7 - 8. Also Genesis 14, Abraham's victory over the kings.

Session 5 The Strange Battle

Review (Judges 6 - 7:15):

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

Faith means more than simply trusting God; it also means seeking God and wanting to please Him. How did God reward Gideon's faith?

He gave him **wisdom** to prepare the army (v. 15-18);
He gave him **courage** to lead the army (19-22);
He gave him opportunity to **enlarge** the army (23-25).

Chapter 7 (cont.)

Preparing the Army

Gideon was a new man as he and his servant returned to the Israelite camp: his fears and doubts were gone as he mobilized his small army and infused courage into their hearts in his announcement. Faith “sees the invisible” (victory in a battle not yet fought), and “does the impossible” (wins the battle with few men and strange weapons).

- 16] And he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

“Lamps”: **לָפִיד** *lappiyd*, kindling torch (from an unused root probably meaning to shine); firebrands, or, torches. They would encircle the enemy camp with the torches inside the jars and with trumpets (*shofars* like Joshua used at Jericho) and at Gideon's command the men would blow the trumpets, break the jars revealing the torches, and then shout, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” and God would do the rest.

- 17] And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be *that*, as I do, so shall ye do.
18] When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that *are* with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword* of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Gideon was the example for them to follow. No committees, no dialogues, no discussions. He had come a long way from the day God found him hiding in the winepress! He was no longer asking, “If—why—where?” He was “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). God took a doubter and made a general out of him.

Leading the Army

Gideon led his small army from the Spring of Harod (“trembling”) to the Valley of Jezreel where they took their places around the enemy camp.

- 19] So Gideon, and the hundred men that *were* with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that *were* in their hands.

In Gideon's day the first watch was from 6 PM to 10 PM; the middle watch was from 10 PM to 2 AM; and the morning watch from 2 AM to 6 AM. At the beginning of the middle watch the retiring guards would still be milling about their tents.

The trumpets blared; the smoldering embers burst into flame; the crescendo of declarations was deafening...

- 20] And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow *withal*: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Finding themselves surrounded by sudden lights and noises, the Midianites assumed that they were being attacked by a large army and panic resulted.

- 21] And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.
22] And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-Shittah in Zererath, *and* to the border of Abel-Meholah, unto Tabbath.

In the spirit of confusion the Midianites began to kill each other; the intratribal warfare was a factor behind the strategy. They quickly realized the safest thing to do was to flee so they took off on the caravan route to the southeast with the Israelite army pursuing... (Abel-Meholah was where Elisha was living when Elijah called him to be his protégé.)

[There is an interesting *spiritual* analogy here: We, as Christians, have the light of Jesus inside, but it is all bottled up. The Lord wants to release the light of Jesus He has placed in each of us. But it only comes after breaking (Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6-12). The light is *in* the earthen vessel; but the light cannot shire forth *from* the vessel until there is a breaking *of* the vessel.]

Enlarging the Army

Obviously 300 were inadequate to pursue thousands, so Gideon put out a call for more volunteers.

- 23] And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.

In addition to the original 32,000 who had responded earlier, they were also joined by the proud tribe of Ephraim.

- 24] And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan.

To Ephraim was given the honor of capturing and slaying Oreb (“raven”) and Zeeb (“wolf”), the two princes of Midian. Beth-Barah was the place that Joshua originally crossed the Jordan, and the place where John the Baptist would later be baptizing (Jn 1:28).

- 25] And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

The story began with a man hiding in a winepress (6:11) and ended with the enemy prince slain at a winepress. Gideon’s great victory over the Midianites became a landmark event in the history of Israel, not unlike the Battle of Waterloo for Great Britain, for it reminded the Jews of God’s power to deliver them from their enemies. The day of Midian was a great day that Israel would never forget (Ps 83:11; Isa 9:4; 10:26).

God doesn’t need big buildings, big crowds, or big budgets: faith then becomes misplaced. He looks for a Gideon: someone who He can use just as He sees fit...

Judges 8

Winning the War, but Losing the Victory

Reports indicate that Angola still has 20 million land mines waiting to maim or kill; Afghanistan, 10 million, Cambodia, 4 ½ million. The wars may be over but the dangers haven’t vanished.

There can also be spiritual land mines that can remain in the wake of a great victory...

Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.

Andrew Bonar

- 1] And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply.

Instead of rejoicing in the victory, they complained about the strategy. Ephraim was a proud people, a large and important tribe, second only to Judah. Gideon was from Manasseh, the “brother” tribe to Ephraim: both Ephraim and Manasseh were sons of Joseph and adopted as sons to Jacob—to replace Reuben and Simeon (Gen 48:5; 49:4). Manasseh was the firstborn, but Jacob reversed their birth order when he blessed them (Gen 41:50-52; 48:1ff).

Ephraim was insulted because Gideon didn’t call them to the battle initially. They had assisted Ehud (3:26-29) and Deborah and Barak (5:13-14), but that was no guarantee that they would follow a farmer into battle!

It was probably wise for Gideon not to call them initially: this proud tribe would have been incensed when Gideon told the frightened men to go home, or when he thinned out the ranks to 300! They were on hand to help in the mopping up and that’s what really counted.

- 2] And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? *Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?*

Gideon could have used his authority and popularity to put them in their place, but he chose a better approach:

A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Proverbs 16:32

Take this remark from Richard, poor and lame, Whate’er’s begun in anger ends in shame.

Benjamin Franklin

Poor Richard’s Almanack, 1732

Their capturing Oreb and Zeeb was a greater feat than anything the men had done from his hometown of Abiezer.

There's no limit to what a man can accomplish if he doesn't care who gets the credit.

Ronald Reagan

- 3] God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.

[Ephraim's pride later created problems for Jephthah (Chapter 12:1-6), whose response wasn't as conciliatory as Gideon's!]

- 4] And Gideon came to Jordan, *and* passed over, he, and the three hundred men that *were* with him, faint, yet pursuing *them*.

They were pursuing two of the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, knowing if they caught them the enemy's power would be crippled and eventually broken. They crossed over the Jordan eastward to Succoth in Gad, hoping to find assistance; but the men of Succoth wouldn't help their brothers.

- 5] And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they *be* faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

Hospitality—even to strangers—is one of the basic laws in the Middle East. It is also an important ministry of the Church (Rom 12:13; 1 Tim 5:10; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9. Cf. Mt 25:34-40). [The Ammonites and Moabites—relatives to the Jews through Lot—failed to help Israel with food and God declared war on them (Deut 23:3-6).]

- 6] And the princes of Succoth said, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?

The 2 ½ tribes east of the Jordan didn't feel as close as they should have; they hadn't sent any soldiers to help either Deborah and Barak (5:17) or Gideon. They were skeptical of Gideon's ability to defeat the fleeing Midianite army and capture the two kings. If they helped Gideon and he failed, then they would be in line for retaliation. They not only didn't help, they replied in an impudent manner.

- 7] And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers.

- 8] And he went up thence to Penueh, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penueh answered him as the men of Succoth had answered *him*.

- 9] And he spake also unto the men of Penueh, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower.

They, like those in Succoth, not only didn't help, but were actually aiding and abetting the enemy. These two cities were east of the Jordan in the region of Gad. This was similar to the earlier curse on Meroz in Deborah's time (5:23).

- 10] Now Zebah and Zalmunna *were* in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand *men*, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.

Karkor is thought to be near Wadi Sirhan well east of the Dead Sea.

- 11] And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure.
12] And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host.

“...discomfited”: חָרַד *charad*, to tremble, quake, move about, be afraid, be startled, be terrified, to drive to terror; routed. A surprise attack captured the two kings and routed their army.

- 13] And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun *was up*,
14] And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, *even* threescore and seventeen men.

Retracing his steps, he providentially found a young man who gave him the names of the 77 leaders who had refused to help him and his army.

- 15] And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, *Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men *that are* weary?

He showed them the two kings who the elders had said Gideon would never capture, and then made good his previous threat.

- 16] And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth.

“...taught”: יָדָע *yada*, made to know.

- 17] And he beat down the tower of Peniel, and slew the men of the city.

He made good his threat to Peniel (Penuel) also. This tower was probably a fortress where the people retreated to safety, like the Tower of Shechem (9:46-49) or the Tower of Thebez (9:50-51).

What good was it for Gideon and his men to risk their lives to deliver Israel if they had traitors (“liberals”?) right in their own nation?

- 18] Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men *were they* whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou *art*, so *were* they; each one resembled the children of a king.

When Gideon arrived back home at Ophrah, leading Zebah and Zalmunna captive, it must have been an exciting and triumphant procession! Gideon was a true hero: with only 300 men he had routed the enemy camp and then pursued the fleeing soldiers across the Jordan and as far south as Karkor. He brought his royal prisoners back, plus the spoils the men had gathered.

Gideon had a personal matter to settle with these two kings because they had killed his brothers at Tabor (apparently on one of their previous annual raids; thus, in their homes or fields, not in battle). This was one of the reasons Gideon was hiding in the winepress.

According to Mosaic law, the family was to avenge crimes like this by killing those responsible for murder. (Cf. Deut 19:6, 12; Num 35:9-34). These were not only murderers, but enemies of Israel. Their attempt at flattery didn't work: flattery is a good thing to taste but a bad thing to swallow!

- 19] And he said, They *were* my brethren, *even* the sons of my mother: *as* the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you.
20] And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, *and* slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he *was* yet a youth.

How a soldier died was important to his reputation. [Abimelech didn't want to die at the hand of woman (9:53-54); King Saul didn't want to fall into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 31:1-6).] For a child to kill a king would be the ultimate in humiliation; by doing what Gideon requested, Jether would also have brought honor to himself for the rest of his life; but he hesitated to avenge the murder of his uncles; so the two kings told Gideon, sarcastically, to do it.

- 21] Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man *is*, *so is* his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that *were* on their camels' necks.
A subtle clue yields a profound insight:

“...ornament”: שָׁהָרֹן *saharon*, ornamental crescent moon.

When Abraham was called out of the Ur of the Chaldees, the prevalent worship throughout the region was the worship of the moon god. In Assyria, he was called *Sin* (Cf. *Sin-echerib*, et al.). In Arabia, he was called *Al-Ilah*, later contracted to *Allah* (long before Mohammed, who then repackaged this occultic religion into a monotheistic form. The worship of *Al-Ilah*, the moon god, was the predecessor to Islam; the crescent moon still adorns every mosque throughout the Muslim world. These Ishmaelites (v.24) are so called as a term for nomads, not limited to traceable descendants of Ishmael. Ishmaelites believed it was Ishmael, not Isaac, that Abraham offered on Mt. Moriah.

A Dynasty Requested

- 22] Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

So popular was Gideon that the people asked him to set up a dynasty—something new for the nation of Israel. This was not only a reward for his exploits, but also a step toward unifying the tribes to mobilize against future invaders. But it was also an admission of unbelief.

- 23] And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

Every Jew knew that the Mercy Seat in the Tabernacle was the throne of God from which He ruled in the midst of His people:

...thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Psalm 80:1

The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims...

Psalm 99:1

Let that sink in: it is the Lord who should rule over you; not man. Not elders, not pastors, not people. People who are in ministry are to serve and to assist, not to rule (2 Cor 1:24).

One of the key themes in the Book of Judges is that there was “no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:11; 19:1; 21:5). Moses had warned that Israel would one day want a king like Gentile nations (Deut 4:5-8; 14:2; 17:14-20; Ex 19:4-5). What other nation had the Creator, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, as their king? Later, the people asked Samuel for a king (1 Sam 8) and God told him to grant their request. Everything that Moses and Samuel

warned them about, their kings did to them, but fallen human nature would rather have visible human rulers instead of the invisible God of heaven and earth. (Appropriately rejecting their offer, Gideon then establishes a royal retirement plan!)

- 24] And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they *were* Ishmaelites.)

(The term is used connotatively for itinerant nomads; not necessarily traceable to Ishmael himself; Bedouins, for example, are descendants of Keturah, not Hagar, etc.)

- 25] And they answered, We will willingly give *them*. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey.
26] And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred *shekels* of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that *were* about their camels' necks.

About 43 pounds of gold, plus what he had taken from Zebah and Zalmunna!

- 27] And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, *even* in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house.

Whether this was an embellished version of that of the high priest (28:6f)—although he wasn't a priest—or some other kind of idol (Judg 17:5; 18:14, 17), it was against God's law (Ex 20:4-6) and it became a snare to him and the people.

There is a similar pattern in revivals: It usually starts with a man who is gifted by God, whose ministry grows and blossoms into a movement. So far so good. But then the movement begins to construct a monument and the monument becomes a mausoleum...

- 28] Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.

This is the last time you will find a period of peace mentioned in the Book of Judges. The remaining judges mainly ruled locally, and most of them had short tenures. The subsequent activities of Jephthah and Samson did not seem to produce an interim of peace or delay the nation's decline.

29] And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house.

Remember, *Jerubbaal* was the name that Joash gave him when he stood up for him before the men of the city (6:27-32).

30] And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

His wealth didn't prevent his family from becoming a real mess: 69 of his 70 sons were killed by their half-brother who himself was slain by a woman dropping a stone on his head. Throughout the Bible, men who had more than one wife multiplied their heartaches. (In our culture, they take them in series rather than all at once.) There is no security apart from the will of God. Had Gideon practiced Matthew 6:33, subsequent events might have been radically different.

31] And his concubine that *was* in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.

32] And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33] And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

34] And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

35] Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, *namely*, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

Gideon had missed a great opportunity to bring in a real reformation and revival to the land. Instead of using the occasion for God's glory, he used it for His own profit.

It is instructive to contrast Gideon and Abraham in their decisions after their respective victories (Gen 14). Abraham took nothing for himself but made sure that others received their share of the spoils (Gen 14:22-24). He especially refused to take anything from the King of Sodom (Gen 14:17, 21). Instead, Abraham worshiped with Melchizedek, King of Salem, a type of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 7 – 8); in all that he said and did, Abraham gave glory to the Lord of heaven and earth.

Bonar was right:

Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.

Andrew Bonar

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List the occasions where God provided Gideon:
a) wisdom b) courage c) opportunity.
- 2) Where did Gideon blow it?
- 3) Describe the spiritual parallels of the torches in the earthen vessels (2Cor 4:6-12).
- 4) Why was Ephraim a proud tribe? Where did it lead ultimately?
- 5) Contrast the way Gideon and Abraham handled their victories.
- 6) Give other examples where historical victories yield:
a) A historical heritage; and
b) Where they are a source of false pride.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Was Gideon’s brutality appropriate or excessive?
 - 2) When and where could Gideon have done better?
 - 3) Give examples of where our biggest challenges (spiritual minefields) come on the heels of victory.
 - 4) Discuss some possible “lessons” from Gideon:
- 1) Skepticism is the enemy of spirituality.
 - 2) Humble and insignificant people can have a vital role in God’s plan.
 - 3) Believers should never test God.
 - 4) Obedience in small ways can qualify us for larger ministries.
 - 5) God demands that our faith in Him be strong.
 - 6) Success holds special dangers for the believer.
 - 7) When God is on our side, numbers are meaningless.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the genealogies of Abraham's descendants, and the ambiguities of the common term "Arab" in contrast to descendancy from Ishmael, Esau, et al.
- 2) Explore the real origins of Islam, the worship of *Al-Ilah*, in contrast to the propaganda and disinformation commonly reported in the media, and the spiritual and prophetic implications of Islam.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapter 9, about self-promotion; one of the longest chapters and yet the most depressing. Study the three phases of Abimelech's political career.

Session 6

Review

As a result of the Gideon's rout of the Midianites, the land enjoyed peace for 40 years. This is the last period of peace recorded in Judges.

My Kingdom Come

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity!

Habakkuk 2:12

When George Washington's army defeated British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, the end of the Revolutionary War *began*. Winning the war didn't end the problems the colonies faced. Things were so bad economically that there were those who felt the only way to get the affairs of the emergent nation under control was to make George Washington king or dictator. His universal popularity would easily have given him the power to do so if he so desired. But he rejected the plan.

Abimelech did just the opposite. He had such a passionate desire to be king that he allowed nothing to stand in his way, not even the lives of hundreds of innocent people.

No man's life is completely worthless, for anyone can serve as a horrible example. This is the longest chapter in the Book of Judges and one of the most depressing. But it will yield two critical lessons:

- 1) The peril of ambition; and
- 2) The principle of sowing and reaping.

Chapter 9

There were three stages in Abimelech's political career:

1) Seizing the kingdom (vv.1-21)

- 1] And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,

It is interesting that in Chapter 9, Gideon is always called JerubBaal, never Gideon. Cf. 6:32.

Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a concubine: a slave woman who lived with her father's family in Shechem (8:30-31; 9:18). Undoubtedly, he would have been shunned by his half-brothers (cf. v.5).

His name means "my father is a king." Gideon certainly lived like a king, but he refused to establish a dynasty in Israel. Remember, Gideon has made it clear that neither Abimelech nor any of his sons were to rule the people (8:23). [Israel will not have a true king until Saul was anointed in 1 Sam 10.]

Obviously, Abimelech felt Gideon had made a mistake. After his father's death, Abimelech moved from Ophrah to Shechem to start his campaign. In what he did, Abimelech broke several of God's laws and as a result brought destruction upon himself and trouble to the people.

"Thou shalt not covet" is the last of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:17), but breaking it is the first step in breaking the other nine! Ambition can be a dangerous thing: "I will ascend into heaven!" turned an angel into the devil (Isa 14:13); "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" turned a king into an animal (Dan 4:28-37). If we exalt ourselves, God has many ways of bringing us down (Mt 23:12).

- 2] Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh.

The Israelites had been acquainted with the people of Shechem since the day of the Patriarchs (Gen 12:6; 33:18-20; 34:1ff). Both Israelites and Canaanites lived in Shechem during Abimelech's days, which is why he started his campaign there.

Shechem had been a significant religious center since the time of Abraham (Gen 12:6-7). It was located in the narrow valley between the hills of Gerizim and Ebal, site of the recitation of the blessings and cursings of the Law under Joshua (Josh 8:30-35), as well as the further covenant renewal ceremony before Joshua's death (Josh 24:1-28). Shechem was situated on a strategic crossroads of the latitudinal route ascending from the coastal highway in the west and descending to Adam, on the Jordan River, and the longitudinal route along the central ridge from Jerusalem in the south to the northern accesses to the Jezreel Valley.

- 3] And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother.

His mother was a Shechemite and his father was an Israelite. Abimelech could represent both constituencies.

In fact, the Canaanites in Shechem had no indebtedness to Gideon's sons, while Abimelech was one of their own.

- 4] And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him.

בְּרִיחַ בַּעַל *Ba'al Beriyth* = "lord of the covenant"; a god of the Philistines. Recall,

And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-Berith their god.

Judges 8:33

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and "Thou shalt not make for yourself any graven image" are the first two commandments (Ex 20:3-4). Abimelech broke them both: His accepting public money from the

Baal worshipers to finance his crusade was a public announcement that he had renounced the God of Israel and was on the side of Baal.

The Greek philosopher Plato said, “Might is right”; and three centuries later, the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote, “Might makes right.” [In fairness to Plato and Seneca, it should be pointed out that they were not defending political brutality—the end justifies the means—but discussing how one might bring about justice in society. “Might is right” and “Might makes right” only if we sincerely want to *do* right.]

Seventeen centuries later, the French novelist Joseph Joubert wrote,

Might and right govern everything in the world; might till right is ready.

However, when *might* is in the hands of a selfish dictator, *right* rarely has a chance to take over.

Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Lord Acton¹

The Prophet Habakkuk described these people as “guilty men, whose own strength is their god” (Hab 1:11). But we become *like* the gods we worship! (Ps 115:8; 135:18). Ambition is a terrible master. With the tainted money from the heathen temple, he hired a group of mercenaries to gain control over the people, and remove every rival to the throne.

- 5] And he went unto his father’s house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself.

“Thou shalt not murder” is the 6th Commandment (Ex 20:13). This was violated numerous times by Abimelech and his mercenaries. Murderers go to hell (Rev 21:8; 22:15). There’s no evidence that Abimelech and his gang ever repented of their sins. Their feet were “swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:15; Isa 59:7), and that blood would come back on their heads. Murder is bad enough, but when brother kills brother, that is even more heinous. 69 brothers killed! (Only Jotham escaped.) This was probably vengeance for their previous abuses.

Abimelech joined the ranks of other men who committed fratricide:

Cain, (Abel) (Gen 4);
Absalom, (Amnon) (2 Sam 13:23ff);
Jehoram, (6!) (2 Chr 21:4).

It is a cynical comment on the men of the area: how soon they forgot the exploits and indebtedness to Gideon! No one interfered...

- 6] And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.

Beth Millo (“house of the fortress”), the section of the upper classes.
“plain”: **עֵלֹנָא** *‘elown*, a tree, great tree, terebinth or oak; probably the well-known sacred tree of Moreh (Cf. Gen 12:6; 35:4).

He also defiled a place sacred in Jewish history:

- This took place at the “oak of Moreh” where the Lord had appeared to Abraham and promised to give him and his descendants the land (Gen 12:6).
- It was near this site that Israel heard the blessings and the curses read from *Torah* and promised to obey the Lord (Deut 11:26-32; Josh 8:30-35).
- Jacob buried the idols here as he called his family back to God (Gen 24:1-5).
- Here Joshua gave his last speech and led the people in reaffirming their obedience to the Lord (Josh 24:25-26).

How ironic that this sacred history was degraded and dishonored by the selfish acts of one godless man.

The 3rd Commandment says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Ex 20:7). The 9th Commandment forbids us bearing false witness (Ex 20:16). Abimelech broke both when he was crowned king. If he took an oath of office in the name of the Lord, it was blasphemy. If he promised to protect the people and obey the law, it was deception (Deut 17:14-20). No matter what he promised, he had his own agenda and intended to carry it out.

The cynical journalist Ambrose Bierce defined “politics” as : “a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles; the conduct of public affairs for private advantage.”

The Devil’s Dictionary: The Parable of the Trees

- 7] And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

Only Jotham had escaped. Jotham probably spoke from a triangular rock ledge on the side of Gerizim which forms a natural pulpit from which one can be heard as far away as Mount Ebal across the valley.

Mt. Gerizim was the place that the blessings were to be read (Deut 27:12, 28); but Jotham's speech was anything but a blessing. [The tribe of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh—was to stand on the Mount of blessing, but Abimelech hadn't brought any blessing to Gideon's tribe of Manasseh.]

Other parables in the OT: Nathan's "Parable of the Ewe Lamb" (2 Sam 12:1-4); the parable by the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:5-20); the Parable of the Thistle (2 Kgs 14:8-14); the Parable of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1-7). Also, the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain both standard parables as well as "action" parables (Jer 13, 18-19, 27-28; Ezek 4-5, 16, 31, et al.

- 8] The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.
- 9] But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?
- 10] And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us.
- 11] But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?

[Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4 both use trees to represent leaders or nations.]

- 12] Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us.
- 13] And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?

Each refused the honor. Each would have to sacrifice something in order to reign, and weren't prepared to make that sacrifice.

- 14] Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us.

A bramble, or thornbush, was a useless nuisance, the most worthless plant in the Middle East. It produces no fruit, and is too low to the ground to produce any shade. Its wood cannot be used for any kind of construction because it splits too easily. It is good only as fuel for the fire. This was, of course, a symbol of Abimelech.

- 15] And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

This was an absurd proposition: it was too low to cast a significant shadow. Often in the summer, fires would breakout in bramble bushes, and threaten the safety of the trees. Cf. David's use of this image:

But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

2 Sam 23:6,7

Also,

For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother.

Isa 9:18-19

- 16] Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;
- 17] (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian:
- 18] And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;)

[Twice we are told of "the seventy men" (vv.18, 56), but since Jotham escaped, there were only 69. This is no more an "error" than "the twelve" in John 20:24 and 1 Cor 15:5, which were actually only eleven with Judas excepted.]

- 19] If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you:

They should have been ashamed of the way they rejected the house of Gideon and honored a worthless opportunist.

- 20] But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

Jotham made his point: Abimelech, the "bramble king" would be unable to protect the people and he would cause judgment to come that would destroy those who trusted in him. After three conditional clauses, this was a prophecy and a curse: Both Abimelech and his followers would

destroy one another (Notice how literally it was fulfilled: v.57). Abimelech was actually trying to wrest the kingdom away from God:

And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

Judges 8:23

- 21] And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

They obviously didn't receive his rebuke favorably... God is still on the throne, and He will see to it that man's selfish purposes would be frustrated.

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Romans 12:3

There's no competition in the work of the Lord (John 4:34-38; 1 Cor 3:5-9), and there's no need for us to promote ourselves.

2) Defending the Kingdom (vv.22-49)

- 22] When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,

"...reigned" is too strong a word: "governed" would be better. Abimelech didn't reign supremely over the entire nation; there wasn't that kind of solidarity during the days of the Judges. He was in control of Shechem and Beth-Millo (v.6), Arumah (v.41), and Thebez (v.50), all in the western part of Manasseh. It's doubtful that his influence reached to all of the tribes. Three years under his leadership set the stage for the Shechem revolt...

- 23] Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

Notice, it was God who sent a spirit of ill will. (Cf. 1 Kgs 12:15; Isa 19:14). He, indeed, rules the entire universe. Even Satan couldn't touch Job without His permission (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.

Longfellow, *Retribution*

- 24] That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren.

Again, the “threescore and ten” is a collective noun for the sons of Gideon; there were actually 69, excepting Jotham.

- 25] And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech.

Abimelech was living at Arunah (v.41) and these bandits were robbing him of both his tribute money and his reputation. The merchants would divert to a different trade route, and thus avoid whatever tariffs were levied upon them. Furthermore, the word was getting out that the new king couldn't control his people and protect area business—a fundamental requirement of the crown.

- 26] And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

Another brigand and his bands moved into town. There's always an intruder to spoil the fun... One good opportunist deserves another.

- 27] And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech.

At the time of the grape harvest (June-July), the Shechemites held a pagan religious festival, perhaps comparable to the Feast of Ingathering (Lev23:15-22).

- 28] And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him?

They cursed Abimelech and put their confidence in Gaal, who ridiculed both Abimelech and his deputy Zebul who was the governor of Shechem (v.30). Why did Gaal curse and challenge Abimelech? *Because he had been drinking!* (v.27). He reminded the people that their king had a Jewish father; while they were the sons of Hamor, not sons of Jacob (Gen 34:26). The key plank in Abimelech's platform (v.9) turned out to be his “thorn in the flesh.”

- 29] And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out.

Abimelech was living in Arumah (perhaps Kirbet el-Urma between Shechem and Shiloh); Gaal was living in Shechem. He was more accessible to the people and their problems. (This was the same approach that Absalom, years later, would use to steal the hearts of Israel (2 Sam 15:1-6). Gaal closed his festival address by daring to the king to accept his challenge...

- 30] And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled.

Zebul was Abimelech's local representative in Shechem.

- 31] And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee.
- 32] Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field:
- 33] And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion.
- 34] And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies.
- 35] And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait.
- 36] And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men.

Gaal trusted Zebul as a friend; but he was a double agent: Zebul was placing the bait in Abimelech's trap.

- 37] And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim.

"...middle of the land": Heb. "navel of the land"; apparently a reference to Gerizim located centrally in the central highlands. Tree of Meonenim: soothsayer's (or the regards of times) tree, perhaps the oak of Moreh (Gen 12:6).

- 38] Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them.

When it was obvious that an army was attacking Shechem, Gaal had to "put up or shut up." If he hid in the city, he would have been disgraced

and lost his following, and eventually be caught and killed. If he tried to flee, Abimelech's men would have chased him and killed him. [Just as Jesus challenged Judas when He disclosed the presence of a traitor in their midst. Judas had to "fish or cut bait"...]

- 39] And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech.
- 40] And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate.
- 41] And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem.
- 42] And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

Abimelech had one more score to settle: the citizens of Shechem had cursed him (v.27) and were attacking caravans and robbing him of both money and reputation.

- 43] And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them.

The next morning, when the people of Shechem went out of the city to work in the fields, Abimelech set an ambush, blocked the city gate, and slaughtered the trapped citizens.

- 44] And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them.
- 45] And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.

He put salt in the land so that nothing could grow there. This was also a symbolic action that condemned a conquered city so that nobody would want to live there.

Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste; {Or Give wings to Moab, for she will fly away} her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them.

Jeremiah 48:9 (NIV)

Cf. Deut 29:23; Jeremiah 17:6. Archaeology has confirmed this 12th century destruction of Shechem, which remained a ruin till rebuilt by Jeroboam I as his capital (1 Kgs 12:25).

- 46] And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith.

The “tower of Shechem” may have been the same as “the house of Millo” (v.6), where the aristocracy of Shechem lived. The people fled from Beth-Millo to the Temple of Baal-Berith (v.4; cf. 8:33). Apparently the people felt safer in a building devoted to their god, hoping that Abimelech would respect it and leave them alone. Abimelech turned the temple into a convenient furnace and killed all the people in it:

- 47] And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.
- 48] And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done.
- 49] And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women. Thus the Lord avenged the blood of Gideon’s sons. The fire did “come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon” (v.15). The “cedars of Lebanon” represents the leading citizens of the city who had supported Abimelech’s rule (v.20).

[The carnage recorded in this chapter is grim, but hardly compares to the extremes of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, or Yasser Arafat (who, let us not forget, was awarded the “Peace Prize.” Also, the current massacres of Christians in the Sudan, Somalia, et al.)]

3) Losing the Kingdom (vv.50-57)

- 50] Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it.

Since the people of Thebez (about 10 miles NE from Shechem on the road to Beth Shean) had joined in the general rebellion against Abimelech, he went there to punish them as well.

- 51] But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower.

Here, too, the citizens sought the protection of their tower; and Abimelech tried to use the same method of attack that had proven successful at Shechem.

- 52] And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.
- 53] And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech’s head, and all to brake his skull.

He made the mistake of getting too close to the tower, and a woman dropped an upper millstone (12-18 inches in diameter, and several inches thick) on his head and gave him a splitting headache! (This was reminiscent of Jael in Chapter 4.)

This was a triple disgrace:

- 1) He was killed, but not really in a battle;
- 2) He was killed by a woman, a disgrace to a soldier;
- 3) He was killed with a millstone, not a sword.

- 54] Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.

Similar to Saul (1 Sam 31:4). This didn't really change anything: centuries later, Abimelech's shameful death was remembered as being accomplished by a woman (2 Sam 11:21).

- 55] And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place.

Abimelech lost his life and his kingdom. The curse pronounced by his half-brother Jotham was fulfilled on both Abimelech and the people of Shechem (v.20).

- 56] Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:
57] And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

Literally fulfilling curse of Jotham, Gideon's son (v.20):

... let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

Judges 9:20

Beth Millo = "house of fortress."

Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

Psalms 34:21

The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.

Proverbs 21:12

The shedding of innocent blood is something that God takes very seriously and eventually avenges (Deut 19:10, 13; 21:9; 1 Kgs 2:31; Prov 6:17; Isa 59:7; Jer 7:6; 22:3, 17; Joel 3:19).

[In 1990 there were 23,438 murders in the U.S., an average of 3/hour all year long. Add to that the millions of innocent babies killed in their mother's wombs, and it is clear that the "land of the free" is stained with innocent blood.]

I tremble for my country when I recall that God is just, and that His justice cannot sleep forever.

Thomas Jefferson

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What are the main lessons from the career of Abimelech?
- 2) Why is Gideon always referred to as JerubBaal in this chapter?
- 3) Why did Gideon name his son Abimelech? Did that impact his later years?
- 4) List (of the Ten) the Commandments that were violated in this chapter, with examples.

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) We become *like* the gods we worship: (Ps 115:8; 135:18). How does this chapter reveal this?
- 2) How does Habakkuk 1:11 explain the rise of Islam plaguing the free world today?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) List other examples where a lone son escaped from attempts to wipe out rivals to a throne.
- 2) How does this reflect on Satan's attempts to thwart the plan of God with respect to Gen 3:15?

- 3) Research Item: The “judge” (leader) who followed Abimelech was Tola תולע *Tow-lah*, which means “worm.” It also means “scarlet” which was made from a particular worm, *Cermes vermilio*. How could this refer to Psalm 22:6?

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Judges 10, 11, and 12.

Notes:

1. *Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 1887.*

Session 7

Prelude

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

2 Tim 3:16

We have always emphasized that every detail in the Scripture is there by deliberate design. These first two verses contain an obscure little gem that clearly demonstrates this perspective. [I am indebted to Jon Courson for this following insight.]

Chapter 10

- 1] And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim.

The “judge” (leader) who followed Abimelech was not a local: he was a man of Issachar, but who dwelt in Ephraim. He “arose to defend” Israel.

His Grandad: דודו *Dodo*: “beloved one.”

His Dad: פואה *Puah* = “splendid.”

Tola: תולע *Tow-lah*, which means “worm.” (!)

Recall the remarkable 22nd Psalm, written as if it were dictated by our Lord from the cross:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

“helping...”: Heb. “my salvation.”

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Psalm 22:1-8

(The psalm then continues to detail aspects of the crucifixion—as if it were being dictated while Jesus was hanging on the cross itself...)

He, too, left His home (in heaven) to defend His people; despised...

But *Tola* also means “scarlet” (38x; “Crimson”); scarlet dye was made from a particular worm, *Cermes vermilio*, of the family *Coccidae*, of the order *Thynchota* or *Hemiptera*.¹ These insects pierce the thin bark of twigs to suck the sap, from which they prepare a waxy scale to protect their soft bodies. The dye is in this scale. The active ingredient is kermesic acid and the dye is one of the anthroquinones. It is yellow-red in water and becomes the typical violet-red in acid solution. When reproducing, the female climbs a tree (usually the holm oak), where it bears its eggs; the larvae hatch and feed on the body of worm. It gives its life...

“A worm and no man” on the “Tree” of Calvary, that we might be born again. “Take eat, my body, given for you (1 Cor 11:24).”

A crimson spot is left on the branch; when the scarlet spot dries out, in three days, it changes to white as it flakes off...

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Isa 1:18

We have an Accuser of brethren, (Rev 12:10) day and night... yet we, too, have our *Tola*, our defender, our advocate, our propitiation:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:1, 2

* * *

- 2] And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

שָׁמִיר *Shamiyr* = “a point” or “thorn”; a town in the mountain district of Judah; a town in Ephraim where Tola was buried; Cf. Mt 27:29; Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2, 5; Gen 3:18.

- 3] And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years.

Jair was from the tribes east of the Jordan, from the area known as Gilead. In the broadest sense, Gilead is the whole area east of the Jordan, given to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. In the narrower sense, it was bounded on the north by Bashan proper, and on the south by the *Misher*, or plain of Medeba, which lay between the valley of Heshbon and the river Arnon, thus excluding that part of the territory of Reuben from Gilead (Josh 13:9-11).

יָאִיר *Ya'iyir* “he enlightens”:

- 1) a descendant of Manasseh who conquered 60 towns during the time of the conquest (Num 32:41; Deut 3:41; Jos 13:30);
- 2) a judge of Israel for 22 years during the time of the judges; father of 30 sons.

[The Greek name for the Hebrew *Jair* is *Jairus*. (Cf. Ruler of the synagogue in Mark 5:22, Luke 8:41).]

- 4] And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havoth-jair unto this day, which *are* in the land of Gilead.

Havoth-jair: or, the tent-villages of Jair, a group of towns in Bashan named by an earlier Jair (Numb 32:39-42; Deut 3:14). Jair must have been quite wealthy, not only with a plurality of wives; only wealthy people could afford to provide their children with their own personal donkeys (5:10; 12:9, 14). In addition, each had a “city.”

עִיר *ir* (in the plural), cities, towns (places of waking, guarded); a place guarded by waking or a watch; even of mere encampments or posts.

The Hebrew name for “ass colts,” עֵיִר *ah’-yeer*, is identical with that for “cities,” עִיר *’eer*; this play on words is in the same style as produced Jotham’s fable (9:8-16) and Samson’s riddle (14:14).

- 5] And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

Thanks to the leadership of Tola and Jair, Israel enjoyed 45 years of peace and security.

The Dismal Pattern Continues

History teaches us that man learns nothing from history.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

They had enjoyed 45 years of peace and security yet didn’t take the time to thank the Lord for what He had done for them... [Comfortable living often produces weak character.] Ingratitude is a tragic thing. Thanksgiving glorifies God (Ps 69:30). That’s why some say their blessing *after* a meal:

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

Deut 8:10

This can be a strong defense against selfishness and idolatry. If they had only reviewed their own history and learned from it, their lives and future would have been quite different. From the time of Othniel to the days of Gideon, they endured over 50 painful years of oppression from their enemies. By now they should have known that their blessings were a response to obedience, and their chastening a response to their rebellion (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; et al.).

These were the terms of the covenant that they had accepted when they entered the land: Josh 8:30-35. [So, too, ourselves: How readily we are abandoning our own heritage... to our own peril.] The Lord had given them victory over seven different nations (vv. 11-12); but now they were worshipping seven different varieties of pagan gods (v.6).

- 6] And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

What foolishness to worship the gods of the enemies they defeated!
Some of the pagan gods:

Baal	Canaan, Aram, Phoenicia
Asherah	Canaan, Aram, Phoenicia
Ashtoreth	Canaan, Aram, Phoenicia
Athtart, Astarte	Aram
Ishtar	Babylonia
Hadad, Rimmon	Aram
(Arameans' name for Baal)	
Adad, Hadad	Mesopotamia
Chemosh	Moab
Milcom, Molech	Ammon
Dagon	Philistia
Resheph	Aram

Aram

In Genesis 10 Aram is described as a son of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, and Aram (arranged in the geographical order from E to W) being the four brethren, sons of Shem. Aram is the elevated region from the NE of Palestine to the Euphrates and Tigris; Balaam's home (Num 23:7; Deut. 23:4).

Aram = Syria: stretching from the Jordan and Lake Gennesareth to the Euphrates, rising 2000 feet above the level of the sea. In contrast to Canaan, the lowland bordering on the Mediterranean. In Gen 24:10 (Heb.) Aram Naharaim means "the highland between the two rivers," i.e., Mesopotamia. Many petty kingdoms in David's time formed parts of the whole of Aram; Damascus subsequently absorbed these.

Aram (Syria) stands for Assyria in 2 Kings 18:26; Jer. 35:11. [The Antichrist will apparently emerge from this area (Dan 11:36ff.).]

- 7] And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.

Ammonites to the east; this anticipates the saga of Jephthah in the rest of the next couple of chapters.

Philistines to the west; this anticipates the saga of Samson, Chapters 13-16.

Ammonites

A nation sprung from Israel's distant relatives: Ben-ammi, Abraham's nephew Lot's son by his younger daughter (Gen 19:38; Ps 83:7,8), as Moab by his elder, after Lot escaped from Sodom. Ammon and Moab appear continually together; both are said to have hired Balaam (Deut 13:4), though Moab alone is mentioned in the detailed account (Num 22; 23).

The land from the Arnon river to Jabbok is assigned to both (Judg 11:12-18, 25). The Israelites dispossessed the Amorites of land which afterward Ammon occupied, between Arnon and Jabbok, but did not, as Jephthah will reason (vv.12-28), dispossess Ammon of it, though they now claim it as theirs (Num 21:24, 26, 29).

Ammon had destroyed the aboriginal Rephaim (post-flood *nephilim*), named *Zamzumim*, and occupied their land, Jabbok being their boundary (Deut 2:20,21,37).

Moab was probably the more civilized half of Lot's descendants; whence we read of the plentiful fields, hay, summer fruits, vineyards, presses, songs of the grape treaders, of Moab (Isa 15; 16; Jer 48).

Ammon was the more fierce, plundering, Bedouin-like half; whence we read of their threat of thrusting out the right eye of all in Jabesh Gilead (1 Sam 11:2), ripping up pregnant women in Gilead (Amos 1:13), treacherously murdering, as Ishmael, Baalis' agent, did (Jer 40:14; 41:5-7), suspecting and insulting their ally David to their own ruin (2 Sam 10:1-5; 12:31).

Ammon's one stronghold, Rabbah, "the city of waters" (20 cities are mentioned v.33, perhaps some Moabite cities), forms a contrast to Moab's numerous towns with their "high places" (Jer. 48). Ammon's idol, Moloch, accordingly, they worshipped in a tent—the token of nomad life—not a fixed temple or high place, such as was appropriated to the god of the more settled people of Moab (Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43).

Ammon crossed Jordan and seized Jericho [Beth Yerah, House of the Moon God] for a time (Judg 3:13). Jephthah and Saul sorely punished them (Judg 11:33; 1 Sam 11:11; 14:47). In Jehoshaphat's reign, Ammon joined with Moab in the expedition for uprooting Judah from its possession, (2 Chr 20; Ps 83:3-7). So utterly were the confederates routed that the Jews spent three days gathering the spoil.

They had to bring gifts to Uzziah (2 Chr 26:8). Jotham reduced them to pay 100 talents of silver, 10,000 measures of wheat, and 10,000 of barley. Ammon seized on the cities of Gad from which Tiglath Pileser had carried the Israelites (Jer. 49:1-6; Zeph. 2:8,9). On the return to Jerusalem Tobiah, an Ammonite, joined with Sanballat, of Horonaim of Moab, in opposing Nehemiah's restoration of the city walls (Neh. 2:10,19). Naamah, Solomon's wife, mother of Rehoboam, was an Ammonite.

Their idol, Moloch, appears also under the varied form Milcom and Malcham, as the Heb. for "their king" may be rendered. Compare Zeph 1:5; 2 Sam 12:30. Solomon's Ammonite wives seduced him to rear an altar to this "abomination," to his own hurt (Jer 49:1,3).

Nahash, perhaps a common title of their kings, means a **serpent**.

- 8] And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that *were* on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which *is* in Gilead.

"...oppressed": Heb. "crushed."

Eighteen years: the same length as that of the earlier Moabite servitude (3:18). The land of the Amorites was the territory of Sihon the king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan (Num 32:33). The territory bounded by the river Jabbok on the north, and the Arnon river on the south, by the wilderness on the east, and the Jordan on the west, belonged to Moab, but the Amorites had taken it from them before the conquest of Sihon by the Israelites (11:13-22).

- 9] Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

It would seem that at this time the king of Ammon may have also been king of the Moabites, since he laid claim to the land which once belonged to Moab (11:13, 24).

- 10] And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

As history repeats itself, they cry out for help. But this time God announced that He wouldn't help them anymore. They should ask their new gods for help! (Cf. Deut 32:36-38.)

- 11] And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, *Did not I deliver you* from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

From the Egyptians: as in Exodus; from the Amorites (Num 21:21-35); from the children of Ammon: confederates with Moabites under Ehud (3:13); from the Philistines (3:31).

- 12] The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

Zidonians: northern Canaanites under Jabin, king of Canaan (18:7)? Amalekites: in alliance with the Moabites (3:13); with Canaanites (4:14); and with the Midianites (6:3, 33). Maonites: Midianites (of Chs. 6, 7, 8)?

The Lord had given them victory over seven different nations (vv. 11-12); but now they were worshiping seven different varieties of pagan gods (v. 6).

- 13] Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.
14] Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

The greatest judgment God can send His people is to let them have their own way and not interfere! “Wherefore God gave them up... God gave them up... God gave them over” (Rom 1:24, 26, 28).

- 15] And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.

This was too much for Israel, so they repented, put away their false gods, and told God He could do to Israel whatever He wanted to do.

- 16] And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

“...grieved”: Heb. “shortened”; implies impatience.

Their hope wasn't in their repenting or their praying but *in the character of God*.

Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

Neh 9:31

[Representing the character of God is a prime consideration when considering various doctrinal differences: amillennialism, et al. Cf. Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of the Character of God*, Loyal Publishing, Sisters OR, 2002.]

Lack of Leadership

(This verse should start a new chapter: the deliverance by Jephthah begins here.)

- 17] Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh.

There were several places named “Mizpah” (watchtower) in Scripture; this one was in Gilead (v.29); Cf. Josh 13:26. This is probably where Laban and Jacob parted (Gen 31:25, 49).

- 18] And the people *and* princes of Gilead said one to another, What man *is he* that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

“People and princes...”: No “and” in the Hebrew: the words in apposition = the assembly of the chiefs of Gilead. After 18 years of oppression, the people were prepared to act, but there was nobody ready to take the lead. An army without a general. As an incentive, they promised that the leader would be named head over all of Gilead. [Where are the Elijahs when you need them?]

Chapter 11

- 1] Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he *was* the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Jephthah, the unwanted brother.

“Gilead” can be a geographic term; it can also mean the son or descendant of Machir, the son of Manasseh (1 Chr 7:14, 17; Num 26:29, 30).

- 2] And Gilead’s wife bare him sons; and his wife’s sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father’s house; for thou *art* the son of a strange woman.

If Jephthah was the son of Aramitess (1 Chr 7:14), born to Gilead in his old age in the wilderness, he was possibly about 17 at the time of the entrance to Canaan; rejected by his brothers returning from the wars of Canaan.

- 3] Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

“...from”: Heb. “from the face.”

Tob was 80 miles to the north, near Syria, beyond the frontier of the Hebrew territories. He led a band of adventurers (“reckless persons”), brigands; a “Robin Hood” of the area. He was known as a “man of valor” (v.1) and had no trouble gathering a following.

- 4] And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

(This reunites with narrative of Chapter 10.)

- 5] And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

His brothers didn’t want him, but the elders sent a deputation 80 miles to solicit his help...

- 6] And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

Captain: a military term; but also used a ruler (Isa 1:10, for the rulers of Sodom).

- 7] And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father’s house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

This indicates that Jephthah’s expulsion was a tribal matter, not just among the family itself...

- 8] And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

- 9] And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

No interrogative in the Hebrew: it lays down a condition to which they assent (v.10):

- 10] And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.
- 11] Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

Mizpah (“watch-tower”): where Laban and Jacob parted (Gen 31:25, 49). His consistent piety of language reveals a personal spiritual posture despite his roving lifestyle. Notice Jephthah’s emphasis that it would be the Lord’s victory, not his (v.9). It was before the Lord that agreement was witnessed (v.11), and before the general assembly at Mizpah.

Jephthah was a man of faith, not simply an opportunist: he would be included in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11:32. We can’t help but be amused about how his brothers felt when he returned home as general of the army and leader of the land!

- Cf. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, and later prime minister of the then-known world!
- Cf. David, who took 7 years to gain the full support of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.
- Cf. Our Lord Jesus Christ, rejected by His people, but the Ruler of the Universe!

An Attempt at Diplomacy

Jephthah was not a hothead looking for a fight; he recognized the real cost of war. And he knew his Scriptures. He makes an attempt at an honorable peace by showing that there is no just cause for quarrel. This was required by law to avoid war until negotiation had failed (Deut 20:10-18).

- 12] And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land.
- 13] And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those *lands* again peaceably.

This was the type of myth that Hitler used on the Sudetenland to subdue Czechoslovakia; this is similar to the myth that the Palestinians have promoted in their quest to exterminate Israel today.

The Facts of History

(The following is consistent with references from Numbers and Deuteronomy)

- 14] And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:
- 15] And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:
- 16] But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

Cf. Num 13:26; 14:25.

- 17] Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken *thereto*. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not *consent*: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

Cf. Num 20:14, 17.

- 18] Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon *was* the border of Moab.

Num 21:11-20; Deut 2:1.

- 19] And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

Num 21:21-14; Deut 2:2, 26, 30.

- 20] But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

Num 21:23; Deut 2:32; Isa 15:4; Jer 48:21, 34.

- 21] And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.
- 22] And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

They didn't *steal* any land; they *captured* it from the Ammonites and the Amorites (Num 21:21-35; Deut 33-36). Furthermore, the Amorites had

originally taken the land from the Moabites (Num 21:29); so if Israel's claims by conquests weren't valid, neither were the claims of the Amorites!

It Was the Lord's Land Grant to Israel

- 23] So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

Jephthah was always careful to give the Lord the glory for any victories Israel had won (vv.9, 21, 23-24).

- 24] Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

Chemosh: The national god of the Moabites (Num 21:29; 1 Kgs 9:7, 33; Jer 48:7, 13, 46, et al.). "Thy god": this phrase indicates a very close connection between Moab and Ammon at that time, possibly being under one king. Chemosh, rather than Moloch, is mentioned because the territory had belonged to the Moabites, but Chemosh had not been able to save it from the Amorites.

"From Time Immemorial"

(Cf. Joan Peter's monumental exposure of the Palestinian myth.)

- 25] And now *art* thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,

If the territory in question was Moabite property, how come Balak laid no claim to it? He was the enemy of the Israelites, and yet when Israel took possession of the land, and dwelt in Heshbon, its capital, and the related villages thereof, and in Aroer and her villages, and the rest along the shores of the Arnon river, Balak never strove over them: plain proof that he did not look upon them as his property (cf. Num 21:23ff; Deut 2:36; Josh 12:2).

- 26] While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that *be* along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover *them* within that time?

Why was the King of Ammon making his claims now? During the three centuries of Israel's dwelling in the area (of present Jordan), they hadn't

tried to reclaim their territory. Even back in the days of Moses, even the King of Moab hadn't tried to get his land back. If the Ammonites had a legitimate claim to the territory, they should have said something centuries ago!

“300 years”? The commencement of the oppression by Chushanrishathaim (3:8) to the death of Jair is 301 years; however, this is regarded by some as untenable since it would require 600 years between the Exodus and the Temple. (The dating of the Exodus is also problematical for other reasons.) Some sources suspect that 300 *cities* is more appropriate.

The Real Defender

- 27] Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

Jephthah's Four Arguments: the facts of history (vv.14-22); the land grant from the Lord (vv.23-24); three centuries of occupation (vv.25-26); they were fighting against God (vv.27-28).

Jephthah's final argument: he hadn't declared war on Ammon; it was Ammon that declared war on Israel. And if God gave Israel the land, then the Ammonites were declaring war on the Lord God. And that could only spell defeat for Ammon.

- 28] Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.
- 29] Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over [to] Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over *unto* the children of Ammon.

Empowered by the Spirit of God, Jephthah called for volunteers (12:1, 2) and mustered his army. Mizpeh was the capital, his base of operations. [In his exuberance, he foolishly made a bargain with God, a subject we will take up subsequently.]

The Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites, and he captured 20 of their strongholds as he pursued the fleeing enemy army. This would guarantee freedom and safety for Israel as they traveled in the territory of Gilead. The Ammonites didn't threaten Israel for another 50 years (1 Sam 11:1ff).

The writer of Hebrews included Jephthah as a man of faith (Heb 11:32):

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 11:32 -12:2

The circumstances of birth or of family are not a handicap to the person who will live by faith.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) How do the meanings behind the names *Tola*, *Dodo*, and *Puah* relate to Psalm 22?
- 2) Give other examples of Israel's *repeated* failure to learn from their chastisements in the Book of Judges.
- 3) How do the four arguments that Jephthah advanced fit the current situation in Israel today?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Give examples of Hegel’s observation that “man learns nothing from history.”
- 2) Give examples where “comfortable living leads to weak character.”
- 3) Give examples how we become like the gods we worship (Psalm 115:8; 135:18).

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the legitimacy of the Palestinian claims upon the land of Israel today. (Cf. Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine*, Harper and Row, New York NY, 1984. Also, Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations*, Bantam Books, New York NY, 1993. Also, *The Betrayal of the Chosen*, our briefing pack on this subject.)
- 2) Review the origin and subsequent histories of the Ammon, Moab, and Edom (Cf. Dan 11:41).

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapter 11:30 through the end of Chapter 12. Also, read about the dangers of taking a vow (Lev 27; Num 30; Deut 23:21-25).

Notes:

1. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p.3109.

Session 8

Review

Jephthah was installed as the captain and leader, and after an attempt at negotiation, he attacked and soundly defeated the Ammonites. However, his excessive exuberance caused him to offer his famed ill-considered vow. [We are indebted to Warren Wiersbe’s rebuttal to the conventional expositions on this fabled issue.]

Chapter 11

Jephthah's Vow

In the exuberance of going out to battle, Jephthah made his famous vow. It was acceptable to God to make vows, provided they obeyed the laws governing them (Lev 27; Num 30; Deut 23:21-25). Vows were completely voluntary, but the Lord expected them to fulfill them.

- 30] And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,
31] Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, [or/and] I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

“...whatsoever”: Heb. “that which cometh forth, which shall come forth.” The Hebrew word translated “whatsoever” is masculine, and suggests that he expected to meet a person (*The Living Bible* reads, “the first person coming out of his house”).

[and/or: a *waw* connective; it could be either. Herein lies a major controversy: “and/or I will offer it,” etc. (More on this later).]

Jephthah made a bargain: If God would give the Israelites victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah would sacrifice to the Lord whatever came out of his house when he arrived home in Mizpah. God gave him victory, and Jephthah kept his promise. But what was his promise and how did he keep it? What actually happened to Jephthah's daughter, his only child? Therein lies the issue (pun not intended). The more you study Jephthah's vow, the more puzzling it becomes: there are strange ambiguities in his expression:

- How did he know who or what would come out of the door of his house?
- What if the first thing to greet him happened to be an unclean animal that was unacceptable to God?
- What if that person turned out to be a neighbor's child or a visiting stranger?
- What right did Jephthah have to take either life, and thereby offer to God a sacrifice that cost him nothing? (Cf. 2 Sam 24:24).

Furthermore, Jephthah knew that YHWH didn't approve of, or accept, human sacrifices (Lev 18:21, 20:1-5; Deut 12:31, 18:10). The Ammonites put their children through the fire as part of their worship of Molech.

Eighteen years earlier, God had severely chastened them for adopting the practices of heathen paganism. It's also doubtful that Jephthah's friends and neighbors would have permitted him to slay his own (and only) daughter in order to fulfill a foolish vow. [King Saul's soldiers didn't let him kill his son Jonathan, who had violated his father's foolish vow (1 Samuel 14:24-46).]

Where would Jephthah offer his daughter as a sacrifice? The Lord only accepted sacrifices at the Tabernacle altar (Lev 17:1-9), and they had to be offered by the Levitical priests. He would have to travel to Shiloh to fulfill his vow (Deut 16:2, 6, 11, 16). It's doubtful that even the most unspiritual priest would offer a human sacrifice on the sanctified altar. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Jephthah would have gone to Shiloh, since it lies in the territory of the Ephraimites, with whom there was a deadly feud (12:1-6). Such a trip would certainly have yielded some comment in the text.

[Even if a priest did offer Jephthah's daughter as a burnt offering, the sacrifice would not be acceptable: a burnt offering had to be a male (Lev 13:10).]

When Jephthah would have arrived at Shiloh, he would have learned from any priest that *paying the proper amount of money could have redeemed his daughter* (Lev 27:1-8). As a successful soldier just returning from looting the enemy, Jephthah could easily have paid the redemption price. Jephthah was a pious man (v.11); none of this is consistent with the presentation of him in the text.

A Resolution

Would a Spirit-empowered man (v.29), committed to the Lord (v.11), even make such a vow? Several expositors point out that the little word "and" (v.31), in the Hebrew is the single letter ו, *waw*, which can *either* be conjunctive ("and") or disjunctive ("or").¹ This implies that whatever met him when he returned home would be *dedicated* to the Lord (if a person), *or* sacrificed to the Lord (if an animal).

If he was met by his daughter, Jephthah would give her to the Lord to serve Him at the Tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22). She would remain a virgin, which meant that she would not know the joys of motherhood or perpetuate her father's inheritance in Israel. This would be reason enough for her and her friends to spend two months grieving, etc.

- 32] So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.
- 33] And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, *even* twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

God fulfilled Jephthah's request and gave the Ammonites into his hands. Aroer is 14 mi. E of the Dead Sea, near the intersection of the Arnon River, the southern boundary of Reuben and the "King's Highway" on the main N-S trade route.

- 34] And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she *was his* only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.
- 35] And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.
- 36] And she said unto him, My father, *if* thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, *even* of the children of Ammon.
- 37] And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

Nowhere in the text does it indicate that Jephthah actually killed his daughter, nor do we find anyone bewailing her death. The emphasis (vv.37-40) is on remaining a virgin.

- 38] And he said, Go. And he sent her away *for* two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

If Jephthah was going to kill his daughter, he would want her home with himself, not running around on the mountains with her girlfriends. Why would the girl lament her virginity if she expected to die? Of what significance is virginity if you're heading for the grave? She would have been lamenting her impending death instead.

- 39] And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her *according* to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

"...custom": or, "ordinance."

- 40] *That* the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

“to lament”: תָּנָה *tanah*, to recount, rehearse, tell again; celebrate, attribute honor. The “lament” is actually to *celebrate*: her devotion and obedience. She actually deserves to stand with Isaac as a faithful child, willing to obey both father and God, no matter what the cost.

Key Lesson: Jephthah kept his commitment! (Whichever view is correct). *The absence of the sanctity of our commitments is a major problem in our society.* We see it the fabric of our businesses; we see it in our marriages...

Chapter 12

A Ruler in Defense

- 1] And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

The leaders of the tribe of Ephraim expressed to Jephthah the same pride and anger they had shown to Gideon (8:1). As before, they felt entitled to share the glory of victory even though they weren't willing to risk their lives in battle. They had only hostility to the new ruler of the tribes east of the Jordan. There was, apparently, a long standing disparagement of the tribes who remained east of the Jordan: Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. They were looked down upon by the tribes west of the Jordan, exemplified by the Ephraimites.

- 2] And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.
- 3] And when I saw that ye delivered *me* not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

Gideon had used flattery, but Jephthah took a more direct approach: he reminded them that:

- 1) His first concern was to defeat the Ammonites, not to please his neighbors.
- 2) Furthermore, for 18 years, nobody from Ephraim had offered to come to their rescue.

- 3) Jephthah had issued a call for the tribes to assist him, but Ephraim hadn't responded.
- 4) It didn't seem that the Lord needed their help...
- 4] Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites *are* fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, *and* among the Manassites.
- 5] And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was *so*, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, *Art* thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

“...escaped”: פָּלִיט *pahleet*, refugee, fugitive, renegade.

- 6] Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce *it* right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Quite a slaughter. Perhaps Jephthah could have practiced Prov 15:1 and 17:14, but it seems that the time had come to call their bluff. (Jephthah *had* attempted diplomacy with the Ammonites, so it seems he knew how and when to employ it.)

Shibboleth

The Hebrew word *Shibboleth* means “a stream” or “ear of grain.” The Ephraimites were unable to pronounce the aspirate (as indeed the Greeks also have no “sh” sound), and said *Sibboleth*, so, for them, it was a dead give away! (*Sibboleth* means “burden.” To the Ephraimites, it sure was!)

[The term “Shibboleth” has thus become an idiom in the cryptographic community. During WWII, the American Indians were used as “code talkers” because the Japanese couldn’t translate or decrypt them. This was featured in a recent movie, *Windtalkers*.]

This same dialectical issue surfaces in the NT:

And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

Matthew 26:73

And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

Mark 14:69, 70

Jesus also said our words will either justify or betray us:

For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Matthew 12:37

There is a word—a single word—that will focus our lives, and will yield us entrance into heaven: *Kuriat*, which means “Lord.” Jesus is Lord. Thus, for we who acknowledge Jesus as Lord, *kuriat* becomes our *shibboleth* to bring us into the promise and fullness of God.

- 7] And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in *one of* the cities of Gilead.

Ibzan

- 8] And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

Not necessarily the Bethlehem down south in Judah (Ephratah); there also was a Bethlehem up north in Zebulon, about 6 miles from Nazareth. Josephus, however, records that Ibsan was of the tribe of Judah.

- 9] And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, *whom* he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

Josephus² says that, except being the head of a very numerous family, he did nothing in the seven years of his administration that was worth recording or deserved a memorial. So he died an old man and was buried in his own country. Every Jew was to teach his sons three things: The law; a trade; and to find a wife. Ibzan apparently had his hands full...

- 10] Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

Elon

- 11] And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

Elon means “plain.”

- 12] And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

Elon and *Aijalon* are identical in unpointed Hebrew. Aijalon is not listed among the Zebulonite cities in Joshua 19:10-16; perhaps it was named from Elon, its possessor.

Abdon

- 13] And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.
14] And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

“...nephews”: grandchildren; Hebrew, “son’s sons.” Quite a bunch.
[Grandchildren are our reward for not killing our kids!]

“...ass colts” may refer to horses.³

- 15] And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

After the victories of Jephthah, and the leadership of his three successors, Israel had 31 years of peace and security. How paradoxical: the hero of the defeat of the Ammonites—and the trouncing of Ephraim—had no family, and yet his successors had numerous children and grandchildren.

We have reviewed Jephthah, and the challenge of the Ammonites in the east. Next, we will study the paradoxical career of Samson, dealing with the Philistines in the west: Chapters 13 – 16.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Review and list the references that highlight Jephthah’s spiritual condition and walk with the Lord.
- 2) List the problems with the traditional view that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter as an offering to the Lord.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Explore the role of vows in our society, and our personal lives.
- 2) What are the implications of this chapter regarding our traditional *marriage* vows?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Catalog the incidences of vows in the OT and in the NT.

Preparation for Next Session:

Next, we will study the career of Samson, dealing with the Philistines: Chapters 13 – 16. Contrast his successes and his failures. (What did his hair have to do with anything?)

Notes:

1. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset & David Brown, *Critical, Experimental, and Practical Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, (5 vols), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, 1948, Vol 2, p.104.
2. *Antiquities*, 5:7.130.
3. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, Vol 2, p.106.

Session 9

Review

We have been dealing with the Ammonites in the east. Now we will be dealing with the Philistines in the west—along the southern coast. We will also be dealing with the colorful—but enigmatic—exploits of Samson, who, unfortunately, was bold before men but weak with regards to women. He exemplifies what James emphasized:

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:8

Empowered by the Spirit of God, he yielded his body to the appetites of the flesh. Called to declare war on the Philistines, he fraternized with the enemy; he even tried to marry a Philistine woman. He fought the Lord's battles by day and disobeyed the Lord's commandments by night.

Given the name Samson (which means "sunny"), he ended up in darkness, blinded by the enemy he was supposed to conquer. A sad end to a promising life.

Chapter 13

- 1] And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

The Philistines

Philistines were originally from Mizraim (Egypt); Deut 2:23; Gen 10:13, 14. From Caphtor, originally the northern delta of the Nile, from which the Phoenicians emigrated to Asia. (Crete was an intermediate resting place, and gave rise to the legends as their source. Tacitus (Hist., 5:2) says “the inhabitants of Palestine came from Crete.”)

The time of migration must have been very early, as the Philistines were settled in Palestine in Abraham’s time (Gen. 21:32,34). Their immigration to the neighborhood of Gerar in the south country was before Abraham’s time, for he deals with them as a pastoral tribe there (Gen 21:32,84; 26:1,8).

Philistiyim means immigrants, from the Ethiopic *fallasa*. Philistia is derived from the Ethiopic *falasa* “to emigrate,” Hebrew *palash*, “wander.” (In the W. of Abyssinia are the Falashas, i.e., emigrants, probably Israelites from Palestine.)

The Romans later deliberately named the region *Palestina* (Latin for Philistines) after the enemies of the Jews in an attempt to erase their memory. Thanks to the British, they almost succeeded.

Their uncircumcision was due to their having left Egypt at a date anterior to the Egyptians’ adoption (Herodotus ii. 36) of circumcision (compare Jer 9:25,26).

By the time of the Exodus, the Philistines had become formidable (Ex 13:17; 15:14). At Israel’s invasion of Canaan they had advanced N. and possessed fully the seacoast plain from the river of Egypt (*el Arish*) to Ekron in the N. (Josh 15:4,47), a confederacy of the five cities (originally Canaanite) Gaza (the leading one), Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (always put last).

The *Shephelah*: Their plain was famed for its fertility in grain, vines, and olives (Judg 15:5), so that it was the refuge from times of famine (2 Kgs 8:2; compare Gen 26:12). It suited war chariots, while the low hills of the shephelah afforded sites for fortresses. Philistia is an undulating plain, 32 miles long, and from nine to 16 miles broad, from 30 to 300 ft. above

the sea. To the E. lie low spurs culminating in hog's backs running N. and S., and rising in places 1,200 ft. above the sea. To the E. of these the descent is steep, about 500 ft., to valleys E. of which the hill country begins. The sand is gaining on the land, so that one meets often a deep hollow in the sand, and a figtree or apple tree growing at the bottom, or even a house and patch of ground below the sand level. It was the commercial thoroughfare between Phoenicia and Syria on the N. and Egypt and Arabia in the S. Ashdod and Gaza were the keys of Egypt, and the latter was the depot of Arabian produce.

The term "Canaan" (merchant) applied to the Philistine land (Zeph 2:5) proves its commercial character. They sold Israelites as slaves to Edom and Greece, for which God threatens retribution in kind, and destruction (Amos 1:6-8; Joel 3:3-8). They were proficient in smelting iron; they had so subjugated Israel as to outlaw all smiths and indigenous iron workers (1 Sam 13:19). They used sometimes to burn their prisoners alive (Judg 15:6; Ps 78:63). Their speech differed from the Jews' language (Neh 13:23,24).

[Review the events of 1 Samuel 4 and the steps taken by the Philistines to return the stolen Ark.]

A Child of Promise

- 2] And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

The tribe of Dan was originally assigned to the land adjacent to Judah and Benjamin extending to the Mediterranean (Josh 19:40-48), but since the Danites were unable to dislodge the coastal inhabitants, most of the tribe relocated to the north (Judg 18-19). Some of them remained in their original location. Zorah was a city 15 miles from Jerusalem, near the Philistine border, at the highest point on the *Shephelah*. Samson would often cross that border to satisfy his whims.

- 3] And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

Cf. Abraham and Sarah: Isaac (Gen 17); Amram and Jochebed: Moses (Ex 6:20); Elkanah and Hannah: Samuel (1 Sam 1); Mary: Jesus (Luke 1).

Other servants of God chosen before birth include Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-5) and Paul (Gal 1:15); although Psalm 139:15-16 teaches that God is

involved in the conception of *every* child. [Microbiological information equations would seem to require that God is involved in *every cell division* to resolve conflict resolution logic in the devolution of stem cells, etc.]

Each baby is a gift from God; a new beginning, with tremendous potential. How tragic that we live in a society which sees an unborn baby as a menace instead of a miracle, and intruder rather than an inheritance. . . . Most expositors see the “Angel of the Lord” as a preincarnate appearance of the Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Cf. Gen 22:1-8; 31:11-13; Ex 3:1-6; Judg 6:11-24).

- 4] Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean *thing*:

Like John the Baptist, Samson would be a *Nazarite* from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:13-15).

Nazarite (Num 16)

(= “to separate,” “to consecrate.”) For a period of time, they consecrated themselves to the Lord in a special way:

- They abstained from drinking wine and strong drink;
- They avoided touching dead bodies; and, as a mark of identification,
- They allowed their hair to grow.

“Nazarites for days” were the norm. Only Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were *perpetual* Nazarites; “Nazarites forever” as the *Mishna* classifies them. Don’t confuse *Nazarite* with *Nazarene*. Jesus was *not* a Nazarite: He drank wine (Mt 11:19; Mk 11:25); and He touched dead bodies (Lk 7:14; 8:54).

- 5] For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

“...begin”: Samson’s 20 years in office were during the 40 years of Philistine rule: 1095–1055 B.C., ending with Israel’s victory at Mizpeh (1 Sam 7). It was about the middle of this period—and the beginning of Samson’s period—that the ignominious defeat at the battle of Aphek resulted in the Ark being lost, etc. (1 Sam 4). It was the end of this period that probably coincided with the judgeship of Samuel.

The Philistines had disarmed the Jews (1 Sam 13:19-23) and had little fear of rebellion. (Judg 15:9-13 highlights that many were ostensibly content with their situation and didn't want Samson to "rock the boat"; content with their bondage and the status quo.) Nowhere does the text indicate that Israel cried out to God for deliverance during this period.

Samson didn't deliver them from foreign domination; he simply *began* the work others would finish (13:5). It would take the prayers of Samuel (1 Sam 7:10-14) and the conquests of David (2 Sam 5:17-25) to finish the job.

- 6] Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told he me his name:
- 7] But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean *thing*: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.

She was also to avoid foods that were unclean to the Jews (Lev 11; Deut 14:3-20).

- 8] Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.
- 9] And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband *was* not with her.
- 10] And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the *other* day.
- 11] And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, *Art* thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I *am*.
- 12] And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and *how* shall we do unto him?

The *Torah* already had given them instructions as to how to raise their children (Deut 6). Here and v.17, the Hebrew verb is in the singular. In the LXX the *word* is in the singular (!)

- 13] And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.
- 14] She may not eat of any *thing* that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean *thing*: all that I commanded her let her observe.
- 15] And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

He wanted to be an appreciative host (Cf. Abraham, Gen 18:1-8; Gidoen, 6:18-19).

- 16] And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he *was* an angel of the LORD.
- 17] And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What *is* thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?
- 18] And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* secret?

“...secret”: rendered “wonderful” in the American Standard Version, LXX English Translation, New American Standard Version, New King James, Revised Standard Version, Young’s Literal Translation, Douay-Rheims American Edition, English Standard Version.

פֶּלֶא *pele’* wonderful, incomprehensible, extraordinary hard to understand thing; wonder .

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called **Wonderful**, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

2 Corinthians 12:4

Cf. Rev 21:17; 3:12; 19:12.

- 19] So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered *it* upon a rock unto the LORD: and *the angel* did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

“...wondrously”: same as v.18: an amazing, extraordinary thing.

- 20] For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on *it*, and fell on their faces to the ground.
- 21] But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he *was* an angel of the LORD.
- 22] And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

Frightened just as Gideon was (6:19-23) because of Exodus 33:20; Deut 18:16, et al. (Cf. Gen 32:30; Isa 6:5.)

- 23] But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would

he have shewed us all these *things*, nor would as at this time have told us *such things* as these.

Common sense logic, indeed. [Evidence of an accepted sacrifice: just as His resurrection and ascension is for us!]

- 24] And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

Samson means “sunny” or “brightness.” (From *shemesh*, like the sun.) While other “judges” were said to be clothed with God’s Spirit (3:10; 6:34; 11:29), only of Samson is it said “the Lord blessed him.”

- 25] And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Eshtaol is town about 1 ½ miles ENE of Zorah. Samson would later be buried between those two towns (16:31).

The secret of Samson’s strength was his Nazarite vow, symbolized by his unshorn hair, and the source of his strength was the Holy Spirit (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). Only a few of his feats are recorded in the Book of Judges (16:24):

- Killing a lion bare-handed (14:5,6);
- Slaying 30 Philistines (14:19);
- Catching 300 foxes (15:3-5);
- Breaking bonds (15:14; 16:9, 12, 14);
- Slaying 1,000 men with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15);
- Carrying away the Gaza city gate (38 miles!)(16:3);
- Destroying the temple of the Philistines (16:30).

A fun loving guy with a sense of humor; but he didn’t take his gifts—or his work—seriously. His strength was a weapon to fight with and a tool to build with, not a toy to play with. He was a loner; he never “rallied his troops” to unite Israel to throw off the Philistine yoke. For 20 years he played the champion, but not the leader.

Chapter 14

According to Hebrews 11:32, Samson was a man of faith, but he wasn’t a faithful man: he wasn’t faithful to his parent’s teaching; or his Nazarite vow, of the laws of the Lord.

- 1] And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

Timnath: 3-4 miles SW of Zorah.

- 2] And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

He wandered four miles into enemy territory and was captivated by a Philistine woman. This was contrary to God's Law (Ex 34:12-16; Deut 7:1-3; Cf. 2 Cor 6:14-18).

- 3] Then his father and his mother said unto him, *Is there* never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.

"...pleases me well": literally, "right in my eyes." Cf. 17:6; 21:25. The derogatory theme of the Book of Judges.

- 4] But his father and his mother knew not that it *was* of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

The Israelites accepted that domination without resistance until the time of Samuel (15:11; 1 Sam 7:10-14).

- 5] Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

The vineyards of Timnath: in the valley of Sorek ("choicest vines"), famous for its wines (Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21). What was a Nazarite doing in a vineyard? Strike one. Was the lion a warning sign? Who else goes about "as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour"? (1 Pet 5:8).

- 6] And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a [the] kid, and *he had* nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

"...a kid": no; definite article = "the kid," as served in a meal. Impressive. This will figure significantly later...

- 7] And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

He was living by sight, not by faith: the lust of the eyes (1 Jn 2:16). He was pleasing himself, not the Lord. [Are we guilty, too?] He should have been going to a war, not a wedding... But as a result he would kill 30 men (v.19), burn up their crops (15:1-5), and slaughter a great number of Philistines (15:7,8, 15).

- 8] And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, *there was* a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

This would be the basis of a riddle at a drinking party...

- 9] And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

Again, breaking his Nazarite vow: he wasn't supposed to touch anything dead (Num 6:6). Strike two.

- 10] So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

“feast”: מִשְׁתֶּה *mishteh*, drinking party; banquet. A week long, in this case!

- 11] And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

Guards? His reputation preceded him. To ease the tensions, Samson puts forth a riddle and a wager.

- 12] And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find *it* out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments:

“...sheets” and “changes”: inner skirts, and outer garments; together a complete ensemble.

- 13] But if ye cannot declare *it* me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.
14] And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

“Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet.”

- 15] And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? *is it not so?*

Sixty changes of garments was expensive. After three days of frustration they begin to presume upon his wife-to-be. On the final day, they threatened her and her family! The Philistines sometimes used to burn their prisoners alive (Judg 15:6; Ps 78:63).

- 16] And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told *it* me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told *it* my father nor my mother, and shall I tell *it* thee?
- 17] And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

She had been working him over for seven days; but finally she is desperate. Women can be the measure of weakness in a man. She enticed him; controlled him; and then betrayed him.

- 18] And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What *is* sweeter than honey? and what *is* stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

“...plowing with my heifer”: a proverbial usage; if they hadn't cheated they would have lost the wager.

- 19] And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

Ashkelon, one of the five major Philistine cities, was 20 miles away from Timnath. (The eschalot, or shallot, is named from Eshkalon, or Ashkalon.)

Thirty men died because of the party wager. Samson, in his anger, went home without consummating the marriage. Perhaps he planned to do so at the wheat harvest (15:1-3), but then learned that she wasn't his wife!

- 20] But Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

To avoid disgrace, the father had given it to “his best man.” (Probably the one who had extracted the solution to the riddle from her.) This turn

of events would motivate Samson to fight the Philistines instead of entertaining them.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

Psalm 32:8, 9

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What were the three conditions that were violated in Samson's Nazarite vow?
- 2) Are there examples of a Nazarite vow in the NT? (Acts 18:18; 21:23)?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) How do the enigmas of Samson illuminate the ambiguities of *your* life?
- 2) What is the role of vows today? How do they square with our liberties in Christ?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Look up the background on Dagon. (What was the god that the Ninevites worshipped? How was Jonah uniquely qualified to minister to them?)

Preparation for Next Session:

Stand by for action. He's mad now. But after all the carnage, the light that flickered now fails. The He-man has a She-weakness. Read Chapters 15 & 16.

Session 10

Great is the art of beginning, but greater is the art of ending.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The end of a matter is better than its beginning.

Ecclesiastes 7:8, NIV

The Scriptures are full of disappointing examples:

- Lot had the privilege of walking with Abraham and yet ended in a cave, drunk and committing incest with his daughters.
- King Saul began as a humble man but ended up a suicide, destroyed by his stubborn pride.
- King Uzziah was a godly man until he became strong. When he tried to usurp the place of the priests, God judged him by giving him leprosy.
- Ahithophel was David's most trusted advisor, but he ended up hanging himself. (He was Bathsheba's Grandfather!)
- Paul's helper Demas abandoned the ministry because he "loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

We each should pray that the Lord help us all to end well! When David faced the Philistines, he saw them as the enemies of the Lord and sought to honor the name of the Lord in his victory (1 Sam. 17). Samson's attitude was different.

Chapter 15

- 1] But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in.

"...wheat harvest" = about the end of April or early May; the dry season; (highly combustible state...)

- 2] And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: *is* not her younger sister fairer than she take her, I pray thee, instead of her.

Although he had never consummated the marriage, Samson thought he was legally married to the woman of Timnah. Therefore, he took a gift and went to visit her in her father's house. How shocked he was to learn that

not only was he not married, but also the woman he loved was now married to his best-man! There are several surprised bridegrooms in the Bible:

- Adam went to sleep a single man and woke up to learn (happily) that he was married (Gen 2:21–25).
- Jacob woke up and discovered he was married to the wrong woman (Gen 29:21–30).
- Boaz woke up to find his prospective wife lying at his feet on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1–13).

Samson had paid the legal “bride price” for his wife, and now he had neither the money nor the wife. Samson was angry, and even the offer of a younger and prettier bride didn’t appease him. (It was also prohibited: Lev 18:18.)

If anybody should have been punished, it was his father-in-law. He was the real culprit. After all, he took the money and gave the bride away—to the wrong man! But Samson decided to take out his anger on the Philistines by burning up the grain in their fields.

- 3] And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure.
- 4] And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

The word שׁוּׁעַל *shuw`al*, translated “foxes,” also means “jackals,” and that’s probably the animal that Samson used. Foxes are solitary creatures, but jackals prowl in large packs.

שָׁלַח *shalach* really implies *capture*, snared into traps or pitfalls..

Had he tied the firebrands to individual animals, they each would have immediately run to their dens. But by putting two animals together and turning them loose, Samson could be fairly sure that their fear of the fire and their inability to maneuver easily would make them panic. Thus they would run around frantically into the fields and ignite the grain. The fire then would spread into the vineyards and olive groves.¹

- 5] And when he had set the brands on fire, he let *them* go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards *and* olives.

It was the time of the wheat harvest (v.1); thus destroying the land's three main crops (cf. Deut. 7:13; Hag. 1:11).

- 6] Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire.

Since they couldn't hope to overcome Samson, they did the next best thing and vented their wrath on his wife and father-in-law. In the long run, her betrayal of Samson didn't save her life after all (14:15). (Jon Courson points out that her plan to protect her father by betraying her husband "backfired" completely!)

- 7] And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

Cf. Psalm 58:10,11; 76:10.

- 8] And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam.

The idiom "leg on thigh," is a wrestling metaphor for a ferocious attack. (This is not the Etam mentioned either in 1 Chronicles 4:32 (too far away) or 2 Chronicles 11:6 (hadn't been built yet). It was some elevated place in Judah, near Lehi, from which Samson could safely and conveniently watch the enemy.)

- 9] Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi.
10] And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us.

The invasion of Judah didn't help Samson's popularity with his own people, who sadly were content to submit to their neighbors and make the best of a bad situation. Instead of seeing Samson as their deliverer, the men of Judah simply considered him a troublemaker. It was Samson's own fault: he was a champion, but not a leader. He didn't challenge the people, organize them, and trust God to give them victory.

- 11] Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines *are* rulers over us? what *is* this *that* thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them.

This is the only time during Samson's judgeship that the Jews mustered an army, *and it was for the purpose of capturing one of their own men!* A nation is in a sad state indeed when the citizens cooperate with the enemy and hand over their own God-appointed leader!

- 12] And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.
- 13] And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock.

This was heroic, but they missed it.

- 14] *And* when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that *were* upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

"...loosed": melted.

- 15] And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

"...new": Heb. moist. An old one would have been too brittle.

Do you see the irony here? The Philistines had *the most advanced weapons technology of their day*: iron: iron spears, iron chariots, etc. With it they had subjugated the Israelites. They had outlawed smiths and iron-mongers (1 Samuel 13:19). Here the Spirit of God had defeated 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a jackass!

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1 Corinthians 1:25

[Cf. Shamgar's ox-goad; 3:31. One of David's mighty men would later slay 300 with a spear (1 Chr 11:11).]

- 16] And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men.

Samson had a way with words. At his wedding feast, he devised a clever riddle (14:14); and after this great victory, he wrote a poem. It's elegant paronomasia, based on the similarity between the sounds of the Hebrew words *chamor* ("donkey") and *chomer* ("heap").

*With the jawbone of an ass I have piled them in a mass. With the jawbone of an ass I have assailed assailants.*³

(James Moffatt's rendering)²

- 17] And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramath-Lehi.

Ramath-Lehi: "lifting of the jawbone"; or, "Jawbone Heights."

- 18] And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?

So often in Scripture, testing follows triumph:

- No sooner had the Israelites crossed the Red Sea than they became thirsty (Ex 15:22–27) and hungry (Ex 16).
- Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel was followed by his humiliating flight to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 18–19).

If triumphs aren't balanced with trials, there's a danger that we'll become proud and self-confident. Samson's prayer indicates that he considered himself God's servant and that he didn't want to end his life falling into the hands of the godless Philistines. Unfortunately, that's just what ultimately happened.

- 19] But God clave an hollow place that *was* in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof En Hakkore, which *is* in Lehi unto this day.

En Hakkore : "spring of the caller" or "the well of him who cried." (The place where Samson slaughtered the Philistines received the name "Jawbone Hill." Some translations give the impression that the water came from the jawbone because the name of the place in Hebrew is Lehi, which means "jawbone." In the NKJV, Judges 15:19 reads, "So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi," and the NASB and NIV are substantially the same.)

- 20] And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Chapter 16

- 1] Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

Gaza was an important seaport town located about 15 miles SW of Askelon, and about 40 miles from Samson's hometown of Zorah (Cf. 1 Cor 10:12; Prov 5:1–14; 7:6-23).

- 2] *And it was told* the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed *him* in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him.
- 3] And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put *them* upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that *is* before Hebron.

If typical of this period, the *city gate* was an elaborate structure at least two stories high, with guard rooms flanking a tunnel-like opening. Whether he carried them all the way to Hebron, a distance of about forty miles (2 days?), or only to a hill that faced Hebron, depends on how you translate Judges 16:3. It is likely that it was to the hill of el-Montar, climbing in through thick sand, a feat in itself.

The city gate was not only a protection for the city, but also the place where the officials met to transact business (Deut 25:7; Ruth 4:1–2). To “possess the gate of his enemies” was a metaphor meaning “to defeat your enemies” (Gen 22:17; 24:60).

- 4] And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delilah.

The Valley of Sorek lay between Zorah and Timnah on the border of Judah and Philistia. The city of Beth-shemesh was located there. Whenever Samson went into enemy territory, he “went down” both geographically and spiritually (14:1, 5, 7, 10).

Though Delilah was probably a Philistine, she had a Semitic name meaning “devotee” so she may have been a temple prostitute. Or her name (perhaps meaning “loose hair” or “small, slight”) is a pun on the Hebrew word for “night” (*laylah*) while Samson's is related to “sun” (*shemesh*).

[Along with David and Bathsheba, Samson and Delilah have captured the imagination of scores of writers, artists, composers, and dramatists. Handel included Delilah in his oratorio “Samson,” and Saint-Saens wrote an opera on “Samson and Delilah.” (The “Bacchanale” from that work is still a popular concert piece.) When Samson consorted with Delilah in the Valley of Sorek, he never dreamed that what they did

together would be made into a Hollywood movie and projected in color on huge screens.]

- 5] And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength *lieth*, and by what *means* we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred *pieces* of silver.

This is quite a sum: in Chapter 17, Micah offered to pay his household priest ten pieces of silver a year, plus room and board (17:10); so Delilah was being rewarded most generously. If each of the princes of the five Philistine cities was in on the plan, as they probably were, Delilah would have received 5,500 pieces of silver. This shows how important it was to the Philistine leaders that Samson be captured.

- 6] And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength *lieth*, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee.
7] And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

“...green”: new, moist. Vine tendrils, pliant twigs, or twists made of crude vegetable stalks.

- 8] Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them.
9] Now *there were* men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known.
10] And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound.
11] And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man.

“Ropes”: twisted, interwoven, thick.

- 12] Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And *there were* liars in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread.
13] And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web.
14] And she fastened *it* with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.
15] And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart *is* not with me thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength *lieth*.

- 16] And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

Verse 16 suggests that Samson saw her daily (“day after day,” NIV).

- 17] That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.
- 18] And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.
- 19] And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.
- 20] And she said, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

Numbers 6:7 on the Nazarite vow reads literally “because the consecration (*nezer*) of his God is upon his head.” The basic meaning of the word *nezer* is “separation” or “consecration”; but it is also used of a royal crown (2 Sam 1:10; Zech 9:16; Ps 89:39). Samson’s long hair was his “royal crown” and he lost it because of his sin.

Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Rev 3:11

The Holy Spirit left King Saul because of his sins (1 Sam 16:14) and he also lost his crown (2 Sam 1:10). Sin makes slaves out of kings; grace makes kings out of sinners. Since Samson didn’t discipline his body, he lost both his crown and his prize (1 Cor 9:24–27).

- 21] But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.

“...put out”: dug out. His eyes had gotten him into trouble (14:1-2; 16:1). Samson is one of three men in Scripture who are especially identified with the darkness:

- King Saul, who went out in the darkness to get last-minute help from a witch (1 Sam 28);
- Judas, who “went immediately out: and it was night” (Jn 13:30).

Saul lived for the **world**, Samson yielded to the **flesh**, and Judas gave himself to the **devil** (Jn 13:2, 27); and all three ended up taking their own lives.

- 22] Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.
23] Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.?

Dagon

Worshipped from before the 20th century B.C., Dagon was regarded as the father of Baal, and was variously seen as a storm god, a sea god, or of grain, or fertility. The Philistines, from a seafaring heritage, usually represented him as having the head and upper parts human, while the rest of the body resembled a fish.

In the 14th century B.C. and earlier, Dagon had a temple at Ugarit in N Phoenicia, identified by two stelae in it dedicated to his name.³ This temple had a forecourt, an antechamber, and probably a tower.⁴ In the Ugaritic (N Canaanite) texts Dagon is father of Baal. At Bethshan, one temple discovered may be that of the desecration of Saul's body (1 Chr 10:10).⁵

That Dagon had other shrines in Palestine is indicated by two settlements each called Beth-Dagon (Jos 15:41; 19:27) in the territories of Judah and Asher, as well as Gaza (Judg 16:23).⁶ [When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, their Dagon was humiliated, forcing their return of the Ark, supplemented with offerings of golden mice and golden "emerods." Cf. 1 Sam 4:11 - 6:18.]

- 24] And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us.
25] And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them? sport: and they set him between the pillars.

In the KJV, two different words are translated "make sport" in 16:25 ("entertain" and "perform" in the NIV). The first means to celebrate, frolic, joke, and entertain; and the second means to perform, make sport, and laugh. The second word—*sahaq*—gives us the name "Isaac," which means "laughter." Both Hebrew words carry the idea of entertaining people by making them laugh. The champion is now a comedian.

- 26] And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them.?
- 27] Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines *were* there; and *there were* upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport.
- 28] And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

Ps 66:18–19.

- 29] And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.
- 30] And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life.
- 31] Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought *him* up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.

Prov 25:28

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Prov 16:32

Samson was not ignorant of his calling. He had known all along that he was a Nazarite and that the secret of his strength lay in his special relationship with God (his hair was merely a sign of this). But he had never been able fully to come to terms with his separateness. He had always secretly wanted to be as other men and to enjoy the pleasures that they enjoyed—a *temptation that is surely common to Christians today*.

He was, however, venerated in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11:32.

* * *

Appendix:

**Parallels between the Life of Samson
and the Legends of Hercules**

- Supernatural strength of each
- Slavery to women
- Tearing asunder of a lion
- Violent death of each, partly voluntary, partly forced
- Two pillars: on each side of the Straits of Gibraltar
 - Mount Abila and Mount Calpe
 - Rent asunder by the strength of Hercules arms

“Herodotus describes the Temple of Hercules at Tyre: Two pillars--gold, and smaragdus (an emerald-like green stone). On his visit to Egypt: “The Greeks say that when Hercules went down to Egypt, the Egyptians surrounded him, and led him in a procession to sacrifice him to Jupiter; that he kept quite still for a time, but that when they were commencing the sacrifice at the altar” (the first act of which was cutting off the hair) “he turned in self-defense, and by his prowess slew them all.” On which Herodotus remarks, “How was it possible for him, being but one, and being only a man, to slay many myriads?”

“The prevalence of the worship of Hercules among the Phoenicians, as at Tyre and Thasos, a Phoenician colony, and the close connection of Egypt with Gaza, where the prowess of Samson was so well known, are points not to be omitted in considering the probability of some of the legends of Hercules being drawn from the history of Samson.”

—A. C. Hervey, *Judges*, Pulpit Commentary, Vol 3, p.175.

Contrast, too, the probable links between the Brazen Serpent of Numbers 21 and the subsequent legends of Aesculapius as a symbol of modern medicine.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) List some examples of those who began with great promise, but were disappointing in their finish.
- 2) List some of those who finished well.
- 3) Name two men in the Bible (besides Christ) of which no evil is spoken.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Review Samson’s mistakes.
- 2) Why is Samson mentioned in Hebrews 11:32?
- 3) Contrast David and Samson.
- 4) List examples where testing follows triumphs.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the parallels between the exploits of Samson and the legends of Hercules.
- 2) Explore the use of private quarrels advancing God’s program:
 - Samson and Philistines;
 - Paul and Baranabas with respect to John Mark, etc.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapters 17-21.

Notes:

1. James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), 291.
2. These are pictured in *Syria* 16, 1935, plate 31:1–2, opposite p. 156, and translated by Albright, *op.cit.*, p. 203, n. 30.

3. Plan in C. F. A. Schaeffer, *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra Ugarit*, 1939, plate 39. Also, illustrated in by C. L. Woolley (*A Forgotten Kingdom*, 1953, p. 57, fig. 9).
4. See A. Rowe, *Four Canaanite Temples of Beth Shan*, 1, 1940, pp. 22–24.
5. Rameses II mentions a B(e)th-D(a)g(o)n in his Palestinian lists (c. 1270 B.C.), and Sennacherib a Bit-Dagannu in 701 B.C.

Session 11

Chapters 17 and 18

Confusion in the Land

The events described in Chapters 17–21 apparently took place earlier in the period of the Judges, most likely prior to the forty-year rule of the Philistines. (The movements of the tribe of Dan would have been difficult, and the war against Benjamin in the forthcoming chapters impossible if the Philistines had been in charge at that time.)

The writer apparently departed from historical chronology and put these events together as an “appendix” to the book to dramatize just how wicked and confused the people had become.

In three major areas of life, there was rampant confusion: in the home, the ministry, and the national social order.

God has established three institutions in society: the home, human government, and the worshiping community—Israel under the Old Covenant and the Church under the New Covenant. The first of these, in both time and significance, is the home, because the home is the basis for society. When God wedded Adam to Eve in the garden, He laid the foundation for the social institutions humanity would build. When that foundation crumbles, society begins to fall apart. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps 11:3)

Judges 17

Confusion in the Home

- 1] And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name *was* Micah.

The name Micah means “Who is like Jehovah?” but this man certainly didn’t live to honor the Lord. It is ironic that a man named Micah should establish an apostate shrine with an unlawful priesthood. He had a family (v.5), although nothing is said about his wife; and we get the impression that his mother lived with him and that she was wealthy. Somebody had stolen 1,100 shekels of silver from mother, and she pronounced a curse on the thief, not knowing that she was cursing her own son. (These 1,100 silver shekels are not to be confused with the 1,100 silver shekels that each of the Philistine rulers gave Delilah, 16:5, 18.)

- 2] And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver *is* with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed *be thou* of the LORD, my son.

Then the mother joyfully neutralized the curse by blessing her son. It was the fear of the curse, not the fear of the Lord, that motivated the son to confess his crime and restore the money. As a reward for such “honesty,” his mother sought to neutralize her curse with a blessing

- 3] And when he had restored the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

Her subsequent consecration of the silver to the Lord to make a carved image was in *disobedience* to the command in Exodus 20:4, and reflects the idolatrous Canaanite influence on the Israelites during this period.

The phrase “a carved image and a cast idol” suggests two objects of false worship, an image carved out of stone or wood, and a cast idol made out of melted metal poured into a mold. But some scholars think the phrase is a hendiadys¹ (referring to only one molded image), perhaps a wooden idol overlaid with silver which Micah’s mother had made and placed in the house. However, in Judges 18:18 the objects are clearly distinct.

- 4] Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

In gratitude for the return of her money, she dedicated part of the silver to the Lord and made an idol out of it. Micah’s mother paid a silversmith 200 silver shekels—equal to several thousand dollars—to make those objects of worship.

- 5] And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

These were not the only idols in Micah's aberrant shrine, for he had an ephod (possibly as an object of worship; cf. 8:24-27; or for a priest to wear) and some idols (*teraphim*; cf. Gen. 31:17-50). He then installed one of his sons as his priest to conduct worship in this shrine (later Micah installed another priest, v.12).

- 6] In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.

Have you ever seen a family more spiritually and morally confused than this one? They managed to break almost all (7!) the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17) *and yet not feel the least bit guilty before the Lord!* In fact, they thought they were serving the Lord by the bizarre things they did! The son didn't honor his mother; instead, he stole from her and then lied about it. First, he coveted the silver, and then he took it. (According to Col. 3:5, covetousness is idolatry.)

Then he lied about the whole enterprise until the curse scared him into confessing. Thus he broke the fifth, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments; and he broke the first and second commandments by having a shrine of false gods in his home. According to Proverbs 30:8-9, when he stole the silver, he broke the third commandment and took the name of the Lord in vain.

Breaking seven of the Ten Commandments without leaving your own home is quite an achievement!

The man's mother broke the first two commandments by making an idol and encouraging her son to maintain a private "shrine" in his home. According to Deuteronomy 12:1-14, there was to be but one place of worship in Israel, and the people were not permitted to have their own private shrines. Furthermore, Micah's mother didn't really deal with her son's sins; his character certainly didn't improve by the way she handled the matter. But she was a corrupt person herself, so what else could he expect?

Micah not only had a private shrine, but also he ordained his own son to serve as priest. Certainly Micah knew that the Lord had appointed the family of Aaron to be the only priests in Israel; and if anybody outside Aaron's family served as priests, they were to be killed (Num 3:10).

Because Micah and his family didn't submit to the authority of God's Word, their home was a place of religious and moral confusion. But their home was a good deal like many homes today where money is the god the family worships, where children steal from their parents and lie about what they do, where family honor is unknown, and where the true God is unwanted.

Confusion in the Ministry

- 7] And there was a young man out of Bethlehem-Judah of the family of Judah, who *was* a Levite, and he sojourned there.

A young Levite named Jonathan (18:30) had been living in Bethlehem of Judah, which was not one of the cities assigned to the priests and Levites (Josh 21; Num 35). [In 18:30, Jonathan is a Levite identified as "the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh," which is impossible since Gershom was a son of Moses and didn't belong to the tribe of Manasseh (Ex 2:22; 1 Chr 23:14–15). A Levite would come from the tribe of Levi. The addition of the letter "n" (*nun* in the Hebrew) to the name "Moses" would change it to "Manasseh." In the Hebrew original, the *nun* is found *above the line*, showing that the letter was added to the text later. Some Hebrew scholars believe that a scribe, zealous to protect the good name of Moses, changed the text so that there wouldn't be an idolater in Moses' family. If so, the scribe apparently forgot about Aaron!]

He was probably there because the people of Israel weren't supporting the tabernacle and its ministry with their tithes and offerings as God commanded them to do (Num 18:21–32; Deut 14:28–29; 26:12–15). Why live in one of the Levitical cities if you're going to starve? When God's people grow indifferent to spiritual things, one of the first evidences of their apathy is a decline in their giving to the work of the Lord; as a result, everybody suffers.

- 8] And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem-Judah to sojourn where he could find *a place*: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.
- 9] And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, *I am* a Levite of Bethlehem-Judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find *a place*.

Instead of seeking the mind of the Lord, Jonathan set out to find a place to live and work, even if it meant abandoning his calling as a servant of God. The nation was at a low ebb spiritually and he could have done something to help bring the people back to God. He was only one man,

but that's all God needs to begin a great work that can make a difference in the history of a nation. Instead of being available to God, Jonathan was agreeable only to men; and he eventually found himself a comfortable home and job with Micah. If Jonathan is typical of God's servants in that period of history, then it's no wonder the nation of Israel was confused and corrupt. He had no appreciation for his high calling as a Levite, a chosen servant of God.

They were to:

- 1) Assist the priests in their ministries (Num 3:6–13; 8:17–18);
- 2) Teach the Law to the people (Neh 8:7–9; 2 Chr 17:7–9; 35:3); and
- 3) Be involved in the sacred music and the praises of Israel (1 Chr 23:28–32; Ezra 3:10).

Jonathan gave all that up for comfort and security in the home of an idolater. He was a *hireling* and not a true shepherd (Jdg. 18:4; John 10:12–13). He didn't serve the true and living God; he worked for Micah and his idols.

Jonathan wasn't a spokesperson for the Lord; he gave people just the message they wanted to hear (Jdg 18:6). When he was offered a place involving more money, more people, and more prestige, he took it immediately and gave thanks for it (v. 19). And then he assisted his new employers in stealing his former employer's gods!

Whenever the church has a "hireling ministry," it can't enjoy the blessing of God. The church needs true and faithful shepherds who work for the Lord, not for personal gain, and who will stay with the flock to feed them and protect them. True shepherds don't see their work as a "career" and run off to a "better job" when the opportunity comes. They stay where God puts them and don't move until He sends them. True shepherds receive their calling and authority from God, not from people (Gal 1:6ff); and they honor the true God, not the idols that people make.

It must grieve the Lord today to see people worshiping the idols of ministerial "success," statistics, buildings, and reputation.

- 10] And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten *shekels* of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.
- 11] And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

- 12] And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.
- 13] Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to *my* priest.

The sad part of the story is that Micah now thought he had the favor of God because a genuine Levitical priest was serving as his private chaplain, when in fact it was forbidden in the Law (cf. Num 3:10).

Micah practiced a false religion and worshiped false gods (with Jehovah thrown in for good measure), and all the while he rested on the false confidence that God was blessing him! Little did he realize that the day would come when his priest and his gods would be taken from him and nothing would be left of his religion. The Levite, of course, was as much (or more) to blame for having accepted the position. These acts of disobedience to God's Law were typical of the Israelites in the time of the Judges.

Judges 18

Confusion in Society

- 1] In those days *there was* no king in Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day *all their* inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

If the people had forsaken their idols, and if the elders of Israel had consulted God's Law and obeyed it for God's glory, Israel could have been governed successfully. Instead, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25), and the result was a society filled with competition and confusion.

The tribe of Dan descended from Jacob's fifth son, born of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah (Gen 30:1–6). Though not a large tribe (Num 1:39), it was given choice territory when the tribal boundaries were assigned (Josh 19:40–48).

The Lord had assigned the tribal allotments under the direction of Joshua, with the help of Eleazar the high priest and the elders from the tribes (Josh 19:51). *As He did with the nations* (Acts 17:26), so He did with the tribes: God put each tribe just where He wanted it. For the tribe of Dan to reject God's assigned territory and covet another place was

to oppose His divine will. The Danites were being pushed by the Amorites (1:34-35; cf. Josh 19:47) and later the Philistines (with the rest of Israel; cf. Judg 13:1; 14:4; 15:11). The Danites, however, were not able to defeat and dispossess the enemy (Judg 1:34), thus they decided to go north and relocate. Most of the other tribes were able to conquer the enemy, dispossessed them, and claim their land, but the Danites coveted somebody else's land instead and took it in a violent manner.

- 2] And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.
- 3] When they *were* by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this *place*? and what hast thou here?

It was Jonathan's dialect (probably a Judean accent) that attracted the attention of the five spies, because he didn't speak quite like a man from Ephraim.

- 4] And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

When they asked what a Levitical priest was doing in a private home in Ephraim—a very good question, by the way (1 Kgs 19:9, 13)—he told them the truth: He was hired to do the job!

- 5] And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

When they learned that he was functioning as a priest, they superstitiously sought some word of God's blessing on their mission. Since somebody else was paying the bill, the spies thought it was permissible to get "spiritual counsel" from Jonathan, and he told them what they wanted to hear.³ If the tribe of Dan had really wanted God's counsel, they could have consulted with the high priest. But they were already rejecting God's counsel by refusing to remain in the land He had assigned to them. Therefore, it wasn't likely God would have revealed anything to them (Jn 7:17).

- 6] And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD *is* your way wherein ye go.

One wonders about the source of the priest's confident answer. The outward success of their mission did not correspond with the Lord's

revealed plan for the tribe of Dan, and ultimately resulted in the establishing of a major center of idolatry (cf. 18:30-31; 1 Kgs 12:28-30). (Many scholars attribute the absence of the *sealing* of the tribe of Dan in Revelation 7 as a result of their being the tribe through which idolatry entered the land.)

- 7] Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that *were* therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and *there was* no magistrate in the land, that might put *them* to shame in *any* thing; and they *were* far from the Zidonians, and had no business with *any* man.

The five spies traveled 100 miles north from their encampment at Zorah to Laish (“Leshem,” Josh 19:47, modern Tell el-Qadi), a town inhabited by the Sidonians, about 25 miles north of the Sea of Kinnereth and 27 miles east of Tyre on the Mediterranean. These were a peaceful people who minded their own business and had no treaties with anybody.

They were “unsuspecting and secure” and “prosperous” (v. 7, NIV), and isolated. Their town was isolated from the Sidonians by the Lebanon range of mountains, and from Syria by Mount Hermon and the Anti-Lebanon range, so that they were without close military allies. Thus, a perfect target for the warlike tribe of Dan.

- 8] And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What *say* ye?
9] And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, *it is* very good: and *are* ye still? be not slothful to go, *and* to enter to possess the land.
10] When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where *there is* no want of any thing that *is* in the earth.

They encouraged the Danites to **attack** Laish without hesitation. They felt that **God** had given it to them. Though their theological affirmation is debatable, their anticipated victory seemed inevitable.

- 11] And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war.
12] And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-Jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-Dan unto this day: behold, *it is* behind Kirjath-Jearim.
13] And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

The Danites armed 600 men for battle who first camped near Kiriath-Jearim (about six miles east of the Zorah-Eshtaol area). Their campsite, Mahaneh-Dan (“Camp of Dan”), was where Samson later first sensed the work of God’s Spirit in his life (13:25). The Danites then went on to Ephraim where Micah (cf. 17:1; 18:2) lived.

- 14] Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do.
- 15] And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, *even* unto the house of Micah, and saluted him.
- 16] And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.
- 17] And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, *and* came in thither, *and* took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men *that were* appointed with weapons of war.
- 18] And these went into Micah’s house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

On their way to capture Laish, the people of Dan paused at Micah’s house in Ephraim. The spies told the men that Micah had a wonderful collection of gods, hinting, of course, that the collection would be valuable to them as they traveled, warred, and established their new home. While the armed men stood at the gate of the city, the five spies, who knew Jonathan, invaded the shrine and stole the idols.

- 19] And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: *is it* better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?
- 20] And the priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

When the five men, with their religious loot, arrived back at the city gate, the priest was shocked to see what they had done. But the Danites silenced him by hiring him; and since he was a hireling, Jonathan was ready for a better offer. The Danites not only broke into Micah’s shrine and stole his gods, but they also stole his chaplain. Not a bad day’s work! (As serious as their crimes were, even Wiersbe confesses that he couldn’t help smiling as he envisioned five brave men stealing gods *that can’t even protect themselves!* The Scriptures that come to mind are Isaiah 40:18–31 and 44:9–20, as well as Psalm 115.)

- 21] So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them.

Anticipating that Micah might pursue them, the Danites sent their families and possessions on ahead of them and formed a rear guard.

- 22] *And* when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that *were* in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

By the time the Danites had traveled some distance away, Micah discovered that his shrine was out of business, having neither gods nor priest; so he called his neighbors together, and they pursued the invaders. After all, a man must protect his gods!

- 23] And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company?
24] And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what *is* this *that* ye say unto me, What aileth thee?
25] And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

It was useless. Since the Danites outnumbered him and were too strong for him, Micah and his neighbors had to turn around and go home defeated. Micah's sad question "What else do I have?" (v. 24, NIV) reveals the folly and the tragedy of religion without the true and living God. Idolaters worship gods they can carry, but Christians worship a God who carries them (Isa 46:1–7).

- 26] And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they *were* too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.
27] And they took *the things* which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people *that were* at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

With 600 armed men, plus their women and children (Jdg. 18:21), they marched north and captured Laish, killing all the inhabitants and burning the city. Then they rebuilt it and proudly called it Dan, after the name of the founder of their tribe. Moses had prophesied:

And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.
Deuteronomy 33:22

In the cruel and crafty attack on Laish, Dan “leaped” from Bashan and Mt. Hermon...

Jacob’s Prophecy

Unfortunately, what Jacob prophesied about the tribe of Dan came true:

Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

Gen 49:16-18

[Evil predicted. Following the “serpent” is verse 49:18: “salvation” (cf. Gen 3:15)!] Dan is also missing from the list of tribes in Revelation. Irenaeus explains the omission by saying that antichrist is to come from the tribe of Dan—a belief which he bases on Jer 8:16, LXX (“from Dan shall we hear the noise of his swift horses”). (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V. XXX. 2)

Editorial Derision?

Names of his sons omitted in genealogies: Gen 46:23 (Hushim?); Num 26:42 (Shuham?) Shuham = “pit-digger.” (Strong’s); 1 Chr 1-10; Rev 7: Name blotted out! Mentioned last: Num 10:25; Josh 19:47-49; 1 Chr 27:16-22. Why? Is this deliberate design? [On one of our trips to Israel, we were able to view the rare “mud gate” at Laish: a gate that even Abraham might have gone through! A rare find, since mud structures rarely survive; this one did due to some unusual circumstances.]

- 28] And *there was* no deliverer, because it *was* far from Zidon, and they had no business with *any* man; and it was in the valley that *lieth* by Beth-Rehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

The peaceful and unsuspecting people of Laish (cf. v. 7) were no match for the determined Danites who defeated them and burned down their city. The people of Laish were 27 miles from Sidon (cf. v. 7) and had no allies to come to their rescue.

- 29] And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city *was* Laish at the first.

The northern city, Laish (Judg 18:29); called Leshem in Josh 19:47), near one of the sources of Jordan, was named Dan (modern Tell el-Qadi or Tell

Dan). It was the most N Israelite city, hence the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” (e.g. Judg 20:1).

First to fall into idolatry (Judg 18:30; Golden Calves: 1 Kgs 12:28,29. Jeroboam ...2 Kgs 10:29. ...until Jehu.) The shrine established here under the priesthood of Moses’ grandson Jonathan and his descendants (Judg 18:30) was elevated (along with Bethel) to the status of a national (idolatrous) sanctuary by Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 12:29f.), and so remained until “the captivity of the land” under Tiglath-pileser III.

Some members of the tribe, however, remained in their earlier settlement, with the Philistines as their W neighbors; it is in this region that the stories of Samson, a Danite hero, have their setting (Judg 13:1ff.). It is possibly the remnant of the tribe that stayed in its first home that is described in Deborah’s song (Judg 5:17). The southern remnant appears to have been absorbed ultimately in Judah; the northern Danites were deported by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C. (2 Kgs 15:29). The aggressive qualities of the Danites are celebrated in the benedictions of Gen 49:16f and Deut 33:22.

- 30] And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

Many scholars refer this to either the Assyrian captivity of Israel in 722 B.C. (2 Kgs 17:6) or the captivity of the Galilean population under Tiglath-Pileser III in 733-732 B.C. (2 Kgs 15:29). However, an early monarchical date of the authorship of Judges suggests that the statement refers to an earlier unknown captivity (some have suggested the Philistine capture of the ark; cf. 1 Sam 4:11).

- 31] And they set them up Micah’s graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

The reference to the “house of God in Shiloh” (modern Seilun, 19 miles north of Jerusalem) implies that the worship at the Danite shrine opposed the true worship of the Lord at Shiloh (cf. Josh 18:1). This false worship in Dan was a forerunner of that of Jeroboam I, who later established a Northern Kingdom shrine at Dan (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-31).

Someone has said that there are only three philosophies of life in today’s world: 1) “What’s mine is mine, I’ll keep it”; 2) “What’s yours is mine, I’ll take it”; and, 3) “What’s mine is yours, I’ll share it.”

The Danites followed the second philosophy, and so do too many other grasping people.

The tribe of Dan was the first tribe in Israel to officially adopt an idolatrous system of religion. Even though there was a house of God in Shiloh, they preferred their images and idols. Years later, when the kingdom divided, Jeroboam I of Israel would set up golden calves in Dan and Beersheba and encourage the whole nation to turn away from the true and living God (1 Kgs 12:25–33).

(This session's speaking notes were largely excerpted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available*, Victor Books, Wheaton IL 1994; John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, Chariot Victor Publishing, 1997.)

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) In what several ways was Micah's home confused?
- 2) Which commandments were broken in Micah's home?
- 3) In what ways did Jonathan violate his role as a Levite?
- 4) In what ways did the Danites violate their charter?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) In what ways do:
 - the confusion of the family of Micah,
 - the ministry of Jonathan, and
 - the antics of the Danites parallel our own times?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Explore the strange slighting of the tribe of Dan throughout the entire Bible, historically and prophetically.

Preparation for Next Session:

The atrocity of Gibeah and the war with the Benjamites: Chapters 19-21.

Notes:

1. *Hendiadys* refers to the presentation of a single idea by a coordinate combination of words (Christo Van der Merwe, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
2. Francis Brown, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Strong's, TWOT, and GK references Copyright 2000 by Logos Research Systems, Inc., 364.2-5.1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).
3. Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries : Updated Edition*, H7743 (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981).

Session 12

Chapters 19 & 20

A Word of Warning: This session should be rated “X.” (And I am not kidding.) The writer has detailed this narrative to make his point that Israel had declined to a moral low point. And he certainly succeeded.

However, after watching the news or reading the paper, you will probably also agree that times haven't changed all that much! For in these closing chapters of Judges you find reports of: wife abuse, blatant homosexuality, gang rape leading to murder, injustice, brother killing brother, and kidnapping.

I have lived to see things all as bad as they can be.

Samuel Johnson, 1783

What would he say today?

According to a study by the American Psychological Association, there are five violent acts per hour in prime-time TV programs; and on Saturday mornings when the children watch cartoons, violent acts per hour multiply five times.¹

This chapter opens with the now-familiar slogan, “In those days Israel had no king” (cf. 17:6; 18:1; 21:25). Chapters 17-18 illustrated the *idolatry* that characterized the nation. Chapters 19-21 illustrate the *anarchy and injustice* that prevailed when the Israelites did not have the centralized authority of a king.

When evil isn't dealt with properly, it has a tendency to grow: the sin in the city of Gibeah eventually infected the tribe of Benjamin and led to war in the land of Israel.

Chapter 19

Entertainment in Bethlehem

- 1] And it came to pass in those days, when *there was* no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem-Judah.

If you thought that the Levite Jonathan (in Chapters 17–18) was a reprobate, then you'll probably conclude that this unnamed Levite was an absolute scoundrel of the basest sort. He was what some of you might call a “party animal” (19:4, 6, 8, 22); he walked in darkness and jeopardized his life and the lives of those with him (vv. 9–14); he treated his concubine in the most shocking manner, while she was alive and after she was dead; and, what he then did to her actually precipitated a civil war in Israel!

Concubines

A concubine was a lawful wife who was guaranteed only food, clothing, and marital privileges (Ex 21:7–11; Deut 21:10–14). Any children she bore would be considered legitimate; but because of her second-class status, they wouldn't necessarily share in the family inheritance (Gen 25:1–6).

If a man's wife was barren, he sometimes took a concubine so he could establish a family. Though the law controlled concubinage, the Lord did not approve or encourage it; yet you will find several Old Testament men who had concubines, including Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, Saul, David, and Solomon.

- 2] And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehem-Judah, and was there four whole months.
- 3] And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, *and* to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

Four months later the Levite traveled to Bethlehem where he initiated a reconciliation with his concubine. He and his father-in-law discovered

they enjoyed each other's company and spent five days eating, drinking, and making merry for four days and part of a fifth before the Levite decided he could stay no longer.

- 4] And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there.
- 5] And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.
- 6] And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.
- 7] And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again.
- 8] And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.
- 9] And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home.
- 10] But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which *is* Jerusalem; and *there were* with him two asses saddled, his concubine also *was* with him.

During the period of the Judges, it was dangerous to travel in the daytime (5:6) and even more so at night. The Levite didn't want to stay in Jerusalem because it was in the hands of the pagan Jebusites.

Jebus

The name for Jerusalem used only here in vv. 10-11 and 1 Chr 11:4-5, so named for the Amorite group of Jebusites who lived there)

- 11] *And* when they *were* by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.
- 12] And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that *is* not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah.

The Levite took his servant, his two donkeys (v. 3), and his concubine and traveled northward six miles to pass by Jebus so he could be with his own people. But the men of Gibeah turned out to be as wicked as the heathen around them!

- 13] And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah.
- 14] And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them *when they were* by Gibeah, which *belongeth* to Benjamin.
- 15] And they turned aside thither, to go in *and* to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for *there was* no man that took them into his house to lodging.

A tragic lapse in hospitality! God's people are commanded to practice hospitality (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Heb 13:2

- 16] And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which *was* also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place *were* Benjamites.

Only one man in the city showed any concern, and he was an Ephraimite. He not only took them into his home but also used his own provisions to feed them and their animals:

- 17] And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou?
- 18] And he said unto him, We *are* passing from Bethlehem-Judah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence *am* I: and I went to Bethlehem-Judah, but I *am now* going to the house of the LORD; and there *is* no man that receiveth me to house.
- 19] Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man *which is* with thy servants: *there is* no want of any thing.

Since the Levite had plenty of provisions for his party and his animals, he wouldn't have been a burden to anybody.

- 20] And the old man said, Peace *be* with thee; howsoever *let* all thy wants *lie* upon me; only lodge not in the street.
- 21] So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.
- 22] *Now* as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, *and* beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.

Gibeah had become like Sodom, a city so wicked that God wiped it off the face of the earth. In fact, the entire episode is reminiscent of Lot and his

visitors in Gen 19. The men of the city were indulging in immoral practices that were contrary to nature (Rom 1:24–27) and the laws of God (Lev 18:22; 20:13; see 1 Cor 6:9–10). The word “know” in Judges 19:22 means “to have sexual experience with.” These sinners were excited because a new man was in town, and they wanted to enjoy him.

- 23] And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, *nay*, I pray you, do not *so* wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.
- 24] Behold, *here is* my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.
- 25] But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go.

Since the Levite was afraid the mob would kill him (20:5), he pacified them by giving them his concubine; she had to endure gang rape the whole night. (Was he punishing her for being unfaithful to him? If so, the punishment was far greater than the sin.)

But it gets worse. Not only did the Levite surrender his wife to the perverted appetites of an ungodly mob, but also he was able to *lie down and go to sleep* while they were abusing her in the street!

- 26] Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her lord *was*, till it was light.
- 27] And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down *at* the door of the house, and her hands *were* upon the threshold.

When the Levite stepped out of the door *to continue on his way* (not to look for his concubine!), he discovered her corpse in the doorway, and put her on his donkey and set out for home.

- 28] And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her *up* upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place.

Finding her dead on the doorstep, but not feeling guilty about it, he put her corpse on one of the donkeys and made his way home.

- 29] And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, *together* with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel.

The Levite next performed an almost unbelievable cruelty, cutting up his concubine limb by limb (lit., “according to her bones,” like a priest preparing a sacrifice) into 12 parts, apparently one for each tribe (cf. 1 Sam 11:7; 1 Kgs 11:30).

While this is difficult for us to understand (as well as for the Levite’s contemporaries; Judg 19:30; cf. Hosea 9:9), he meant to arouse the nation to action by calling for a national judicial hearing. Perhaps he was charging them with the responsibility of removing the bloodguiltiness that rested on the entire nation for his concubine’s death. And, while he wanted to mobilize the support of the tribes to punish the men of Gibeah who had killed his wife, in fact, *he was the one* who had let them kill her! Surely there were other ways to call attention to Gibeah’s crime.

- 30] And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak *your minds*.

Judges 20

The Assembly

- 1] Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpah.

The Levite’s gruesome announcement produced the results that he wanted: Leaders and soldiers from the entire nation, except Benjamin (v. 3) and Jabesh-gilead (21:8–9), came together at Mizpah to determine what to do.

From Dan to Beersheba: from the northern to southern boundaries of Israel; a stereotyped expression written from the perspective of the early monarchical author.

The land of Gilead: here referring to all the Transjordanian tribes. Mizpah: Tell en-Nasba, eight miles north of Jerusalem and only four miles north of Gibeah. (Not the Mizpah in Gilead; cf. 10:17; 11:29).

Keep in mind that this event probably took place early in the period of the Judges, at a time when the nation wasn’t under foreign oppression. Though they had no central government, the tribes were still united and able to muster troops and wage war together.

- 2] And the chief of all the people, *even* of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword.
- 3] (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpah.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell *us*, how was this wickedness?

The Benjamites were not officially represented at Mizpah since the men who raped the concubine were from Gibeah in Benjamin. Apparently, however, the tribe of Benjamin received one of the 12 parts of the concubine (cf. 19:29; 20:6).

- 4] And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that *belongeth* to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.
- 5] And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, *and* thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.
- 6] And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.
- 7] Behold, ye *are* all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel.
- 8] And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any *of us* go to his tent, neither will we any *of us* turn into his house.

The verdict was unanimous: All the people rose as one man against the town of Gibeah to give them what they deserve by launching an attack.

- 9] But now this *shall be* the thing which we will do to Gibeah; *we will go up* by lot against it;
- 10] And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

One-tenth of the Israelites' troops collected supplies for those who did the fighting.

- 11] So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

After hearing the Levite's indictment of the men of Gibeah, the people of Israel delivered a verdict and made a vow. The verdict was that the men of Gibeah were guilty and should be handed over to the authorities to be slain (Deut 13:12–18).

The vow was that none of the tribes represented would give their daughters in marriage to the men of Benjamin (Judg 21:1–7).

- 12] And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness *is* this that is done among you?
- 13] Now therefore deliver *us* the men, the children of Belial, which *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel:

The tribes were concerned to “put away evil out of the land,” a phrase that is found at least nine times in Deuteronomy. The eleven tribes had agreed “as one man” to attack Gibeah, but first they sent representatives throughout the tribe of Benjamin, calling for the people to confess their wickedness and hand over the guilty men. According to Leviticus 20:13, homosexuals were to be put to death; but that wasn’t the crime the tribes were judging. Since the Levite had *willingly* given his concubine to the men of Gibeah, their sin can hardly be called adultery (Deut 22:22).

The penalty for rape was death, and gang rape would be even more serious (Deut 22:25–26). The tribes may also have been citing the law concerning wicked men in a city (Deut 13:12–18) and using that as the basis for their action.

- 14] But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel.
- 15] And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men.

The Benjamites mobilized 26,000 swordsmen plus 700 “left-handed” men from Gibeah who were all experts with slings.

- 16] Among all this people *there were* seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair *breadth*, and not miss.

Some have interpreted the stubbornness of Benjamin as an act of patriotism: They were only trying to protect their own citizens. But their refusal to cooperate was definitely an act of rebellion against the Lord. When sin isn’t exposed, confessed, and punished, it pollutes society and defiles the land. The wicked men of Gibeah were like a cancerous tumor in the body that had to be cut out. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). The result? The little tribe of Benjamin declared war on the rest of the tribes of Israel!

- 17] And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these *were* men of war.

- 18] And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah *shall go up* first.

They went up to Bethel (translated “house of God”) to inquire of the Lord (probably through the high priest’s *Urim* and *Thummim*; cf. Lev. 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8) concerning which tribe should lead the attack against the Benjamites. The Lord’s answer was, Judah shall go first.

Since the tabernacle was located in Shiloh both before (cf. Josh 18:1) and after (cf. 1 Sam. 1:9) this incident, some scholars refer “Bethel” here not to the city but to “the house of God” which was at Shiloh (cf. Judg 18:31, “the house of God was in Shiloh”). However, in 18:31 and elsewhere when the sanctuary is called “the house of God” the Hebrew phrase is *בית-האלהים* *bet-ha’elohim*, not *בית-אל* (*bet-’el*, as in 20:18, 26). Possibly the central sanctuary was moved back and forth between Shiloh and Bethel, perhaps more than once. So it is preferable to regard Bethel in verses 18 and 26 as the city on the central ridge route 10 or 12 miles north of Jerusalem.

- 19] And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.
20] And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.
21] And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.

That first day, God allowed the Benjamites to win and kill 22,000 Israelite soldiers.

- 22] And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.
23] (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.)

The eleven tribes wept before the Lord and again sought His will. Note that “the children of Benjamin” in Judges 20:18 becomes “Benjamin my brother” in verse 23. Perhaps this was one reason why God permitted the Israelites to lose that first battle. It gave them an opportunity to reflect on the fact that they were fighting their own flesh and blood.

- 24] And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.
25] And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword.

But on the second day of the war, Benjamin won again, this time killing 18,000 men. The situation was very grim.

- 26] Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

“They wept before the LORD and fasted and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD (cf. 21:4). Perhaps one reason the Lord permitted their initial defeats was to bring them back in a spirit of repentance to the neglected sacrificial worship.

- 27] And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days,
28] And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand.

This time their inquiry about whether they should continue the battle not only received a positive reply (Go) but also included a promise of victory. [The mention of Phinehas son of Eleazar (i.e., Aaron’s grandson) implies that he was instrumental in procuring the oracle from the Lord. It also indicates that this event occurred not much later than the death of Joshua (cf. 18:30).]

General Overview (vv.29-36)

God’s promise of victory (v.28) did not lead to presumption on Israel’s part, for they reviewed and improved their battle strategy by setting an ambush around Gibeah.

This was accomplished as follows:

- a) The Israelites took up the same battle positions as before and then deliberately fled as the Benjamites launched their attack, so that the Benjamites were drawn away from the city. Joshua had used a similar ambush strategy against Ai (Josh 8:1-29).
- b) Then 10,000 of Israel’s finest men attacked Gibeah frontally, and the LORD gave them victory in battle. The Benjamites lost 25,100 soldiers—almost their entire force of 26,700 (Judg 20:15).

- 29] And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah.
- 30] And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.
- 31] And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, *and* kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel.
- 32] And the children of Benjamin said, They *are* smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

As the Benjamites were drawn away from the city (cf. vv. 31-32), the Israelites who were waiting in ambush dashed into Gibeah, slaying the population and setting the city on fire.

- 33] And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-Tamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, *even* out of the meadows of Gibeah.
- 34] And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil *was* near them.
- 35] And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword.
- 36] So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

Ambush Detail

- 37] And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew *themselves* along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword.
- 38] Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

The smoke of the whole city going up into the sky was a prearranged signal for the retreating Israelites to turn on the terrified Benjamites who fled toward the desert (eastward; cf. v. 43).

- 39] And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite *and* kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as *in* the first battle.
- 40] But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.
- 41] And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them.

- 42] Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which *came* out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them.
- 43] *Thus* they inclosed the Benjamites round about, *and* chased them, *and* trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising.
- 44] And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these *were* men of valour.

The strategy used on the third day was similar to that which Joshua used at Ai (Josh 8). Self-confident because of two days of victories (Judg 20:30–31, and note 16:20), the army of Benjamin met the Israelite army, killed about 30 men, but were drawn away from Gibeah and caught in an ambush.

- 45] And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them.
- 46] So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these *were* men of valour.

Before 600 Benjamites finally escaped to the rock of Rimmon (v. 45; cf. v. 47), they suffered a total loss of approximately 25,000 Benjamite swordsmen (the more exact figure of 25,100 is given in v. 35). The narrative groups their deaths in stages of the battle—18,000 (v. 44), 5,000 . . . along the roads, and 2,000 (v. 45).

- 47] But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

Only six hundred Benjamite warriors were able to reach the defensible stronghold of the rock of Rimmon (modern Rammun, four miles east of Bethel), where they stayed four months (until they received terms of peace from the Israelites; cf. 21:13–14). They were the only survivors from the entire tribe of Benjamin, since the Israelite soldiers destroyed and burned all the towns of the Benjamites.

- 48] And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of *every* city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

Since the destruction included the animals and everything else they found, apparently they had placed the Benjamite towns “under the ban” as in holy war.

חֶרֶם *charam*

“Totally destroyed” often translates the Hebrew חֶרֶם *charam*, indicating a holy war in which a city and its occupants were totally “devoted” to destruction.

The city of Jericho and everything in it was “to be devoted to the Lord” (Joshua 6:17). The NASB renders those words “shall be under the ban,” a more literal translation. Josh 6:21 includes a verb form of that noun *he-rem*: They devoted (*wayyah-a-rimu*, from *ha-ram*) the city to the LORD. The idea is that the city’s contents were to be given over to the Lord by totally destroying them.

(The verb *ha-ram* is trans. “totally destroyed” in 10:28, 35, 37, 39-40; 11:11-12, 21 and “destroy them totally” in 11:20; cf. 1 Sam 15:3, 8-9, 15, 18, 20. The noun *he-rem* is trans. “devoted” or “devoted things” in Josh 6:17-18; 7:1, 11-12, 15; 1 Sam 15:21; “devoted to destruction” in Lev 27:29; “set apart for destruction” in Deut. 7:26.)

The contents of Jericho were to be given “to the LORD” as the firstfruits of the land. Just as the firstfruits of a crop, given to the Lord, pointed to more crops to come, so the conquest of Jericho signified that Israel would receive all of Canaan from Him. No loot from Jericho was to be taken by the people. In carrying out the *he-rem*, people and animals were to be killed (Josh 6:17, 21), and other things were either to be destroyed or set apart, as in this case, for the purposes of the sanctuary. These items included “silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron” (v. 19). All was “devoted” either to destruction or to the Lord’s “treasury”; all was to be forfeited by the people.

Furthermore, God has the right to visit judgment on individuals and nations in sin. Is there evidence that the iniquity of the Canaanites was full? Few would question that the idolatrous worship and licentious lifestyle attested by archeological discoveries (e.g., the Ras Shamra tablets) justified the divine judgment..

Finally, God’s purpose was to bless the nation of Israel in the land and to use her as a channel of blessing to the world. But this would be greatly hindered if they were infected by the degenerate religion of the Canaanites. Sin is desperately contagious. To compromise with evil is dangerous and invites spiritual disaster. Gleason Archer declares, “In view of the corrupting influence of the Canaanite religion, especially with its reli-

gious prostitution . . . and infant sacrifice, it was impossible for pure faith and worship to be maintained in Israel except by the complete elimination of the Canaanites themselves.”²

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) What should the Levite have done under the circumstances?
- 2) What alternative remedies might he have sought after the incident?

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Why was this dismal episode included here? What are its lessons?
- 2) Why had God instructed them under Joshua to *destroy* their enemies? Wasn’t that a bit barbaric?
- 3) How is sin “contagious”?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Study the origin and role of the *Rephaim* (the post-flood *Nephilim*) throughout the Old Testament.

Preparation for Next Session:

Read Chapter 21. Begin a review of the entire book in anticipation of Session 14.

Notes:

1. *USA Today*, August 2, 1993.
2. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1964, p. 261.

Session 13

Review

The Levite and his concubine...the outrage...the civil war...the tribe of Benjamin decimated to a remaining 600.

The atrocity of Gibeah (19:25-26) had been punished and bloodguiltiness had been removed from Israel by the deaths of the Benjamites (20:35). However, with the war and destruction behind them, the Israelites became aware of another painful problem—1 of the 12 tribes of Israel had been nearly exterminated and since only 600 males remained alive, the tribe of Benjamin was in danger of extinction.

Judges 21

- 1] Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife.

The problem was complicated by the fact that the Israelites had taken an oath at Mizpah not to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite (cf. 21:7, 18). And, of course, it was contrary to the Torah for the remaining 600 Benjamites to marry non-Israelites (cf. Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3). Another secondary matter faced by the Israelites was the fulfillment of another solemn oath to put to death any Israelites who had failed to assemble at Mizpah.

- 2] And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore;

Once their anger cooled off, the eleven tribes realized that they had just about eliminated a tribe from the nation of Israel; and this made them weep (vv. 2, 15). The primary content of their lament was, Why should one tribe be missing from Israel today?

- 3] And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?
4] And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

They offered sacrifices to the Lord, but there's no record that the people humbled themselves, confessed their sin, and sought the help of the

Lord. Previously, the Lord had revealed His will to them (20:18, 23, 28); but there's no evidence that they received His Word after the battle was over. Instead of getting directions from the Lord, the eleven tribes depended on their own wisdom to solve the problem (James 3:13–18).

Furthermore, I suspect that the Lord wasn't pleased with the people of Benjamin because they still hadn't confessed their sin and admitted they were wrong. The 600 soldiers who were stranded on the rock of Rimmon still weren't seeking God's face. They were simply fleeing from the victorious army. Had somebody suggested that they all meet the Lord at Shiloh and get the matter settled with the Lord, it might have made quite a difference.

- 5] And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death.

This is the other secondary matter that they were going to deal with in v.8.

- 6] And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

The 600 men who were left from Benjamin would need wives if they were going to reestablish their tribe, but the eleven tribes had sworn not to give them wives. Where would these wives come from? (Remember, it was contrary to the Torah for the remaining 600 Benjamites to marry non-Israelites; cf. Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3).

- 7] How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?
8] And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-Gilead to the assembly.

In researching their secondary problem (cf. v. 5), the Israelites discovered that no one from the town of Jabesh-Gilead (located 9 mi SE of Beth-Shan, and 2 mi E of the Jordan River, within the territory of eastern Manasseh), and was, according to JOSEPHUS, the capital of Gilead. The ban which the assembled tribes had pronounced at Mizpeh seemed to impose on them the necessity of punishing its inhabitants for not joining the crusade against Benjamin.

- 9] For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead there.
- 10] And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children.

Nobody had come to the war from Jabesh-Gilead, which meant two things: They hadn't participated in the oath, and the city deserved to be punished.

It appears that when the twelve parts of the concubine's body were sent throughout Israel, a warning was issued that any tribe or city that didn't respond and help fight Benjamin would be treated the same way. The men of Jabesh-gilead knew what was at stake when they remained at home; and so the ensuing slaughter of their city was their own fault. That's the kind of warning King Saul gave when he used a similar approach (1 Sam 11:7).

- 11] And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

The Israelites solved the problem by killing more of their own people! So they fulfilled their vow by having 12,000 soldiers exterminate the people of Jabesh-Gilead, (except that they spared 400 virgins of the city as a step toward solving the primary problem of Benjamite extinction).

- 12] And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

The executioners found 400 virgins in the city, women who could become wives to two thirds of the soldiers on the rock.

- 13] And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them.

These men had been on the rock for four months (Judg 20:47), but now they could take their brides and go home. What a price was paid for these wives! But such are "the wages of sin." (See Num 31:17 and Deut 20:13-14 for precedents.)

The assembly of Israelites next sent to the 600 surviving Benjamites a formal offer of peace (*Shalom*, implying restoration to covenantal participation).

- 14] And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-Gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not.

They accepted the peace offer and were granted the 400 virgins of Jabesh Gilead. Israelite grief continued, however, because 200 Benjamites were still without wives.

- 15] And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.
16] Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?
17] And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel.
18] Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin.
19] Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah.

Somebody remembered that many of the virgins from the tribes participated in an annual feast at Shiloh. Conveniently the girls of Shiloh (about 13 miles north by northeast of Mizpah) would soon be participating in a local harvest feast where they would dance in the fields near the vineyards. Lebonah (modern el-Lubban) was about 3 miles north of Shiloh.

The Israelites conceived a plan, based on a loophole in their oath, which they suggested to the Benjamites. The oath said the Israelites could not “give” (vv. 1, 7, 18) their daughters to the Benjamites, but it said nothing about their daughters being “taken.”

If the remaining 200 men of Benjamin hid near the place, they could each kidnap a girl and take her home as a wife. The tribes wouldn’t be violating their oath because they wouldn’t be giving the girls as brides. The girls were being *taken*. It was a matter of semantics, but they agreed to follow the plan.

- 20] Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards;
21] And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin.
22] And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we

reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty.

- 23] And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them.

Thus, the 600 men got their brides, the eleven tribes kept their vow, the citizens of Gibeah were punished, the tribe of Benjamin was taught a lesson, and the twelve tribes of Israel were saved. The 600 men of Benjamin, with their brides, returned to their inheritance, cleaned up the debris, repaired the cities, and started life all over again.

But all of this carnage and destruction happened because one Levite didn't have the courage to stand up for what was right and treat his wife honorably. Once again, as with Jonathan, Micah, and the Danites (Judg 17-18), the problem started in the home. As goes the home, so goes the nation.

- 24] And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance.

Though the people were guilty of scheming to get around their oath, the tribe of Benjamin was saved from extinction. The few that remained returned to the inheritance of that tribe, v. 23.

- Descended from Jacob's twelfth son, Gen 35:18.
- Predictions respecting, Gen 49:27; Deut 33:12.
- Formed the rear of the third division of Israel in their journeys, Num 10:22,24.
- Encamped on west side of the tabernacle under the standard of Ephraim, Num 2:18,22.
- Celebrated as bowmen and slingers, 1Chr 12:2.
- Assisted against Sisera, Judg 5:14.
- Oppressed by the Ammonites, Judg 10:9.
- Almost annihilated for protecting the men of Gibeah, Judg 20:12-48.
- Remnant of, provided with wives to preserve the tribe, Judg 21:1-23.
- Furnished the first king to Israel, 1Sam 9:1,2,15-17; 10:20,21; 2Sam 2:8-10.
- Adhered for a time to the house of Saul against David, 2Sam 2:9,15,25,31.
- Revolted from the house of Saul, 2Sam 3:19.
- Remained faithful to Judah, 1Kgs 12:21.

- Furnished an army to Jehoshaphat, 2Chr 17:17.
- Celebrated persons of Benjamin include Ehud, Judg 3:15; Kish, 1Sam 9:1; Saul, 1Sam 9:1; 10:1; Abner, 1Sam 14:51; 17:55; Elhanan, 2Sam 21:19; and Paul, Phil 3:5.

And soon after from among them sprang Ehud, who was famous in his generation, the second judge of Israel, ch. 3:15.

25] In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

For the fourth time (17:6; 18:1; 19:1), the writer tells us that “there was no king in Israel”; and for the second time (17:6), he adds that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Today, there is no king in Israel because the nation chose Barabbas instead of Jesus (Luke 23:13–25). They said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). Because there’s no king in Israel, people are rebelling against God and doing whatever pleases them; and it will be that way until the King returns and takes His throne on earth.

The fact that everyone did as he wished is a sad commentary on the deplorable spiritual condition of the nation in those days. The Book of Judges concludes with a final restatement of human failure concerning the moral and social anarchy of this period which preceded the monarchy. Though Israel suffered under the oppression of many enemies, God’s grace was repeatedly evident when the people turned to Him in repentance. The Book of Judges illustrates both God’s justice and His grace—justice in punishing sin and grace in forgiving sin.

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Summarize the history of the tribe of Benjamin in the OT.
- 2) Why did God insist that Israelites were to marry only Israelites in the first place?
- 3) What were the alternatives to continue the tribe of Benjamin, in view of their being ostracized by the other eleven? What about the maidens from among the tribe itself?

Discussion Questions

("Where two people agree, one is redundant.")

- 1) How was the arranged kidnapping of wives any different than arranged marriages that was their custom?
- 2) How could Samuel, who knew that the king of Israel was to come from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49: 10, et al), anoint the Benjamite Saul as king?

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Review the history of the Tribe of Benjamin through the Bible, and the notables that emerged from that Tribe (Saul in OT; Paul in the NT, etc.)

Preparation for Next Session:

Review the Book of Judges and compare those days to our own.

Notes:

1. R.A. Torrey, *The New Topical Text Book : A Scriptural Text Book for the Use of Ministers, Teachers, and All Christian Workers* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos research Systems, Inc., 1995, c1897).

Session 14 Review of the Book of Judges

Judges is the source of some of our most familiar Old Testament stories. The youngest of children have heard tales of Samson and Gideon—over and over again. In fact, the very familiarity of the stories from this book makes it likely that some will miss its message.

The book takes its name from the leaders who emerged to deliver and govern Israelite tribes during an era of moral decay. The period probably extended from about 1390 B.C. to around 1050 B.C. when Saul was anointed king.

Judge: the Hebrew word *saphat* is translated “judge” in this book. The word implies every function of government, not just the judicial. Thus the judges of this era were governors in the fullest sense. They were military leaders, with executive and legislative power as well as judicial power. Most important, the judges of Israel were divinely appointed to deliver God’s people when the people turned from idols and returned to the Lord.

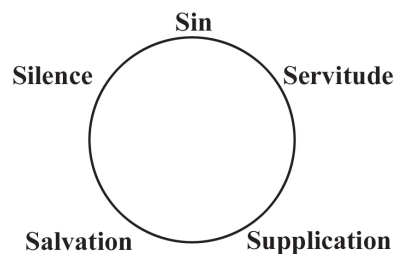
The Book of Judges begins with an overview and ends with a summary.

- The first chapters of this book provide a brief analysis of why Israel’s great promise was never realized.
- The middle section (Judg 3:7–16:31) traces chronologically the history of the Judges and the conditions of their times.
- The final section summarizes and, through two case histories, vividly demonstrates the results of Israel’s choice to abandon God’s ways.

Incomplete Obedience

Judges 2:10: “Another generation [after Joshua] grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel.” The lesson that earlier generations had learned at Jericho and Ai forgotten, the people of Israel now had to be taught again and again and again. This time, instead of involving a single family (Achan’s), the pattern of sin and subsequent judgment swept over the nation as a whole. Unable to cope with these chariots of iron, the tribes involved failed to drive the inhabitants out (Judg 1:31, 34). Even more serious, when Israel was victorious they chose not to drive them out. “When Israel became strong,” the author of Judges notes, “they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor, but never drove them out completely” (v. 28; see also vv. 30, 33, 35). The people of Israel valued slaves more than their covenant promise to the Lord!

THE CYCLE OF SIN



Practical Applications (Adapted from Wiersbe; see Bibliography)

1. God rules and overrules in history

The Book of Judges makes it clear that God can work in and through all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. God has “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). He’s the God of both history and geography. He can use Gentile nations to chasten His own people Israel. He can put one ruler up and bring down another.

While there may not be an obvious pattern to history, although historians may search for it, there is definitely a plan to history; because God is in control. As Dr. A.T. Pierson used to say, “History is His story.” Events that look to us like accidents are really appointments (Rom 8:28). As dark as the days were in the time of the Judges, God was still on the throne, accomplishing His purposes. This ought to encourage us to trust Him and keep serving Him, no matter how grim the prospects might be in this wicked world.

2. God gives nations the leaders they deserve

I’ve pointed out several times in these studies that the quality of the character of the judges deteriorated, starting with Gideon. By the time we get to Samson, we see great physical strength wedded to the weakest kind of character. Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson did the work God gave them to do, but they provided no spiritual leadership for the people.

Philosophers have debated for centuries whether or not a bad person can be a good leader. Perhaps the key question is, “What kind of leadership are you talking about?” A general who swears, bullies, lies, and ignores the Word of God, if he’s an experienced soldier, can no doubt provide effective leadership for an army; but he won’t provide the kind of example that builds character.

All of God’s servants are flawed in some way, but that shouldn’t be an excuse for us to sin or to do less than our best. We should all strive to build Christian character and to develop our skills to the glory of God. Dedication is no substitute for careless work, but success in the eyes of people is no substitute for likeness to Jesus Christ. Like David, we should serve the Lord with both integrity and skillfulness (Ps. 78:72).

3. God graciously forgives and helps us begin again

The historical cycle in the Book of Judges assures us that God chastens when we disobey and forgives when we repent and confess our sins. It's too bad we don't learn from the failures of others and from our own past failures, but that's one of the occupational hazards of being human.

We must remember that the nation Israel was in a special covenant relationship with God. He promised to bless them if they obeyed His Law and chasten them if they disobeyed. Nowhere in the New Testament has God promised to make His people's lives today easy and comfortable if they obey the Lord. Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, yet He suffered as no one has ever suffered; and we're called to be like Jesus. Paul was a man devoted to the Lord, yet he experienced innumerable trials.

If we obey the Lord just to get things from Him or to escape from trials, then our relationship to Him isn't very loving. It's more of a "contract" relationship: we'll obey Him if He'll give us what we want. Jesus dealt with this selfish attitude in His Parable of the Laborers (Mt 20:1–16), which was given in answer to Peter's question, "What shall we have therefore?" (Mt 19:27). We should obey the Lord because we love Him. Sometimes obeying Him will lead us into trials, but He will see us through. We need to be like the three Jews who faced the fiery furnace: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O King. But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17–18, NKJV).

4. God's Word stands despite people's unfaithfulness

The judges accomplished what they did because they believed the Word of God (Heb. 11:32–34). Sometimes their faith was weak and imperfect, but God honored their trust and glorified His name through them. But even when the leaders and the people disobeyed Him, their unbelief and disobedience didn't cancel the Word of God.

God's Word never fails. If we obey it, He is faithful to bless us, keep His promises, and accomplish His purposes. If we disobey His will, He is faithful to chasten us and bring us back to the place of submission. The Word doesn't change and God's character doesn't change.

As His children, we live on promises and not explanations. God doesn't have to explain to us what He's doing or why He's doing it that way. He will always give His servants just the promises they need to get the job done.

5. God uses human government to accomplish His will

There was "no king in Israel," but God was still able to work. Even when there was a king in Israel, it was no guarantee that the people would obey God. Government is important, and God established government; but rulers, senates or parliaments can't limit God.

According to Romans 13, God instituted human government for our good, and it's our responsibility to respect and obey it. We may not respect the people in office, but we must respect the office. God has accomplished His purposes with His people in different kinds of political systems, including monarchies and dictatorships. We mustn't think that He needs a democracy or a constitutional monarchy in order to accomplish His will. God is sovereign! Regardless of the form of government a nation has, Proverbs 14:34 still applies: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (NKJV).

6. When God's people are unspiritual, the nations decay

Apostasy and anarchy go together. We're the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13–16), and God wants us to exert a positive influence on society. When the church ceases to be a holy people, obedient to the Lord, the salt loses its taste and the light goes under a bushel. G. Campbell Morgan said that the church did the most for the world when the church was the least like the world. Today, many churches have the idea they must imitate the world in order to reach the world. And they are wrong!

When Israel adopted the lifestyle of the pagan nations around them, they weakened their own nation. When Israel turned to idols, God turned from blessing them. Nations don't decay and collapse because of the people who peddle pornography or narcotics, but because of Christians who are no longer salt and light. God expects sinners to act like sinners, though He disapproves of what they do; but He doesn't expect saints

to act like sinners. Compromising Christians not only hurt themselves and their families and churches, but also contribute to the decay of the whole nation.

7. God doesn't tell the whole story all at once

We know a good deal about Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, but we don't know much about Shamgar, Tola, and Jair. God hasn't seen fit to put into His Word all the works of all of His servants, yet these people played important roles in accomplishing His purposes.

The people of God may never recognize the work you do for the Lord. You may be a Tola, an Ibzan, or an Elon. Don't be discouraged! God keeps the records and will one day reward you for your faithful service. It's not important that other people see what you do and compliment you on it. It is important that we serve the Lord and seek to please Him.

There's another caution here: Don't be too quick to judge what other people are doing, and don't get the idea that you're the only one faithfully serving the Lord. During the period of the Judges, different people were serving God in different places, and not all of them knew all that was going on. So it is with the work of God today. In spite of the excellent news coverage in the Christian world, we don't always know what God is doing in and through His servants in various parts of the globe. When we feel discouraged, perhaps we'd be encouraged if we knew the whole story.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

1 Cor 4:5

8. God still blesses those who live by faith

It has well been said that faith is not "believing in spite of evidence" (that's superstition) but "obeying in spite of consequence." I might add that it also means obeying God no matter what we see around us or ahead of us or how we feel within us. Faith doesn't depend on our emotions (Gideon was frightened much of the time, and Samson felt he still had his old power) or our understanding of the situation. Faith takes God at His Word and does what He tells us to do.

You can't serve God without faith, because "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). If we wait until we have perfect faith, we'll never do much for the Lord. He honors even weak faith and seeks to make it stronger. Exercising faith is like exercising muscles: The more you exercise, the stronger the muscles become.

9. God's story isn't finished yet

I must confess that I occasionally felt depressed as I studied for this book. But the Book of Judges isn't the end of the story! In fact, the book begins with the words "now it came to pass," which is a strange way to begin a book. In the Hebrew, it reads "and it was." If I started a book with the phrase "and it was," the editors would send the manuscript back to me and tell me to brush up on my syntax.

But there are eight Old Testament books that begin with "and it was": Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, Esther, Ezekiel, and Jonah. Why? Because they're all part of the continuing story that God is writing! The end of the Book of Joshua doesn't end the work of God in this world, for the Book of Judges begins with "and it was." The story goes on! God is still working!

If the Book of Judges is the book of "no king," just keep in mind that 2 Samuel is the book of God's king; and David takes the throne and brings order and peace to the land. When the outlook is grim, just remind yourself that God hasn't finished the story yet.

A friend of mine who's involved in professional basketball likes to watch videos of his team's winning games. Even during the tightest moments of the game, he can relax in front of the TV set because he already knows how it's going to end.

There are days when God's people look at a chaotic world, a nation given to greed and violence, and a church weak and divided, and they wonder whether it's worth it all to walk with God and do His will. When that happens, remind yourself that God's people know how it's going to end! The Book of Judges isn't the last installment; the Book of Revelation is! And God assures us that righteousness will triumph, evil will be judged, and faith will be rewarded.

10. God is looking for servants

He's looking for people who are available to hear His Word, receive His power, and do His will. God can use all kinds of men and women. Like Gideon, some of God's servants are weak in themselves but strong in the Lord. Like Barak, some people don't want to fight the enemy alone. All of us are different, but all of us can serve the Lord for His glory.

If God calls you to serve Him, it's not primarily because of your abilities and talents. He often calls people who seem to have no leadership qualities at all. He calls you because you are yielded to Him and available to do His will. Don't look at yourself; don't look only at the challenge; look to the Lord.

No Christian can do everything, but every Christian can do something, and God will put all these "somethings" together to get His work done in this world. *You never can tell what God has planned for you, so be available!* After all, one of these days, you'll have to be accountable, and you'll want to be ready.¹

The Book of Ruth

But God's people today don't live in the Book of Judges; *they live in the Book of Ruth!* It's difficult to believe that the story narrated in the Book of Ruth takes place in the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). The story of Ruth is an elegant love story about a man (a *goel*, a Kinsman-redeemer) seeking a bride. In our next two sessions we'll review this marvelous little book:

It is *the* prophetic book of the Church. It is read every year at the Feast of Pentecost (*Shavout*).

In which book are you living—the Book of Judges or the Book of Ruth?

* * *

Study Questions

(For the diligent student.)

- 1) Summarize the "cycle of sin" in the history of the times of the Judges.
- 2) What are the primary lessons of this dismal history?

- 3) Draw a map of Israel, including the “disputed territories” and sketch the various areas of conflict of the Book of Judges.

Discussion Questions

(“Where two people agree, one is redundant.”)

- 1) Compare the areas of conflict in the period of the Judges with the disputed territories in Israel today.

Research Projects

(For the truly dedicated.)

- 1) Are demons territorially limited? (Cf. Dan 10, Rev 9:14; 16:12.)

Preparation for Next Session:

Read the entire Book of Ruth. Study the Law of Gleaning (Lev 19:9, 10; Deut 24:19, 21); Law of Redemption (Lev 25:47-50); and the Law of Levirate Marriage (Deut 25:5-10).

Notes:

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available, An Old Testament Study* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996, c1994).

* * *

The Book of Ruth

Introduction

Why the book of Ruth?

- A beautiful literary example;
- An exemplar of early Israel life;
- Laws: Gleaning, Redemption, Levirate Marriage (Study: Daughters of Zelophehad);
- Critical element in Messianic Genealogy: Connects the house of David with the tribe of Judah. Jesus would not have been born in Bethlehem otherwise.

A Love Story

- Ruth & Naomi
- Ruth & Boaz
- God's love for us: Redemption required God to become our kinsman.

Prophetic Types

- Kinsman-Redeemer
- Israel, Church.

Approach (for any scripture)

- 1) Primary application (historical);
- 2) Practical (homiletic) application(s);
- 3) Prophetic revelations.

God's Greatest Achievement: Creation or Redemption?

- 1) Space devoted to: **Creation**: Genesis: (2 chapters); few psalms; Job (2 chapters); Isa (2 chapters) vs. **Redemption**: The entire Bible....
- 2) What did it cost? (His Son!)

Four women mentioned in the Genealogy of Messiah: (Three of dubious reputation!) Tamar, Rahab (Boaz' mother!), Ruth, and Bathsheba.

Ruth 1

- 1] Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Famine (one of 13 in the Bible): Reason why the family leaves the land; but also typically speaks of a visitation of God's judgment : Lev 26. (Perhaps, the famine is in response to the spiritual condition of the country.)

Bethlehem-Judah (vs. Zebulun) Josh 19:15 without this book (because of the Book of Ruth, the House of David is linked to Bethlehem: Micah 5:2).

- 2] And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.
- 3] And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.
- 4] And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

Gentile marriage forbidden (Deut 7:2, 3) Moabite (masc. only) (Deut 23:3).

Grace: Rom 8:3, 4; John 6:37; Eph 2:11-13, 19.

Israel was without a king.

Meaning of the Names

Elimelech = "God is my King"

Naomi = "Pleasant" (land?)

Judah = "Praise"

Bethlehem = "House of Bread"

Mahlon = "Unhealthy"; "To blot out"

Chilion = "Puny"; "To perish"

Ruth = "Beauty"; "Desirable"

Orpah = "Fawn"

- 5] And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.
- 6] Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

When Elimelech left Bethlehem, he lost his property (he either sold it or lost it through indebtedness). The context here is that the land was lost, and part of the story will deal with "redeeming the land."

- 7] Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.
- 8] And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.
- 9] The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.
- 10] And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.
- 11] And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

Levirate marriage practice (Deut 25:5-10).

- 12] Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;
- 13] Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

Ruth Stays with Naomi

- 14] And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

Orpah goes back, off the pages of Scripture, into oblivion.

- 15] And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.
- 16] And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:
- 17] Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Ruth was raised in Moab, an idol-worshipping Gentile country. She was abandoning everything. Not because she was married to a husband, but to follow her mother-in-law, including adopting a strange way of life.

- 18] When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.
- 19] So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?
- 20] And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

“Naomi” - means “pleasant.” “Mara” - means “bitter” (Ex 15:22-27).

- 21] I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?
- 22] So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Barley Harvest (Passover) begins in Chapter 2. Wheat harvest is Chapter 3. Harvest = End of the age (Mt 13:39).

Reread Chapter 1 with the idea that Naomi is symbolic of Israel (brought into the land originally full, but then the diaspora took her out, and there was a famine for 1900 years; she went out full, she comes back to a land that is desolate, malaria ridden...)

Ruth 2

Boaz' Fields

- 1] And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

"Boaz" - means "In him there is strength." His name is not only important in Ruth, but his name is also chosen by Solomon for one of the two pillars of the Temple.

Goel = Kinsman-redeemer. Boaz is a kinsman.

- 2] And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

Welfare system of those days: If you were a landowner, you were allowed to make one pass through your field. You could not go back a second time. The concept was that what the reapers missed, or what spilled, was left for the widows and the destitute.

Law of Gleaning (Lev 19:9, 10; Deut 24:19, 21).

- 3] And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

"Happened": Coincidence is not a "kosher" word! (Coincidence is when God is working undercover!)

- 4] And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.

Boaz = "Lord of the Harvest..."

- 5] Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?
- 6] And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:

Ruth introduced to Boaz by an “unnamed servant”: cf. Eleazer (Gen 24); “Not of himself” (Jn 16:13).

- 7] And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.
- 8] Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Heardest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:
- 9] Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.
- 10] Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

Grace is the basis.

- 11] And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.
- 12] The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.
- 13] Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.
- 14] And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

“Vinegar” really is “Clomets,” a drink made from sour grapes. Boaz provides bread and wine.

“Let Her Glean”

- 15] And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:
- 16] And let fall also some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

“Handfuls on purpose.”

- 17] So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley.
- 18] And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.
- 19] And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.
- 20] And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

Law of Redemption

Law of redemption (Lev 25:47-50). Israel belongs to God. When Joshua enters the land, it is then granted to the 12 tribes. That land was to stay in that tribe. You could “sell” your land, which was really more of what we would consider a “lease” (you sold the rights to use the land for awhile). In the year of Jubilee the land would return to the original owners. When you sold your land, the title deed would also include the rules for title redemption. The law required a procedure so that if your next of kin would show up there was some procedure where he could purchase back the unused years (called “redeeming the land”). In Jer 25, Jeremiah was instructed to buy land right before captivity... have to understand what will happen after captivity—Jeremiah's descendants will come back and claim the land. The title deed would be a scroll on the back of which would detail the procedure for redemption.

This whole concept becomes important when you get to Revelation 5, with the seven-sealed book, written within and on the backside and sealed with seven seals...

Law of Levirate Marriage

Law of Levirate Marriage (Deut 25:5-10). The Levirate marriage dealt with a situation where you had a widow with no issue (husband passed away with no children). She could go to the next of kin and put a claim on him to take her to wife to raise up children for the family. Called “the Levirate Marriage.” He had to meet three conditions to make it work. First, he had to be a near kinsman. Secondly, he had to be able to perform. Thirdly, he had to be willing; it was not required. If he chose not to, he had to give her his shoe, a symbol of shame; he had failed to do the kinsman's part.

- 21] And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.
- 22] And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.
- 23] So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.

Barley Harvest=time of Passover. Wheat Harvest= about 50 days after Barley harvest. Pentecost.

Ruth 3

- 1] Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

The Threshing Floor

- 2] And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.

The harvest involved harvesting the grain and preparing it for market. The threshing floor was a large, flat parcel of ground where there was a prevailing wind. After the grain had been ground, they would throw the grain up in the air and the wind would cause the grain to fall a little bit downwind and the chaff would fall further downwind. If done properly, one would end up with two piles, the closer one being good for market, and the further one would be burned as trash. The threshing floors were typically prominent places (David purchased the threshing floor of Arunah, which later became the site of the Temple).

This was not only a time of work, but also a time of celebration. Typically the afternoon was spent threshing the grain and that night they would have a party. So the owners and the seniors would sleep there to prevent theft of the grain.

- 3] Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.
- 4] And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.
- 5] And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.
- 6] And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

- 7] And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.
- 8] And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.
- 9] And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

Do not misunderstand this passage. In our culture it would seem that she is propositioning him, but there is much more going on here.

Hems

Hems (Greek: *kraspedon*; Hebrew: *shuwl*) hem, border, fringe, bottom edge of skirt or train.

In ancient Mesopotamia, “to cut off the hem” was to strip one of his personality, authority, etc. A husband could divorce his wife by cutting off the hem of her robe. A nobleman would authenticate his name on a clay tablet by pressing his hem on the clay.

- David’s removal of Saul’s hem: 1 Sam 24.
- Fringes on Levitical garments: Num 15:38, 39; Deut 22:12; Ex 28:33, 34.
- God’s Covenant with Israel: Ezek 16:8; Ex 39:25, 26.
- Lord’s hem sought for healing: Mt 14:36; Mk 6:56; Lk 8:44.
- Goal of the woman with issue of blood (Mt 9:20-21; Mk 5:31). Same “age” as Jairus’ daughter: 12 years. Gentile woman = type of the Church?

Joseph’s coat was a seamless robe which was very prized. As was Jesus’ coat. [For the study of 100 ways Joseph was a type of Jesus Christ, see *Acts* (vol 1); or *Genesis* (vol 4); or *Joshua* (vol 2).] Jesus’ coat was seamless and that is why the soldiers at the foot of the cross did not want to divide it, but rather cast lots for it.

The Temple veil was torn, symbolizing the end of man as a High Priest; Jesus’ hem was not torn because He is our High Priest forever.

In God’s covenant with Israel (Ezek 16 & 39), God says of Israel “I will spread my skirt over you.” This is God’s way of expressing His covering, His protection over the House of Israel.

So when Ruth says this to Boaz; she is making a claim on him to put her to wife because he is obligated under the Law of the Levirate marriage. [No matter how much Boaz loved Ruth, he had to await her move! How about you?]

- 10] And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.
- 11] And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.
- 12] And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

There is someone closer who would have first right.

- 13] Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning.
- 14] And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.
- 15] Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

The six measures of barley are a code. Boaz gave it for Naomi, not Ruth (note v. 17).

- 16] And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.
- 17] And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.
- 18] Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

How long did it take God to create the earth? Six days (Gen 1 and Ex 20:11). And on the seventh day He rested. When Boaz gives six measures to Naomi, she understands that he is saying that he won't rest until the matter is resolved.

Ruth 4

- 1] Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

The gate of the city is similar to what you and I would consider City Hall. In the ancient tribal traditions, the city was protected and the people that came and went would go through the gate. The people in authority over the city would check credentials at the gate. If there was a matter of issue one would meet the elders at the gate of the city.

Boaz was obviously a wealthy landowner, but he also sits at the city gate, which implies that he could have been mayor of the city. When Boaz asks this man to sit down, he does so without question. Boaz is someone who is obeyed.

- 2] And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.

Ten elders: number of testimony, number of witness.

Numbers in the Bible are not mystical, we just notice that they are used consistently. Seven is the number of completeness. One less than Seven is incomplete, man. Five seems to be the number of Grace. Ten seems to be the number of testimony, witness.

- 3] And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's:

The land needs to be redeemed for her. Hebrew implies that the ground can be purchased if someone will step up to be the kinsman-redeemer.

Kinsman Redeemer

Goel- Kinsman Redeemer. Three requirements:

- 1) near kinsman;
- 2) able to perform;
- 3) willing to perform.

Boaz is in the role as the kinsman-redeemer.

Here Boaz is calling the attention of this man to the fact that Naomi is in need of a kinsman-redeemer to step up and redeem the land for her now that she is back in town.

- 4] And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not

redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

- 5] Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.
- 6] And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

Willing, able, to redeem the land; unable to redeem the bride.

Shoes

- 7] Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel.

Shoe: to the giver, a symbol of shame; to Boaz, a marriage license!

[Shoes: cf. the Burning Bush (Acts 7:33); wilderness wanderings; John the Baptist: “shoe latches unworthy to unloose...”]

- 8] Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.
- 9] And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.
- 10] Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

“Purchased...”

- 11] And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:

Famous in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2. “House of Bread” (of life!) Shepherds in the field in Bethlehem, Boaz' field.

House of Pharez

- 12] And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

House like Pharez?! Gen 38:6-29. Tamar, a widow, pretends to be a prostitute and tricks her father-in-law into sleeping with her. She conceives and gives birth to Pharez and Zarah.

This verse is not like a blessing or a curse, it is a prophecy.

Bastard: 10th generation (Deut 23:2). An illegitimate son causes the line to be disinherited for 10 generations.

Genealogy of Christ

Genealogy of Christ. Matthew presents his gospel genealogy of Christ as the lion of the Tribe of Judah; so Matthew takes his genealogy from Abraham down through David, the royal line, through Solomon and the various kings down to Joseph. (Note Jer 22:30, the blood curse on Jeconiah.)

Luke presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, he is interested in Christ's humanity. So Luke starts his genealogy from Adam down through Abraham and David, but when he gets to David, his genealogy differs from Matthew's account. At David, Luke records the line down through Nathan, and down to Mary. That's why there had to be a virgin birth, because of the blood curse on Jeconiah's line. Jesus Christ was entitled to the Throne of David legally through His father Joseph, and by blood through Mary. But He does not inherit the blood curse because He is not "of" Joseph's blood (Luke 3:23-38). According to Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, Westcott and Hort: νομίζω *nomizo*, reckoned as by law. Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli, having married Heli's only daughter, Mary (Jerusalem *Talmud*, Ch.77,4; Cf. E. W. Bullinger).

There is also a peculiar exception recorded in the Torah, the result of a petition by the daughters of Zelophehad, which provided for inheritance through the *daughter*, if no sons were available and she married within her tribe (Num 26:33; 27:1-11; 36:2-12; Josh 17:3-6; 1 Chr 7:15). It's remarkable how many commentaries fail to recognize that the inheritance of Jesus through Mary depends upon this specific exception deriving from the daughters of Zelophehad. *There is nothing "trivial" or irrelevant in the Bible. Indeed, we discover that every detail in the Scripture is there by design and ultimately points to Jesus Christ.*

So back to Pharez, remember a bastard's line cannot inherit until the 10th generation; David is the 10th generation after Pharez. So here in Ruth, we have a prophecy that David will be the House that God is going to build the Messianic line through.

A Son Is Born

- 13] So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

Son: (Obed = worshiped)

- 14] And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.
15] And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.
16] And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.
17] And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

“Father” in the Bible does not necessarily mean first generation father, it could be grandfather, great grandfather...

- 18] Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,
19] And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,
20] And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,
21] And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,
22] And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

How could Samuel anoint Saul (from the Tribe of Benjamin) as King when he knew that the King was to be of the Tribe of Judah? (Gen 49). David was not ready yet! He was prophesied in the time of the Judges (Ruth) in the genealogy from Perez to David!

Types in the Book of Ruth

First, remember that this is a historical story. Ruth, Boaz and Naomi were real people. Second, there is another level, see Hosea 12:10. God has used analogies, or what is Biblically called “types,” or what we might call a “model.” A model is a representation of something for our insight or instruction.

For example, see Genesis 22, with Abraham offering Isaac. Abraham does not have a problem because he knows that God has promised him that Isaac would bear children (Gal 3, Rom 4, Heb 11). Isaac was dead to Abraham when the commandment was given, he was then substituted, but was “dead” to Abraham for three days (1 Cor 15:3-4) according to the Scriptures. We know there are many verses predicting His death (Dan 9; Isa 53; Ps 22), but where do the Scriptures say that He will rise again on the *third day*? One place is here in Genesis. Isaac is a type of Christ. Abraham knew he was acting out prophecy (he named the spot “Jehovah-Jireh” = “in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen”), and 2000 years later on that very spot, another Father offered His Son on a Roman cross.

Abraham is a type of the Father, Isaac is a type of the Son. In Genesis 24, Abraham calls his eldest servant to go and get a bride for Isaac. The servant finds Rebecca for Isaac. The servant is a type of the Holy Spirit, he is not named in Genesis 24, but he is named in Genesis 15, Eliezer (which means “comforter”).

Back to Genesis 22:19, where was Isaac? We naturally jump to the conclusion that, of course, they all went down the hill. But here, the Holy Spirit has left out Isaac for a reason, you will notice that the name of Isaac is edited out of the record from the time that he is killed until he is united with his bride by the well of LaHai Roi (which means “the well of living water”)! With this flavor, let’s go back and see what the Holy Spirit is trying to communicate with us, something far broader than just the episode.

Boaz

Goel=kinsman-redeemer

- 1) Kinsman
- 2) Able
- 3) Willing
- 4) Assume all obligations

Boaz was:

- mighty in pedigree (2:1)
- mighty in power (2:1)
- in him lay total authority (2:5)
- ... riches of grace (2:10)
- ... large in provision (2:14 - 16)
- ... plenteous in redemption (4:19)

Ruth is introduced to Boaz by an unnamed servant (Gen 24; John 16:13). In order to bring Ruth to Boaz, it was necessary for Naomi to be exiled from her land (Isa 6:9-13; Rom 11:11, 12).

Ruth

A Gentile, brought in through the exile of Naomi. Ruth is a type of the Church. Law legally forbade intermarriage (Deut 7:2, 3; esp. Moabite: Deut 23:3). Law shut her out; grace took her in (Rom 8:3, 4). Ruth does not “replace” Naomi. Until Ruth is ready to become the bride of Boaz, Naomi remains in exile! See 2:10 with Grace (see nearer Kinsman). See 3:2 and wash; anointment; raiment. Mystery of Church (Eph 3:5,6; Rom 11:25, 26) Hidden (Mt 13:11, 13-15; Jn 12:36-41). The Book of Ruth traditionally associated with Feast of Pentecost. In Chapter 3: No matter how much Boaz loved Ruth, he had to await *her* move!

Naomi

Naomi = “pleasant” (Land). Driven out of the promised land, into the land of the Gentiles. Only 25% survive (Deut 4:27; 28:62, 64-7). During the exile of Israel, the land lay waste and famine-ridden... Israel’s widowhood as the “wife of Jehovah”: Isa 54:4-8, 10; Hos 1:3-9; 2:1, 2, 5, 14, 16; 3:4, 5. In exile until Bride is ready: Rom 11:25, 26; Lev 26:42, 44; Ezek 36:24, 28; 37:25; Acts 15:13-16.

Boaz & Naomi “never meet” (John 1:11). Naomi only learns of Boaz *through Ruth!* Ruth learns of Boaz’s ways through Naomi. Naomi is complaining of being “empty”; “A son is born to Naomi!” She is the profound recipient.

Nearer Kinsman = The Law

He had debt of his own to pay (Ps 14:2,3; Ps 49:6-8). The “nearer kinsman” perhaps represents the Law. What the Law could not do, Jesus Christ did.

The Law is perfect:

that is why imperfect men cannot keep it.

The Law is holy:

that is why sinners are condemned by it.

The Law is just:

therefore cannot show mercy to the guilty.

The Law prohibits;
 Grace *invites* and *gives*.
 The Law condemns the sinner;
 Grace *redeems* the sinner.
 The Law reveals sin;
 Grace *atones* for sin.
 By the Law is the knowledge of sin;
 by Grace is *redemption* from sin.
 The Law was given by Moses;
 Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
 The Law demands obedience;
 Grace *bestows and gives power to obey*.
 The Law says do and do not;
 Grace says "*It is done.*"
 The Law says, Continue to be holy;
 Grace says, "*It is finished.*"
 The Law curses;
 Grace *blesses*.
 The Law slays the sinner;
 Grace *makes the sinner alive*.
 The Law shuts every mouth before God;
 Grace opens the mouth to praise God.
 The Law condemns the best man;
 Grace *saves* the worst man.
 The Law says, pay what you owe;
 Grace says, *I freely forgive you all*.
 The Law says "The wages of sin is death";
 Grace says, "*The gift of God is eternal life.*"
 The Law says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die";
 Grace says, *Believe and live*.
 The Law was done away in Christ;
 Grace abides *forever*.
 The Law puts us under bondage;
 Grace sets us in the *liberty* of the sons of God.

Romans 12:1

Avenger of Blood

Jesus' duties as the *Goel*, Kinsman-Redeemer: Luke 4:16; Isa 61:1,2.
 Jesus stopped before the part about the Day of Vengeance of the Lord.
 He will eventually fulfill the second part. In addition to redemption, there
 is another responsibility of the next of kin; the Avenger of Blood (Isa
 61:1, 2). Jesus Christ also has a warrior role, He does have a Day of
 Vengeance responsibility yet coming (Isa 63).

City of Refuge

Place of refuge to escape the avenger of blood, until the High Priest died.
Rom 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for
our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures
might have hope."

Jesus is our City of Refuge, until the High Priest dies. Who is our High
Priest? Jesus Christ.

* * *

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About The Cover Design

(on the tape cassette volumes)

The “Front” cover:

The Greek border: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).” The center design element symbolizes the Word of God Incarnate, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

The “Back” cover: (the “front” to the Jewish reader)

The Hebrew border: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (from the Sh’ma, Deut 6:4-5).”

The center design represents the Burning Bush, made up of Hebrew letters which proclaim “the Eternal One cannot lie.”

The Spine:

The spine includes a Menorah from the Old Testament, a Maranatha Dove suggesting the New Testament, and the Koinonia House logo at the base.



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