

**The Book
Of
Judges**

*“And what shall I say more?
For the time would fail me
to tell of Gideon, and of Barak,
and of Samson, and of Jephtha...
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 fight the armies of aliens.”
Hebrews 11:32-34.*

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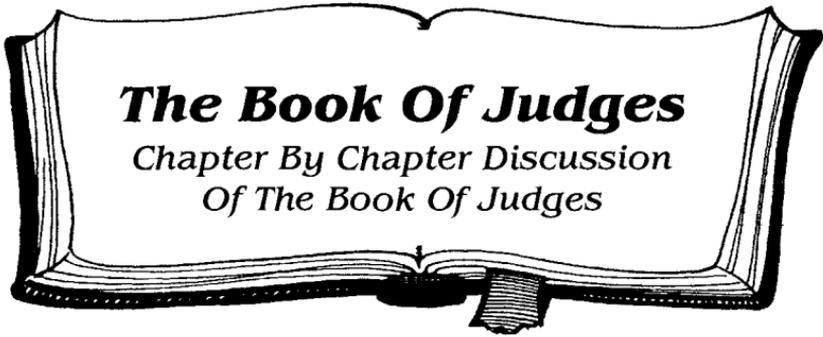
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*This study of the Book of Judges
is dedicated to my four children,
Amy, Bill, Stephen, and Sam,
and to all the many students in my Bible classes
to whom I was privileged to teach this book
in two elementary schools operated by brethren.*

*Special thanks to my son, Bill,
who read this material
and made very useful suggestions
to be included in it.*

*Without my son, Stephen,
helping me with the computer
I could never have produced it.*

*Also to Rosalyn, my wife,
for helping me in so many ways
with contributions, suggestions,
corrections and general assistance.*



Introduction

It was my privilege and opportunity to teach for over fourteen years the Book of Judges to sixth grade boys and girls in two elementary schools operated by brethren. I particularly noticed how the Book of Judges appealed to young boys as they acquired their love for Bible “heroes.” In addition, I have taught this book many other times to the local congregations where I have preached and presented many sermons and lectures on various portions of the book. This provided an unusual opportunity to become acquainted with its contents. I know not how many books written by others I have consulted while studying Judges. I am indebted to many and respect all who have contributed to whatever knowledge I have of any portion of Scripture. For such people I am truly thankful.

It soon becomes apparent as one begins to read Judges that the nature of it is a history book. It presents that portion of the history of the Israelite nation from the close of the life of Joshua until Israel approaches their request for a king. Actually, only thirteen Judges are discussed in the book with two more, Eli and Samuel, being mentioned in First Samuel. When I say thirteen Judges, I must allow that some have a different count. Some exclude Abimelech, son of Gideon, contending he was a usurper, but I have included him as one of the fifteen. Others count Deborah and Barak

as two Judges, but since they served side by side I count them as one. It matters little on this score.

The length of time covered in this history is also contested, ranging from three hundred years to over four hundred fifty years. You get varying numbers depending on the way the count is made. When Paul was reviewing the history of Israel in Antioch of Pisidia, (probably speaking in round figures in Acts, chapter thirteen), he gave the time period as four hundred fifty years until Samuel. Then one must add Samuel's years of service to that. In my opinion, the length of time covered is not very important even though interesting. What happened, why it happened, and the principles of truth that we glean from the book far surpass in significance the number of years involved.

The same could be said for the writer. We have no revelation who wrote the book. Many commentators suggest the writer to have been Samuel, and we have no reason to deny that, seeing how Samuel lived after these events. Because "all scripture is inspired of God" we are confident of its author, Deity; hence its infallibility, inerrancy, and that it contains whatever God has seen fit to reveal to us, and He revealed it sufficiently.

The reason the history of Israel is important is because of the role God gave Israel in the revelation of the scheme of redemption. The Messiah would come through Israel as a descendant of Abraham and David. Israel was the chosen and promised nation. The Law of Moses, events, persons, principles of God's dealing with man are seen over and over in the history of Israel. We have types, prophecies, examples of both good and evil, "shadows of things to come." Names of several of these Judges are listed in that great "Hall of Faith" chapter, Hebrews eleven. We make a mistake to consider the history of Israel as given in the Old

Testament as just a matter of historical record. There is much more to be gained from it than that, as valuable as that is. Judges covers a vital portion of this history, connecting events from the end of the life and work of Joshua until the days of the physical kingdom that were but a few years in the future. But the spiritual meat we gather from Judges is what needs our emphasis.

If ever a book presented a demonstration of Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalteth and nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," Judges accomplishes this. How relevant this truth is to people of every generation.

Someone who is acquainted with the high moral principles of Christianity may be appalled at the conduct of people in this book, even those who had the favor of God. We have to keep in mind that there was a poverty of genuine spirituality among the people, generally speaking. This was true even in their "better" days during Judges. They had partaken heavily of the ways of the people they were supposed to drive from the land. Their behavior as well as attitude toward matters is quite at odds with what one would expect from Christians in this dispensation. But bear in mind, these were a people, used by the Lord, with good and bad qualities, to bring salvation for the soul to all nations. To measure the characters in Judges by the Christian standard is to fail to see its place and Israel's place in God's plan. This does not mean there is nothing we gain from it. Quite the contrary! But conditions were different and the manner of dealing with them was glaringly different than living under Christ.

The conditions in the land during this period of history were mixed. There was no central government even though they all lived subject to the Law of Moses. Local tribes more or less handled their own affairs without much required

cooperation or interference from the other tribes. There were times when they acted more as a nation but that was not the norm. There was political, social and religious instability during this period. Because of certain failures of the Israelites, which we shall note in the comments, they were continually harassed by enemies who were given to idolatry. It was a period of war, blood letting, anarchy, national and personal sinfulness. There were also times of repentance and recovery.

God had intended for Israel to come to Canaan, the land God had promised even to Abraham, Issac and Jacob and their descendants. But they were to drive out completely those that inhabited the land once they arrived there. This was because the various nations already there were idol worshippers, pagans, given to all manner of immoralities, and a disgrace to the human race. God did not want His people to be as they were. But Israel failed to do with them what God commanded. They paid the price for this failure throughout their history. Even many disturbances of our own day stem from that time when Israel, while defeating their enemies, did not destroy their enemies.

I am told by those who know history better than I that military men many years into the future from Judges have paid respect to the battle narratives. "Stonewall" Jackson once said to Lieutenant James Powell Smith, "Can you tell me where the Bible gives models for official reports of battles?" Smith said, "No." "Nevertheless," Jackson went on, "there are such. Look at the narratives of Joshua's battles with the Amalekites. It has clearness, brevity, modesty; and it traces the victory to the right source - the blessings of God."

The same can be said for the battle narratives in the Book of Judges. Those battles are studied by Israel's military intelligence today (Herzog and Gichon),

In the second chapter of Judges there are verses that can properly be considered as a brief summary and overview of the times. Verses eleven through twenty-three should be read carefully and the “steps” in the cycle of history of the period should be noted. Who were judges? The word “judge” is usually used in the Bible as an official interpreter of the Law, explaining its application in various real situations. But mostly, a Judge is to be considered a Deliverer. “The Lord raised up judges to deliver them,” (Judges 2:16). As you note the rise and fall of the people, observe the “steps” in the cycle of their history: (1) Their prosperity, (2) they would forget God and sin, (3) fall into adversity of poverty and bondage as the result, (4) in which state they would repent, (5) and God would select for them a Judge or Deliverer, (6) there would be a deliverance and return to God would take place, and (7) then the return to former prosperity. The Judge was not simply a judicial figure as we consider judges today. He surely had such power and position as was necessary, but his prime work was bringing the nation out of its deplorable conditions into which their sins had brought them. He was at the helm in defeating those who were Israel’s enemies, captors and persecutors. Sometimes he did this by rallying the people and leading armies, but a notable exception was Samson who did his work single-handedly. The Judges were not always the best kind of people themselves. God used evil nations who lived in and near Israel to punish Israel for its waywardness, and used people lacking in moral qualities to gain the results He wanted. It was important to keep Israel intact and in respect for their heritage and purpose in God’s plan.

When Israel obeyed God, they were blessed. When they chose to disobey Him they bore the terrible consequences of their sins. This is the thrust of the Book

of Judges.

The first sixteen chapters discuss many individual efforts by Judges as they performed their duties. Chapters seventeen to the end of the book gives a picture of the turbulence and wickedness to which Israel had stooped during this period.

This commentary shall not attempt to exhaust all that might be said regarding what is written in Judges. However, it is the aim to be sufficiently complete for the average student to learn from it. I personally think some who write commentaries get more out of the book than what God ever placed within it. So comments will be deliberately abbreviated, and given with the hope they are adequate.

Discussion of contemporary history on the world scene will not be included. Concentration shall be on the content of the text with notice of truth that is applicable to our own day.

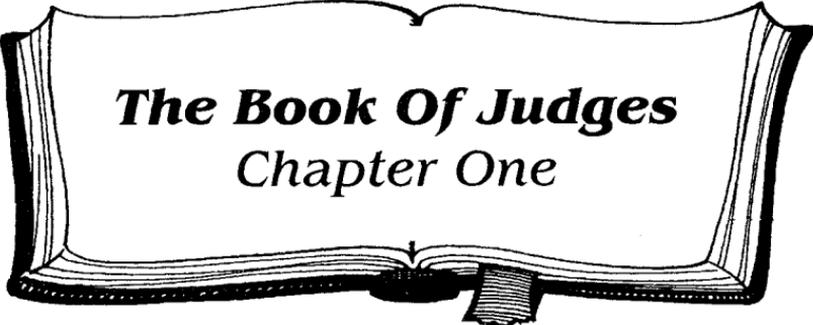
There will be a list of questions at the end of each chapter to facilitate study individually and with others that might provoke class discussion.

Judges begins immediately after the great and marvelous days of one of the most outstanding of Israel's heroes, Joshua, and those who served by his side. With the first verse of chapter one, a new era begins for Israel.

~ James W. Boyd

Questions On The Introduction

1. Define a Judge.
2. What did God tell Israel to do regarding those who already inhabited the land?
3. Why did God want Israel to be separate from those people?
4. If they obeyed God, what would be the consequences?
5. If they disobeyed God, what would be the consequences?
6. Review the seven "steps" of the cycle of the history in Judges.



The Book Of Judges

Chapter One

Verses 1-8

Judg 1:1 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.

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.

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.

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 required me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

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.

The time of the history record is after the death of Joshua. What a glorious career of service that man had given to Israel. The people were now across Jordan and in the Promised Land, undertaking the task of ridding the

countryside of the inhabitants and staking their own divinely given claim. No successor to Joshua had been appointed.

Just who asked the question, “Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites...?” we cannot ascertain. But the answer was given by the Lord. Judah shall go up and he would take Simeon with him. Doubtless this refers to fighting men of these tribes, not the individual persons who had long since died. Take note that God said the land had been delivered into their hand, but still there was much they had to do to receive what was given. This reminds us of how in an earlier event Jericho was given to Israel. But when was it given them? It was not theirs until they obeyed God’s instructions to have it. This is the way it is with our spiritual salvation. Salvation is a gift, but we will not become beneficiaries of the gift until we do what God directs us to do to attain it. So men of Judah and Simeon combined their forces and went against the Canaanites.

Also we read how the Lord delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand and many of the enemy were slain. The opposition leader, Adonibezek, resisted to no avail. He was defeated and punished by having the thumbs and big toes of his fighting men cut off. This would so handicap them that they could never be an effective fighting force again, hindering their ability to shoot arrows, throw spears, or run forward or backward. It was evidently the same kind of thing Adonibezek had done to enemies he had conquered. The name Adonibezek probably refers to the title of the leader rather than a personal name. It is like the title of Pharaoh. This leader was brought to the city of Jerusalem that Judah had previously captured, burned, but did not fully destroy. This probably takes notice of what is

reported in Joshua 15: 63, and the failure to drive out the inhabitants from Jerusalem. This city began to assume its magnificent role in the history of this nation of Israel.

Verses 9-15

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 Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai.

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

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.

This records events subsequent to the occupation of land by Judah in various locations. Caleb is mentioned as offering his daughter to the man who successfully fought against the enemy in taking Kirjathsepher. A man named Othniel, a son of Caleb's brother and Caleb's nephew, became that man. Later he shall be named as the first Judge in chapter three.

Caleb's daughter seemed to make a special request of her father regarding some land. This indicates that daughters as well as sons were to have land of their own. She needed

land that was better watered than what she had previously received. Her request was granted.

Verses 16-19

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.

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.

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.

The Kenites, descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, were a people who were always friendly toward Israel. These Kenites had evidently made the journey with Israel to the Promised Land and had opportunity to have land for themselves probably near the city of Jericho which is called the city of palm trees in Deuteronomy 34:3.

As for additional conquests of Judah and Simeon, they ventured into territory toward the southwest inhabited by the Philistines (Gaza, Askelon, Ekron) and took it. It seems that they later lost control of it either because they could not or would not completely drive out the inhabitants of the valley because of their armaments, in particular, chariots of iron.

Verses 20-36

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.

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

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, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will show thee mercy.

25 And when he showed 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.

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.

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.

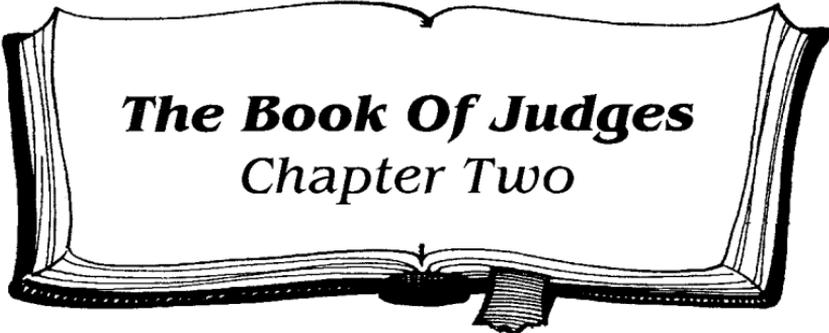
But Caleb and his sons enjoyed victories against Anak, the giants, while the tribes of Benjamin, Joseph (with probable reference to the tribes of Mannasseh and Ephraim), Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan encounter stiff opposition and were not able to completely drive out the people there. While the destruction of the people for which God had called was not accomplished, the Israelites were able to enforce their power over the people and exact tribute from them, but had to content themselves with co-existence with them. This proved to be a thorn in their side throughout their history in the Promised Land. They paid dearly for not driving the earlier inhabitants out altogether. Whether this was because co-existence seemed easier at the moment, or due to their lack of determination to obey God, we are not informed. The result was the same.

One instance of betrayal is recorded on the part of one man from the city of Luz. He was asked to show the Israelites an entrance into the city in exchange for his personal safety and that of his family. He may have been somewhat as Rahab had been at Jericho. He accommodated these invaders and was spared.

How some other of the tribes (Gad, Reuben, Issachar) fared in conquering the land given them is not recorded. Likely a similar situation existed with them as with those mentioned in this chapter. At best it was a partial victory for Israel which was compromised by allowing the enemies to continue among them.

Questions on Chapter One

1. Which tribe did the Lord first commission to go up against the people of the land?
2. What other tribe was asked to accompany them?
3. What was done to the conquered Adonibezek?
4. Why was this action taken?
5. What did Caleb offer to the man who would fight the enemies of Israel?
6. What man accepted the offer ?
7. What did the daughter of Caleb request of her father?
8. Why could not Israel drive out the inhabitants from the valleys?
9. How successful were the tribes in driving out and destroying their enemies?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Two

Verses 1-6

2:1 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.

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.

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.

6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

At first glance it may seem that chapter two continues the record in chronological order, but such is not the case. Actually it goes back into the days of Joshua by making mention of some events in his day. The reason probably is to make the connection smoothly from the time of Joshua to the time under consideration now.

A messenger of the Lord, (from verse six it appears that Joshua is that angel or messenger), reminded Israel

how God had brought them out of Egypt to the land that had been promised their fathers. Also there is emphasis that the Lord does not break His covenant, but the covenant had been broken nonetheless. The one who broke it was Israel. God had instructed them to destroy their enemies but they had not done as they were instructed. They did not even throw down their altars to their idolatrous gods. Therefore, the enemy would not be driven out and would become “as thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare unto you.” The very thing God wanted to prevent by destroying the heathen nations was not accomplished because Israel failed to do their part. The seeds for future digressions into idolatry were sown and cultivated. This speech by the messenger was a severe rebuke of the people.

Upon hearing this the people were disturbed and wept. How like their foreparents when in the wilderness when they failed to heed God’s instructions and warnings and faced punishment. But it was too late for them now. They had created for themselves problems that would hinder them all through their sojourn in Canaan. They called the name of the place where they heard of their failures Bochim, which means weeping and lamentations.

Verses 7-10

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.

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.

It is a tribute to Joshua that the people remained faithful all the days of his leadership and that of his co-workers. Great leadership is so necessary to keeping people in the straight and narrow way. Joshua provided what was needed. He died at the age of one hundred and ten years, and was buried. The words here are similar to those recording Joshua's death in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Joshua. Soon his generation passed from the scene.

Another generation arose. That would be expected. But this new generation "knew not the Lord." This does not mean they had not heard of Him. Nor does it mean they were totally ignorant of Him and His directions. But they had not had the same fellowship with God as the previous generation had. They did not respect what God had done for Israel like Joshua and others. While they enjoyed the fruits of the labors of those who had gone before them, they did not appreciate what had taken place in the past of Israel. Therefore, their dedication and loyalty to God did not measure up to that which the preceding generation had known and exhibited. Either the previous generation had not sufficiently taught the younger one or the younger one refused to be taught.

One great lesson that must be learned from the Book of Judges is that each generation must be taught everything. Let a generation pass in ignorance or rebellion against God and the destruction of many generations will likely follow

until a restoration is accomplished. Even today, we must realize the Lord's church is but one generation away from the apostasy that has characterized religious history. For this reason there must be the continued indoctrination and teaching of basic, fundamental first principles of truth lest we drift, sometimes rapidly, from the truth. We have seen such take place in our own time in many churches and individuals.

Verses 11-13

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.

We come to the place in Judges where we have a brief summary of the message of the book. Verses eleven through eighteen give an overview of what occurred over and over again among the Israelites.

What is recorded here could be expected in light of the attitude of the new generation. So many times in this book do we read the phrase, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." They turned to serve idols rather than the true and living God. The gods Baalim and Ashtaroth are mentioned here. Baal was a male god and Ashtaroth is the plural of the female goddess, Ashteroth. These heathen people had many gods. It is almost impossible to determine what kind of character these idols worshippers attributed to these false gods, but in any case, Israel had no business worshipping them.

Notice the sequence. (1) They did evil. (2) They forsook the Lord. (3) They followed other gods. (4) They bowed before them. (5) They provoked the Lord to anger. Is this not what should be expected? We see the consequences in the following verses.

Verses 14-15

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.

God's anger was justly vented against this rebellious people. The writer says God's anger was "hot against Israel." Does not this convey how deeply offended God was with the apostasy of the people? This resulted in the Israelites being delivered into the hands of their enemies who spoiled their properties, crops, herds and lives. This was punishment for their rebellion against the Almighty, who had done so much on their behalf. They were rendered helpless before those who took advantage of them. Wherever they went there was evidence that the Lord's hand was against them. How conditions had changed! Whereas God had been with them in their efforts to take the land, now His hand was against them.

God was simply staying true to His promises and warnings. He had told them what the results of faithfulness and unfaithfulness would be. The same trouble with Israel then is with us today. You just cannot warn some people. Ask yourself, "Am I like that?"

Had He not kept His word the Israelites would have no reason to ever again place confidence in Him or respect what He instructed. They had brought all this upon themselves by their wayward ways. "They were greatly distressed."

In the punishment of Israel for their sins we see how God used even wicked people to carry out His will. These enemies were not people of God and would not show Jehovah respect. But their wickedness was such that they could be used as tools in the hands of God to carry out this just punishment. As we consider affairs in life and in our world, while we cannot always ascertain with certainty what God may be doing, we can know that evil men have been used to punish evil and the hand of God still rules.

Verses 16-23

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

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.

As we read in the “summary” of the book in verses eleven and twelve, when Israel showed signs of a penitent spirit the Lord was gracious unto them and would raise up one, a Judge, to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies. Once these deliverers performed their work, unfortunately, the people so often would not give heed to them after things got better. They would go after other gods again and cease to follow the ways that had brought their fathers into favor with the Lord. Just why each generation thought that they knew better how to live than their forefathers is not easily determined. But it is obvious that they had little to no respect for the paths of the past that had produced great blessing.

Notice it is reported that the Lord “repented,” changed His mind and discontinued their punishment after a while. Does not this prove that God finds no pleasure in chastening His people? Only because of His love for Israel did He deal with them in this fashion (Heb. 12:6). Because of the overriding purpose for choosing Israel did He persist in dealing with them. It taxed the very heart of God to endure what He had to endure from Israel to provide the way of salvation for all mankind.

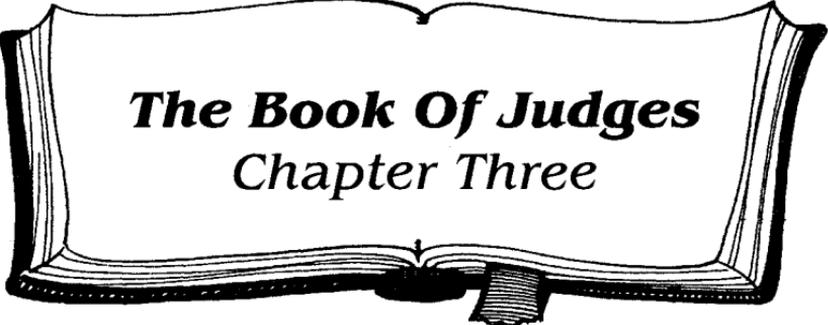
But how pathetic it is as we take note how the Israelites, having been through a period of hardship due to

their sins, persisted in their stubborn way of following other gods, bowing before them, corrupting themselves, rather than learning from their experiences and doing better than they had done. It would seem after a period of punishment that they could see the way they ought to go and not bring difficulties upon themselves again.

The reason for this punishment is emphasized once again. It was because of the transgressions of Israel and their failure to hearken to the voice of God. God, therefore, would not help them drive out the enemies that remained at the death of Joshua. Rather God used these enemies to prove, test, Israel whether they would walk the right way or not. These tribes and nations that were in Canaan when Moses turned the leadership into the hands of Joshua, which neither Joshua nor those after him drove out, were now firmly entrenched in the land and would remain there in varying degrees of strength to be a problem for Israel throughout their history.

Questions on Chapter Two

1. What did the angel of God tell the people God would do about His covenant?
2. Why had the covenant been broken?
3. What does the name Bochim mean?
4. As long as Joshua and his co-workers lived, how did Israel fare?
5. After Joshua's death, what happened to them?
6. What was the weakness of the new generation?
7. How did God deal with their unfaithfulness?
8. Did this mean God had lost interest or concern for them?
9. Who was at fault in bringing the hardships upon Israel?
10. Review the steps in the cycle of the history of Israel as recorded in Judges.



The Book Of Judges **Chapter Three**

Verses 1-6

3:1 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;

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.

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.

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

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

In the first verses of this chapter we have names of a number of the tribes and nations that lived in the land and who became enemies of Israel. It is evident God allowed these nations to continue to exist even though He had commanded Israel to destroy them. Israel's failure to destroy them was then turned into a tool in the hand of God to prove and test the people of Israel time and time again throughout their history.

Whereas God had told Israel to destroy those nations,

Israel did not even destroy the altars to their false gods. Furthermore, while Israel was commanded to stay separate from these people, it was not long until there began to be marriages between them and Israelites. The nation that God had brought out of Egypt, preserved in the wilderness, and to whom the land was given served other gods through the influence of their heathen contacts.

Verses 7-11

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

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

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.

10 And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim.

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

We are now introduced to the first specifically named persecutor of Israel and the first Judge who delivered Israel from his grasp and control. We read again that all too familiar phrase of Judges, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and forgat their God, and served Baalim and the groves." Baalim was the plural of the male gods. The groves were clumps of trees in which the heathen would erect altars to the false gods and make sacrifices there. This tells us why when there was revival

in Israel and a return to God that the groves were cut down. The groves were as temples for these false gods.

Because of this behavior God's anger was "hot" against Israel and He allowed them to fall under the control of a leader of Mesopotamia named Chushan-rishathaim. They served this man for eight years before things began to change.

In their hardship the people would obviously realize what folly they had committed and would cry unto God for relief. God would raise a deliverer. The one raised this time was Othniel. We have read of him once before in chapter one as the man who defeated enemies of Israel and was given the daughter of Caleb for his wife.

Precisely how Othniel managed to bring off this deliverance is not revealed other than they went out for war and the Lord gave Chushan-rishathaim into Othniel's hands. Othniel had considerable success during his lifetime because after defeating the enemy the land had rest for forty years. His labors probably only affected the territories where he lived and not the entire nation although Israel is named in this event. Most of the encounters of which were read in Judges were localized and limited events rather than episodes where the entire nation was involved. There are some possible exceptions to that but this is generally what we find. While Othniel was ruling and delivering some of Israel from the rule of Chushan-rishathaim, someone else may well have leading a similar event in another part of the land, or some might have been falling beneath another enemy.

Verses 12-30

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

Verse twelve has a familiar ring to it, does it not? This is the pattern of events throughout Judges. This time, due to the evil of Israel, the Lord allowed Eglon, king of Moab, to enslave them. There seems to have an alliance of Moab, Ammon and Amalek in smiting Israel in the city of palm trees, which Jericho is called in Deuteronomy 34:3.

Two of these enemies were distant relatives of Israel. Moab and Ammon were the sons of Lot (nephew of Abraham) by his daughters, of which we read in Genesis nineteen. Much later in Israel's history when God's prophets were condemning the sins of Israel and Judah, remnants of surrounding nations were also condemned, among them the Moabites and Ammonites because they had offended Israel. The Edomites, descendants of Esau, were also targeted for condemnation for the same reasons. Evidently God felt those nations of some kinship should have shown more respect for Israel than they did.

Bible students will recognize the name Amalek because ancestors of these people were the ones who had attacked Israel shortly after Israel crossed the Red Sea upon leaving Egyptian bondage. It was then that Joshua lead the Israelites to victory. Moses, Aaron and Hur went upon the mountain and could view the battlefield. As long as Moses could hold up his rod, Israel would prevail. Aaron and Hur assisted him by holding up his hands until the battle was won. Many years later regarding this same people, God commissioned Saul, Israel's first king, to utterly destroy them because of this wicked deed they committed against Israel in the wilderness. But Saul failed to obey God. For eighteen years Israel served these people.

As we read of Israel's servitude from time to time we must keep before us the fact that the land was supposed to be theirs by virtue of the gift from God. How galling it must have been to Israel to be in servitude to others in the land that belonged to them.

But as the cycle turned time and again, Israel cried unto God for relief and the Lord raised up a Judge or deliverer. The man of this occasion was named Ehud, a man of the tribe of Benjamin and left-handed. Although Ehud was the man of the hour and from Benjamin, later we find several of the other tribes bent on destroying the tribe of Benjamin in chapter twenty for evil deeds men of Benjamin committed. This goes to show the turbulence of the period of Judges.

Ehud gained entrance to Eglon by coming with a present for him. Little did Eglon, a fat man, know that Ehud had a two-edged dagger strapped to his thigh. The slyness and deception of Ehud was the mark of a man with

a mission. After presenting the gift, Ehud asked to speak to Eglon alone, feigning a secret message for the king. The king granted his request. Once the two were alone in Eglon's summer parlour, Ehud thrust the dagger into the flesh of Eglon up to the haft. Then Ehud locked the doors and made his escape and began rallying the Israelites to battle. The deliverance was underway.

Eglon's servants delayed opening the doors to the summer parlour thinking the king may be resting. When they finally opened the doors they found him dead and Ehud had gained sufficient time to rally forces for a victorious result.

Following this deliverance the land had rest for another eighty years. Such was the work of the second Judge.

Verse 31

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.

The record of the third Judge is very short. His name was Shamgar. His battles were with the Philistines of whom he slew six hundred with an ox goad. Other details about the oppression by the Philistines or actions against them by Israel are not told., but the deliverance by Shamgar was notable enough to the people of Israel for Deborah to include Shamgar by name in her song of praise which we read in chapter five.

Thus far we have read of Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar as Judges of Israel.

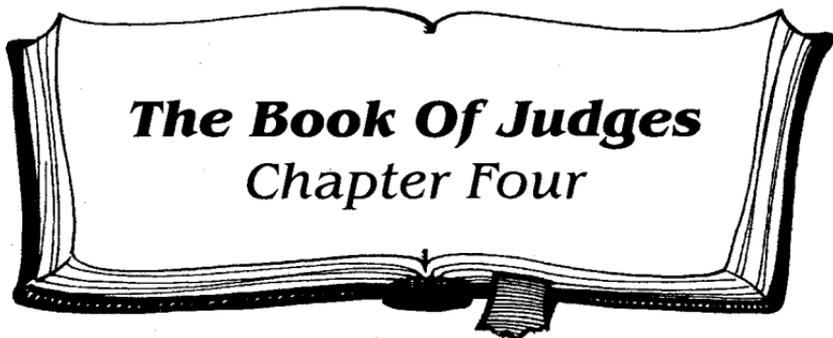
Questions on Chapter Three

1. Name some of the tribes and nations that continued to live in the land.
2. How did God use these people in guiding Israel?
3. What specific violations of God's commands did Israel commit?
4. Who was Chushan-rishathaim?
5. How long did Israel serve him?
6. What Judge delivered Israel from his control?
7. How did he do it?
8. How long did Israel then have peace?
9. Who was the next oppressor of Israel?
10. What brought about this oppression?
11. What was the kinship between Israel and Moab and Ammon?
12. What city is called the city of the palms?
13. How long did Israel serve Eglon?
14. What was different about Ehud?
15. What of the physical state of Eglon?
16. How did Ehud gain entrance to Eglon?
17. What did Ehud take with him?
18. For how long after Ehud's victories did Israel enjoy peace?
19. Who was the third Judge?
20. Against what people did he do battle?
21. Name the first three Judges.

NOTE: There is a matter that may warrant a special consideration at this point in the study. It refers to something that is characteristic of the events in the entire book. As we said in the Introduction, the book is a bloody book. There was much killing involved. There is the use of wicked men

and the use of deceit in accomplishing what has to be done. These things do not harmonize with the standards by which Christian people must live. But remember, these were not Christian people. They lived under a different set of standards. Furthermore, the situation of Israel demanded extraordinary measures. The existence of Israel itself was of extraordinary purpose. The inhabitants of Canaan before the occupancy by Israel were idolatrous people, evidently considered incorrigible, and God considered the way to deal with them was to rid the earth of them.

While there may be people on earth like that today, we as individuals cannot deal with them in this fashion. But this does not forbid proper civil authorities from dealing with them the same way God dealt with them. Israel was not only under religious law but was a civil government as well. Civil government has certain powers ordained of God for the protection of its people (Romans 13). But we always must be very, very cautious in shedding blood even when the cause is just and the punishment warranted. As we study Judges, we must be mindful of the different circumstances under which we live and the turbulent situations we are studying. Even those who were used and approved by the Lord, the Judges themselves, were not the kind of people that would fit the Christian mold. These were preparatory years, preservative years for Israel, and it goes into the overall scheme of things in producing God's plan for redeeming man which culminated in Christ. We must remember, God used these people, both wicked and righteous, but He did not force them to be what they were. As always, men are what they are by their own choices.



Verse 1

4:1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

By now we are very acquainted with the cause of the problems the Israelites faced. In one sense, they were their own enemies, bringing God's wrath upon themselves because of their refusal to obey and their determination to do evil.

This chapter follows the service of Ehud and the years of rest the land had after his great work. All of the chapter is given to the record of one other harassment of Israel and the deliverers on Israel's behalf. Notice "deliverers" in the plural because more than one is involved in this episode. Here we read of the combined efforts of Deborah and Barak together in accomplishing what had to be done. Again, there is much bloodshed involved.

Verses 2-8

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.

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.

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

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.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, 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?

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.

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.

The enemies this time were Canaanites. In one sense, all the enemies were Canaanites in that they lived in the land of Canaan. But there seems to have been one group of people who were called by this name in distinction from the several others who lived there. A man named Jabin was their king and the captain of his army (host) was one named Sisera. They were a mighty force with chariots of iron in their armory. The oppression of Israel was rather extended, twenty years, before deliverance was initiated.

A woman and a prophetess named Deborah is called a Judge in Israel. Just exactly what her duties were we are not told. However, the people looked to her in solving their problems. She worked in conjunction with a man named Barak. Barak is listed among the notables of faith in Hebrews eleven. Why Deborah is not also listed in that list we cannot tell. It could well be an indication, however, that Barak rather than Deborah was really the primary

leader. But without her input the affair may well have been very different.

She called for Barak to act. God had given the commandment to enlist men from various tribes and confront Sisera. For some reason Barak had not done this as yet. Deborah urged him to do as commanded. Barak's response may indicate why it took Deborah to get things moving. Barak must have been timid, hesitant or even fearful for some reason to encounter the enemy. He said he would do what God commanded if Deborah would go with him. Just why this woman had to go into battle before he would obey the Lord does not speak well for Barak. In fact, he was not willing to go unless she went. This is a distinct blight on his leadership. While he proved faithful to the task, his leadership is not to be admired, but that of Deborah is much preferred. When the leadership of men falls short of what is required women have often been the fire behind getting things done. Such seems to have been the case this time.

Probably more of us are like Barak than we would want to admit. Some would do what ought to be done if others would do it first. But if others do not do right then they cannot be counted on either. We should do what is right regardless of others.

We are not to suppose that this gives women authority for leadership in the Lord's church even when men are not all they should be. This was under the Mosaic system. The limitations on women in leading, teaching and exercising authority under Christ is too definitely declared for any reasonable variation from that to be proper (1 Tim. 2:9-15). Actually, Deborah is a demonstration of women using

their power and influence without usurping authority. But we are taught that women can be of tremendous value and service in supporting men in the work God wants them all to accomplish.

Verses 9-16

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

While Deborah agreed to go with Barak she told him the honor of the victory would belong to a woman rather than Barak. Evidently this did not matter that much to him.

As we read this we might naturally think that the woman to whom the honor would go for the victory would be Deborah, but Deborah was not the woman who would receive the honor. As the account unfolds we see a rather unlikely person becoming a vital part of this deliverance of Israel.

Barak called many men from many quarters and the battle was about to begin. Among those who answered the call is a man named Heber who was a Kenite, a descendant of the father-in-law of Moses. Usually the Kenites were friendly with Israel as we noted in chapter one. Once again Deborah encouraged Barak and reminded him that the Lord was with him. The result of the battle was decisive and Sisera and his army were put into retreat. The Israelites pursued them until they were destroyed.

Verses 17-24

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man

whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

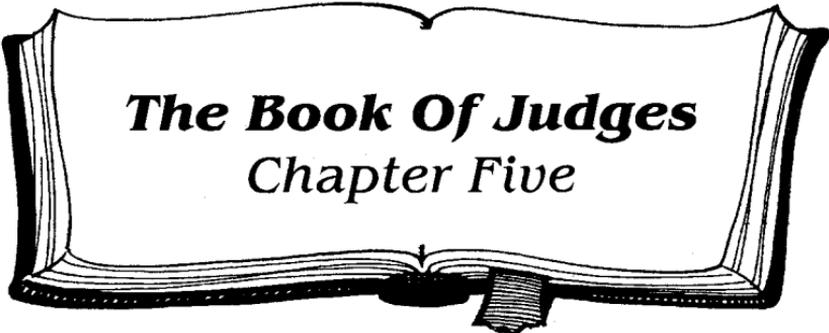
24 And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Sisera fled to a tent occupied by the wife of Heber whose name was Jael. Jael met Sisera and invited him to hide there. She also provided nourishment for him and was to turn away any who sought after him by saying he was not there. Sisera went to sleep and Jael took a nail, probably a tent spike, and drove it into his temples. Jael with a nail made him fail. So it was when Barak did locate Sisera, Jael told him he was already dead. The woman who gained the honor for the defeat of Sisera was Jael. It has been suggested that Sisera had no chance with two women, Deborah and Jael, against him. But Sisera was against the power of heaven and could not win against the will of the Lord.

So the Canaanites were subdued and following that victory the Israelites once again prospered as they always did when they served the Lord. Would you not think that their history was already extended enough for them to realize it was not only right to serve the Lord but it was to their physical and material welfare as well as their spiritual state for them to do so? Why generation after generation had to commit the same blunders and suffer the same results is difficult to understand. Yet, similar things happen among men even in our own time many centuries removed from these events.

Question for Chapter Four

1. Who was the enemy which oppressed Israel in this chapter?
2. What was the name of their king?
3. What was the name of the captain of their army?
4. Who was the only woman Judge?
5. Why were the Canaanites so formidable?
6. With what man did this woman lead Israel into deliverance?
7. What did she tell Barak to do?
8. What was Barak's answer?
9. What was her reply?
10. After the battle turned for Israel, to what place did Sisera flee?
11. How did he meet his death?



The Book Of Judges ***Chapter Five***

Chapter five is a very special chapter of praise, a song of praise, attributed to Deborah. It follows the victories Israel had accomplished over the Canaanites and Israel's deliverance after twenty hard years of oppression. It is one of four instances in Scripture where we read great words of praise of the Lord by women. The first was that by women led by Miriam after Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15). Deborah's song was the second. The third comes later in the time of Judges by Hannah upon the coming of Samuel (1 Samuel 2). The third was the exclamation of praise by Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1).

Verses 1-5

5:1 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.

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.

In this song Deborah gives praise and honor to whom it is due. She gives credit for Israel's success to the Lord but also includes those whom the Lord used to win the victory. It has an emphasis upon the power of the Lord over Israel's enemies, particularly in taking the land from the inhabitants of Canaan, much like the power demonstrated by the Lord at Sinai.

Verses 6-9

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.

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

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

9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD.

Reference is made to the deplorable conditions that existed from the days of Shamgar to her day. Travel was hazardous because of robbers and there was no protection or enforcement of law to protect the innocent.

Also notice is given as to the cause of Israel's plight, which was their choice of false gods. Nonetheless, Deborah spoke praises of the governors of Israel who willingly gave themselves to the task of real benefit for the nation. But the true hero was God.

Verses 10-13

10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way.

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.

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 song seems to be recalling the urging of Deborah to the leaders of the people to rally them in support of the effort of deliverance. She had been particularly encouraging to Barak who probably would not have assumed his role of leading Israel into battle if Deborah had not motivated and encouraged him. She utters praise for the improved conditions their efforts had produced.

We read the phrase, "lead thy captivity captive." This phrase is found several times in Scripture, other instances being Psalms 68:18, Isaiah 49:25 and Ephesians 4:8. It conveys the idea that those who were once captors of others are now made captives themselves, hence, the overthrow of bondage and deliverance. Or, and I prefer this explanation, it speaks of those who were once captives of their enemies but have been captured for the good by others. Such seems to be the concept of Isaiah 49:25. Salvation for those in need is the theme in either case. Verse thirteen of this chapter show they obtained dominion of those who were once over them mightily.

The meaning of the phrase seems clearer in Ephesians 4:8 where it speaks of the mission and purpose of the Lord Jesus. This refers to the Lord giving mankind a spiritual deliverance from the grip of Satan who could control man

in sin. He would lead them away from the captivity of the bondage of sin and lead them as His captives into salvation..

Verses 14-22

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.

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.

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

18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

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.

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

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 prancings, the prancings of their mighty ones.

While giving God the glory, Deborah also notes those who were involved in the great deliverance. Those of Ephraim, Machir (who were of the eastern part of the tribe of Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali are mentioned. There is the naming of some who did not serve as they should have served, such as the people of Reuben, the Danites (who continued their sea-faring ways rather than

fight) and those of Asher who stayed in their ports. This indicates there must have been a great deal of independence for each tribe in this period of history of a decentralized government to decide what to do and when to do it. The national need did not necessarily bring forth a national effort. But in this case there were sufficient forces rallied to accomplish the task and they came in for their share of praise for doing so. The horses of the enemy, which were essential in pulling the chariots of iron of the Canaanites, became incapacitated for battle and this contributed to Israel's success.

It is noteworthy that those who involved themselves are commended for not seeking personal and monetary gain for themselves. The cause was sufficient to bring them to the attack.

Mention is made of the river Kishon. Possibly this river assisted Israel because it flows through some deep ravines and when it rains it is subject to swift waters and flash floods. Probably some enemy soldiers were caught and destroyed by such a thing. We read in other works that such occurred in other battles of later time.

Verse 23

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.

Many sermons and articles have been written based on this verse. "Curse ye Meroz..." Why were the people of Meroz deserving of being cursed, indeed, bitterly cursed? It was because they did not come to help when the Lord wanted their help and the others needed their help. They

remained aloof from the conflict, above it all, refusing to be involved. There be people like this today who will not stand beside faithful soldiers of the cross as they battle the forces of sin and error, but will exclude themselves from any responsibility to lend assistance. Such is a cowardly act and usually done by those who consider themselves “above the strife.” They cannot soil their hands with conflict. They prefer to be friends with everybody regardless of who they are because they seek the praise of men rather than of God. Christians ought never find it a problem to let it be clearly known whose side they are on, God’s or the devil’s.

Verses 24-27

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.

In this short passage Deborah takes note of the participation by Jael and what she did to Sisera, captain of the Canaanites. Deborah had told Barak that the honor and glory for the victory would belong to a woman, and here Deborah praises the woman that proved herself capable of doing what needed to be done. It is interesting to note how Jael treated Sisera with great hospitality at the first before slaying him. Verse twenty-five tells us, “He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly

dish.” She treated him in a special way. But this only disarmed him for what was to happen.

Notice also that it is said, “...blessed shall she be above women in the tent.” Her honor would exalt her and position her in a place of prominence among all women. Roman Catholic doctrine has abused similar words as they were also spoken to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as if this would make her something she was never intended to be, a mediator for man. The Roman Catholic religion is more a worship of Mary than of Christ. They contend one can better gain God’s attention through Mary than through Christ. They cite this phrase spoken by the angel of Mary when she was informed she would bear the Christ child (Luke 1:28). That Mary was a faithful servant of God and her giving birth to Christ is most notable, this phrase no more denotes her as a go-between between God and man than it would be for Jael. To deny the many false Catholic claims regarding Mary in no way demeans or detracts from her rightful glory in all she did. But it is not respectful of her to assign to her a role and position that she was never given. Since she was the mother of the Christ child she surely deserves honor and praise.

Verses 28-31

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?

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?

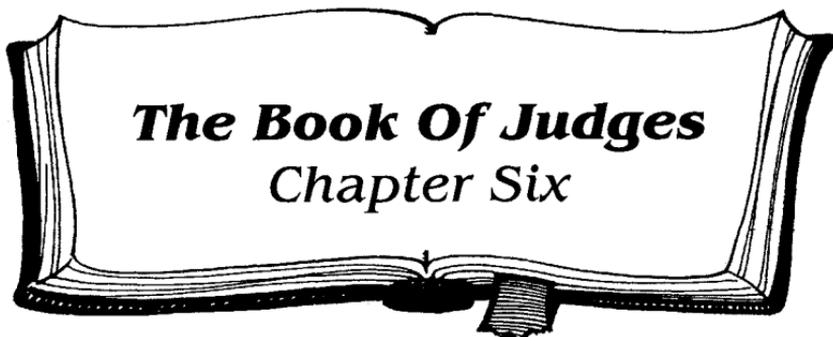
31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Deborah speaks of Sisera's mother, and how she waited for him to return from battle with spoils, but waited in vain. It may be unwarranted to suggest she was more concerned about what Sisera might bring her than she was about the welfare of her son. Some commentators have assigned to her sinister motives for her concern. But it could well be that she, as a mother, was greatly disturbed when her son did not come home from battle the victor that she anticipated. In fact, he did not return at all.

Following this great song of praise the line of history in resumed with the statement regarding a period of forty years of rest that Israel enjoyed after the work of Deborah and Barak. As stated earlier, counting the number of Judges to be fifteen (thirteen in the book of Judges and the last two in First Samuel), I include Abimelech (chapter 9) and count Deborah and Barak together as one because their role was one and the same and at the same time.

Questions on Chapter Five

1. What is the primary theme of this chapter?
2. To whom is this work of praise and honor attributed?
3. Who was the primary object of praise and glory of power?
4. Can you name some who joined in to assist in this deliverance?
5. What people are particularly scorned for their failure to assist?
6. What is the significance of the phrase "blessed shall she be above women?"
7. What is the meaning of "lead captivity captive"?



The next three chapters present the Biblical report of the life and works of Gideon, arguably the greatest of all the Judges, certainly of those recorded in the Book of Judges. He was one whose name is mentioned in Hebrews eleven as an example of faith and works. The hardships he faced, how he overcame the problems that arose from within and without, the tremendous leadership he demonstrated, and all the while maintaining a personal humility and loyalty to God, surely makes him rank among the outstanding characters not only of Judges, but of all the Bible.

Another admirable thing about Gideon is his growth, open-mindedness and willingness to learn. While cautious, he was aggressive. But the record of Gideon begins with his attitude very contrary to what we usually recall when we consider this great man. We are more concerned, however, with what Gideon became than what he was when we are first introduced to him. Surely, he is one of more interesting individuals of Scripture.

Verses 1-7

6:1 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.

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.

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;

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.

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

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites,

This passage depicts to us the oppression the Israelites were suffering at this time. But the account begins with the recognition of the cause of their difficulties. Once again, the theme continues to ring, "Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." This time the punishment would come from God's use of the Midianites for a period of seven years. Israel had dealings with Midian previously through the association with Jethro, father-in-law of Moses. It was in that land and nearby territories that Israel had wandered for forty years. Earlier than that Moses had fled there from Egypt.

The people of Israel were not safe to reside in their houses, but fled to the mountains and lived in caves, trying to fortify their small enclaves against the enemy. But their food supply was very vulnerable. They would plant and the Midianites, in alliance with Amalekites, would destroy their crops. Their animals were also destroyed. Their tents were invaded. The oppressors were so numerous that they seemed to be as grasshoppers for multitude, even numberless.

The result was that their sins had brought them to stark poverty. But as the case is in the Book of Judges, the people, obviously recognized their folly, and turned their hearts and voices toward the Lord.

Verses 8-10

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;
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.

As at other times, the Lord responded to their cry and sent an unnamed prophet into their midst. This prophet did not at first declare good news but reminded the people of the things God had done for them. God had brought them from the bondage of Egypt and given them the land in which they lived. He had driven their enemies away and would have been with them in the complete destruction of their foes if they had remained faithful to Him. But they turned to other gods, the gods of the Amorites specifically named here. They did not obey God's voice. The prophet enforced in their minds why things were as they were with them. Doubtless, this was not only to cause the people to be ashamed of their sins, but hopefully to be more mindful in the future of the source of blessing, the path to prosperity, and the folly of following other gods. Sadly, one of the lessons we learn from Judges is that too often the only

thing some of us learn from the past is that we did not learn anything at all.

Verses 11-16

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

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

Now we have the call of Gideon. An angel, a messenger from God, came to him as he was threshing wheat at the winepress. Ordinarily, that would not be the place to thresh wheat but to harvest grapes. But this indicates that probably Gideon was doing his work in secret lest he be discovered by the enemy and they would deprive him of what grain he could reap. It is a picture of the hardship upon the people at this time.

The angel's address is rather bold and blunt. He affirms to Gideon, calling him a mighty man of valor, that

the Lord was with him. Until this time we have no reason to recall any deeds of valor Gideon had performed, so possibly the angel was considering the future and the things that Gideon would later do.

Gideon was somewhat puzzled at the idea that God was with them. If God was with them, why were they having such a difficult time? He demanded to know why God did not do some miracles on their behalf as He had done when He brought Israel out of Egypt. Rather than it appearing that God was with them, it seemed to Gideon that God had forsaken them and allowed the Midianites to conquer them and subject them to terrible conditions. Gideon did not seem to understand that their problems were of their own making. Like many today when they face difficulties, they wonder why God does not relieve them and do so quickly and easily. Sometimes men “tie God’s hands,” as it were, by their own wickedness and block the blessings God would give them if only they would be righteous.

Rather than arguing the matter just here with Gideon, the angel made another declaration of importance that Gideon would be the man who would lead Israel to salvation from the Midianites. Gideon doubted the affirmation and asked, “Me? Why me? Of all people, I am of a poor people and the least among my brethren.”

So we see Gideon at this first report of him a man in frustration, doubt, insecurity, lacking confidence in himself, unable to see why their troubles existed, and wondering why God did not do something about it. He might not have recognized as much as he should that God was about to do something about it, but God would use him to do what needed to be done. Like many even now, Gideon denounced

the situation but when called upon to help remedy the problems he backed away. But the angel assured him that the Lord would be with him and he would smite the Midianites.

Verses 17-24

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

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.

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.

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 Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Even so, Gideon was not fully convinced nor was he fully prepared for the task. He asked the angel to give him a sign that these things he had been told were true. Gideon went to prepare a present for the angel and he brought

forth an offering of a kid, unleavened bread and broth. He placed it on a rock and a strange thing happened. The angel touched the flesh and bread with his rod and fire consumed them. Then the angel departed. What was the significance of this and how would this give Gideon confidence?

First, he could now be sure he had conversed with an angel of the Lord. Secondly, that which had happened was a sign of acceptance of his present. An event recorded in Leviticus 9:24 provides us with this indication that the consumption of the offering by fire was a sign of God's acceptance and approval. Then Gideon was addressed with the reassuring words, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die."

This seems to have sufficed for Gideon at the moment, although he had the need for other reassurances later, and he built an altar and worshipped God, calling the place Jehovah-shalom, "The Lord is my peace."

Verses 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.

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.

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 inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing.

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.

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.

The initial actions of Gideon were instigated immediately. The same night Gideon was instructed to take a bullock, throw down the altar of Baal, cut down the grove around it, build an altar to God sacrificing the bullock and burning it with the wood he cut down.

Strangely this altar to Baal belonged to his father. From this we see how widespread idolatry was in the land, and even though the father seems to later be impressed with Gideon's operations, he had not been a faithful parent in giving his son the proper example of faithfulness to God. Sometimes children are good in spite of their parents and some children follow wicked ways in spite of everything the parents can do to lead them aright. We do not know who may have taught and influenced Gideon to have respect for the true God of heaven but he already had this conviction when the angel came to him. He just did not understand why things were as they were.

With instructions from God, Gideon solicited help

from ten men and carried out the instructions precisely as given. The next day what he had done was noticed and noised abroad and it was wondered who had done this thing. After investigation it was determined that Gideon had done it. The people demanded that Gideon's father produce him that he might be punished. Notice how these Israelites, supposedly servants of God, were offended that someone had offended the false gods of their enemies. They were so fearful of the Midianites that they pushed aside their convictions toward God, if they really had any, in order to escape the hand of the Midianites.

Just here we see an indication that Gideon's father was favorably impressed with what his son had done. He did not turn his son over to the people, nor did he fully embrace the action with approval. He simply reasoned, "Why do you have to plead for Baal? If he really is a god like our enemies say and as you seem to believe, let him act like a god and take care of the situation himself." Of course, Baal could do nothing and this would only prove to all that Baal was a false god and ought not be worshipped by anyone.

The cutting down of the groves is significant because idols worshippers often erected their altars among clumps of trees and these trees became as "temples" to these false gods. Cutting them down would mean destruction of the sanctity of the altars and the false gods.

From this time forward Gideon is known by an additional name, Jerubbaal, as a result of the actions he had taken against the gods of Midian. Jerubbaal means one who disputes with Baal. Compared to the task of delivering Israel from the oppression of Midian, this work of destroying

the altar to Baal, cutting down the groves and offering sacrifice to God may seem rather small. Actually it is a lesser action than that which he later performed in driving the Midianites from the land. But do we not learn the wisdom of allowing people to grow to capability to do the work they are called to do? If Gideon balked and failed to do what God instructed him regarding his father's altar, how could he be trusted to faithfully execute the much greater and far-reaching work of doing battle against the Midianites on behalf of the whole nation? The wisdom of God is displayed before us. Gideon was faithful in relatively little before he was assigned the task of being faithful in much.

Verses 33-35

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.

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

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.

With this deed the conflict was inevitable. The time had come for deliverance but the Midianites would not go quietly. The enemy gathered their forces together and Gideon had the task of rallying troops to his cause also. As promised, the Spirit of the Lord was with Gideon. Upon the trumpet signal messengers were sent throughout the land soliciting helpers, and the response came from many quarters. The battle would soon become a reality. Keep in mind how numerous were the hosts of Midian.

Verses 36-40

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.

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.

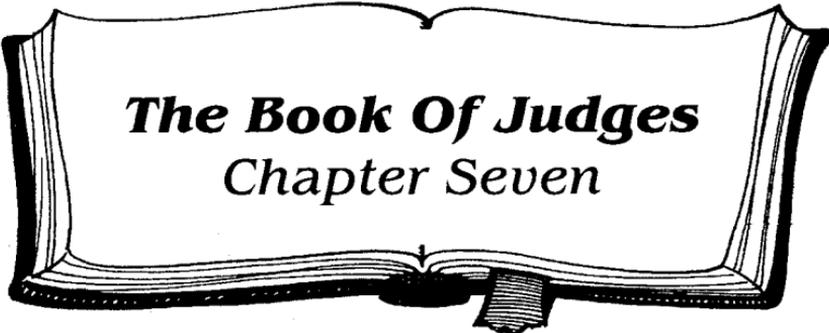
40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Before entering into battle Gideon wanted more assurances. He asked God to give him a sign he would be victorious. Gideon proposed the sign himself. He would put fleece of wool on the ground, and the next morning he wanted the fleece to be wet with dew but the ground around it to be dry. Wet fleece; dry ground. The thing was done as Gideon requested. Gideon wanted one other sign. He asked that an opposite situation exist with the fleece remaining dry and the ground around it be covered with dew. Dry fleece; wet ground. So it was from this point forward, this man we met in the throws of doubt and frustration never again showed any signs of doubt that God was with him and that the task he was called to perform would be successfully executed. God expects us to believe certain things, but gives us evidence by which we can know what we believe is true. We have Scripture that provides

evidence for us (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11: 1). God gave miraculous evidence to Gideon for the task before him.

Questions on Chapter Six

1. Who is the enemy of Israel in this chapter?
2. What hardships did the Midianites impose upon the Israelites?
3. What was the cause of these hardships?
4. Who appeared to Gideon?
5. Where was Gideon when the angel appeared unto him?
6. Why is the location of Gideon of some significance?
7. How did the angel address Gideon?
8. What did Gideon ask the angel?
9. How did the angel answer Gideon?
10. How did Gideon react when told he would lead the deliverance from the Midianites?
11. What did Gideon bring as a present for the angel?
12. What was done with the present and what was its significance?
13. What instructions did God now give Gideon?
14. How many helped Gideon carry out the instructions?
15. To whom did the altar Gideon destroyed belong?
16. What did the people demand of the father regarding Gideon?
17. How did the father react to this demand?
18. What additional name was given to Gideon?
19. As the battle approached, what two signs did God give Gideon that all would be well?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Seven

Verses 1-7

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.

2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

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.

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.

5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth 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.

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.

Gideon is again called by his name Jerubbaal. He enjoyed the support of all his people. Such a blessing this is for someone who assumes the leadership of any worthy task to have the backing of others, especially those for whom success would have benefit. Leadership is important but so is followship. Combined cooperatively together it is an almost unstoppable combination. In addition to this human unity, Gideon was blessed with God being with him. So he confidently moved forward to rid his people of the Midianite oppression.

But then God told Gideon something that must have struck him as rather strange at first. He said Gideon had too many people to help him. Seeing how the Midianites were so numerous, without number, as grasshoppers, how could this be? There was good reason for what God instructed. Deliverance would be accomplished, but the people needed to know that it was accomplished by the Lord and not by themselves.

Gideon did not quibble or dispute God's summation of things and promptly did what God told him to do. God told him to allow all those who were fearful to return home. Of the original thirty-two thousand volunteers, twenty-two thousand of them did return home. Two thirds of his force melted before his eyes. Still God said he had too many.

Possibly many would have questioned God's thinking here, or at least inquired what God was doing. Not so with Gideon. God told him to put the people to a specific test and this would determine who would remain to fight. Those that lapped water as would a dog was to set aside. Those that bent the knee and lapped the water with his hand were to be retained. An additional nine thousand three hundred

were summarily dismissed. This left Gideon with a mere three hundred men to go against the numberless hosts of Midian.

We are mindful just here of a comment made many years later by Jonathan to his servant when they came up against a Philistine garrison and were so heavily outnumbered. Jonathan said, "...for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). Most of us have heard the saying, "The Lord and one man make a majority." This is certainly one such occasion as Gideon confronts the Midianites.

Verses 8-22

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath.

Here is the account of the battle between Gideon with his three hundred man and the Midianites. Having nourished themselves and night had fallen, God came to Gideon and told him that victory would be his. If Gideon had any question about that God gives him another sign of

reassurance. Gideon was to take his servant and slip down near the enemy and listen to what was being said. There were untold numbers of Midianites and their allies, the Amalekites. What Gideon heard was about a dream one of the enemy soldiers had.

In the dream there was a cake of barley that fell into the army of Midian, came to a tent and smote the tent that it overturned. The man to whom the dream was being told responded that it was nothing other than a dream about Gideon and that God had delivered the Midianites into his hand. Just how this dream fit that conclusion I cannot properly tell. But evidently the dream was given by the Lord as well as the interpretation thereof because this was what God wanted Gideon to hear that would give him confidence of victory. Once Gideon heard all this he worshipped God and returned to his camp, telling his men to be ready for the battle because God had showed him they would win. Gideon had confidence in God and Gideon's men had confidence in him. Though few in number relative to the enemy, they were ready to roll.

The battle plan was a simple one. The three hundred men were divided into three companies and dispatched to different positions around the Midianite camp. Then we read of one of the finest statements displaying leadership you can find anywhere. Gideon told his men, "As I do, so shall ye do." Nothing leads as powerfully as a good example. This is true in the home, the church or even the nation. Leadership has authority to act. But when they want someone to follow them the best instruction is to show them what to do as well as tell them. Gideon did some of both.

Upon a given signal, and surrounding the camp, they were to take pitchers in which were lighted lamps, blow their trumpets, break the pitchers so the light would be visible to the enemy and shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon."

Into battle went these faithful men of Israel with Gideon at the helm, with most unorthodox "weapons," but with orders to follow. Everything went as planned and the result was astounding. The Midianites became to run about in confusion and not knowing how many men Gideon had they took each other for a foe and began slaughtering each other, and others fled away.

Verses 23-25

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.

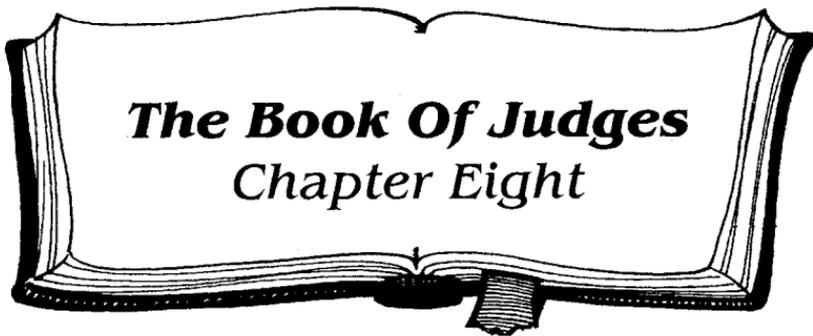
24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan.

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.

With this event many Israelites began the pursuit of the enemy. Evidently those that had been dismissed and allowed to return were nearby. Gideon sent messengers to them to enter the fray and they did. Mention is made how the men of Ephraim blocked escape routes and captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb, slew them, and brought their heads to Gideon.

Questions on Chapter Seven

1. What is the other name for Gideon?
2. Tell how God had Gideon to select the men he would use.
3. How did Gideon learn from God that the victory would be his?
4. What equipment did the men of Gideon take into battle?
5. How did Gideon show great leadership?
6. What did the actions of Gideon then create among the Midianites?
7. What tribe captured two Midianite princes?
8. What was done with them?
9. What lesson can we learn from this account seeing how Gideon was victorious over o many with so few?
10. How do you account for such bloodshed?



Verses 1-3

8:1 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.

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?

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.

This third chapter concerning the life and work of Gideon begins with the men of Ephraim making a complaint against him. It seems they felt they had been slighted and had not been called to battle as they should have been and Gideon had left them out. Their objections must have been sharply made. There may be a problem with the chronology of events here because chapter seven verse twenty-four says Ephraim had been called, and they had responded to that call. Therefore we are made to wonder if they had been hesitant to respond but later did, but now that victory was evident they decided to complain some about it. Possibly this complaint was made before the chapter seven call and is not recorded until chapter eight.

Whatever the case may be with that the way Gideon

handled the matter reflects great wisdom, patience and diplomacy on his part. Rather than engaging them in an argument he brags on what they had done. They had captured two princes, Oreb and Zeeb, and Gideon was now aware of that and magnifies that capture to be above anything anybody else had done. It may be that the men of Ephraim were gleaning grapes when called and this is why they did not answer as quickly as some others. Gideon said what they were doing was as important as anything else. In this way he defused the issue and pacified the complainers who now felt they had done a great work. While we do not scoff at what they did, we do wonder if they were not flattered so much by Gideon that they forgot the issue that had upset them. It is usually a good idea to find the good people do and help them see their worth rather than simply showing them how insignificant they are.

Verses 4-17

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

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.

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?

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 Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him.

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

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.

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.

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 inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.

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?

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

17 And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.

There were some others who could have assisted in driving out the Midianites but who refused. The men of Gideon grew weary and asked for bread from the men of Succoth. He told them he was pursuing Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, and needed some help. The men of Succoth did not readily help him, however, because they wanted to be sure Gideon would be victorious lest Gideon fail and they would be in danger from the Midianites. Some people are like that. Before they will help in a noble and worthy cause they want to be sure they are on the winning

side. If to them there is any doubt as to the potential outcome, they will protect themselves and without conviction refuse to uphold the hands of others. Such are a sorry lot of people.

Gideon was angered at them for good reason since they would also benefit in the defeat of the Midianites. The least they could have done was to help those fighting the battle. He warned them that upon his return he would chastise them severely for their failure to help.

Gideon next went to the city of Penuel, asked help from them, and got the same treatment as given by the men of Succoth. Gideon told them when he came back he would tear down their tower. A tower was a necessity in protecting a city because from there they could watch and also have an advantage in shooting their arrows at an approaching enemy. But Gideon was going to render the city defenseless. Both Succoth and Penuel were cities of the tribe of Gad. Again we witness the independence the tribes had one from another.

Gideon caught the two Midianite kings and their armies that were left and defeated them. As Gideon was returning a man of Succoth was found who described the princes of Succoth and their leaders, those responsible for refusing to give Gideon assistance. He came to Succoth, told them he had captured the two kings and proceeded to teach the men of Succoth the lesson of which he had warned. The Scripture says he "taught" them with thorns and briers. He next went to Penuel and did as he had threatened there also. The tower came down. Gideon was executing wrath against some of his countrymen but he was justified because it was deserved.

Verses 18-21

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.

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.

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.

Gideon next turns his attention toward the two Midianite kings in his custody and asked about the ones they had slain. They answered that they were like Gideon. Gideon was obviously angered at this because he considered his fellow countrymen his brethren. So in revenge for what they had done Gideon commanded that both kings be slain. He gave the order to slay them to his son, Jether, but his son, a youth, was not the hardened warrior like his father and was too fearful to carry out the order. The two kings then told Gideon to do the job himself, which he did, taking away their ornaments.

Once again we see vicious deeds done. How these people brought themselves to the point of doing all they did may be difficult for us to understand. However, they were not just exercising their personal whims or venting their personal anger. They were executing justice in the name of the civil power they represented. We must keep in mind that in God's view these wicked ones deserved

the punishment they received from the hands of His chosen.

Verses 22, 23

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.

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.

At the start of the battle it was made evident that the people were very much in support of Gideon. Now that they all were basking in the glory of victory, seeing how Gideon had been so successful as their leader, some desired to make him a king over the people. Furthermore, they even suggested that the kingship continue through his descendants. This not only shows how appreciative they were of Gideon and what a great leader he had been, but also reflects a misunderstanding of the man himself.

Gideon wanted no part in being made a king because he said, "The Lord shall rule over you." Lesser men would have jumped at the chance for the power and prestige that being the king would have brought him. But Gideon was obviously a humble man and was not swayed by the wishes of the people however well intentioned they may have been. He did not do what he did for personal glory. He served the nation. What a lesson for all those who would have civil power over any people today. Would that our land and others would be blessed with "Gideons."

Verses 24-28

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.)

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.

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.

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.

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

While he would not accept becoming a king he did make request for gifts. Possibly this was because he had so neglected his own livelihood for the welfare of the nation that he was in need. Whatever may have motivated him to accept such gifts, the whole affair later backfired against Israel because Gideon made a ephod from some of it and put it in his city, and the people made an icon or idol out of it. Surely, this was never Gideon's intention.

So ended the career of this outstanding person in the turbulent history of Israel during the days of Judges. Following his accomplishments Israel enjoyed another forty years of rest, and Gideon must have retired to his own home and like old soldiers are said to do, "just fade away."

Verses 30-35

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

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 showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.

There were many descendants of Gideon because he had many wives. Again this condition cannot be tolerated in Christianity and it shows that even though Israel was God's chosen people for a chosen purpose, they were far removed from the standards they ought to have followed and far removed from the moral code of Christ.

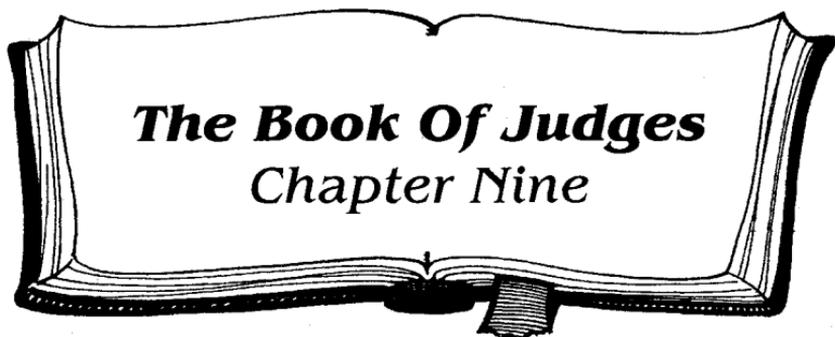
One of his sons becomes prominent. His name was Abimelech. Whereas the people wanted to make Gideon king and he refused, the idea must have been thought deserving by this son at least, of which we shall read in the next chapter. Just here we learn that Abimelech was the son of one of Gideon's concubines.

As the history of the people repeats itself over and over in the Book of Judges, after the death of their noble leader, they turned again after false gods. Nor did the

feelings toward Gideon extend to his descendants and they did not show to them the same kindness they had shown to Gideon. How soon people forget and how quickly they can turn away from those who have been their benefactors!

Questions on Chapter Eight

1. What complaint did the men of Ephraim register against Gideon?
2. Discuss whether you think the complaint was justified.
3. How did Gideon appease the Ephraimites?
4. What request did he make of the men of Succoth?
5. How did they respond to that request?
6. What other city did he ask for help?
7. How did these respond?
8. What did Gideon threaten to do to these people upon his return?
9. How did Gideon deal with the kings of Midian?
10. What did the people suggest Gideon become over them?
11. How did Gideon respond to that suggestion?
12. What did Israel do after Gideon's death?
13. What son of Gideon is specifically named in the last of this chapter?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Nine

Verses 1-3

9:1 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,

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.

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.

As was mentioned previously some do not count Abimelech as one of the Judges and in the next few verses we see the reason for their thinking. However, this commentary does count him among the fifteen. Abimelech is not called to power over the people by the Lord as were the previous men, or those after him. He took it upon himself to manipulate conditions whereby he would become the primary ruler.

He goes to Shechem, the area from which his mother, Gideon's concubine, had come. He reasons with the people there whether it would be best for all the descendants of Gideon to reign over them or to have just one rule over them. Gideon had many sons. Of course, there is nothing

to indicate that God intended for the sons of Gideon to reign over anybody. The people had suggested that and Gideon rejected that. The previous Judges had not been mentioned as reigning, as would a king, but simply came to power by God's authority to perform the task at hand. After presenting his case, Abimelech reminded these people that he was one of them, "your bone and your flesh." It was obvious that he was soliciting their support to make him the single ruler over the land. He was successful in his effort and their hearts were turned to him, saying, "He is our brother."

Verses 4-6

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

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.

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.

Now that they decided to make Abimelech their ruler, the next step was to remove all potential rivals. With money gathered from the Shechemites Abimelech hired mercenaries of low character to slay all the other sons of Gideon. This they did, with the exception of one named Jotham. They proceeded to make Abimelech their king, the very thing that Abimelech's father said should not be done.

Even measuring by the uncouth standards of behavior of that day, nobody could ever contend that Abimelech

came to power in an honorable way. This action betrays the kind of man he was and it becomes even more evident as the account unfolds.

Verses 7-21

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.

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?

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?

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

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.

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;)

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:

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.

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

The one son of Gideon who escaped being killed was Jotham, the youngest of all of Gideon's sons. When he was informed of what had occurred he went to the top of Mt. Gerizim from where he could speak and be heard. He called for the attention of the people below and told them a fable. Some have called Jotham's remarks a parable, but a parable is something that would either be a real situation or a possible one. A fable is a story that is fictitious and could not possibly be true because it includes animals and trees speaking and acting as men. Our Lord taught with parables but never with fables. Jotham's fable was intended to drive home a much needed lesson to the people, however.

His fable was about the trees making a selection who would reign over them. The first choice was the olive tree, which was the prize tree of the land. But the olive tree refused the offer to be king. The next tree that was asked was a more inferior tree to the olive but one that was respected, the fig tree. But the fig tree also declined the offer. Then the trees turned to the vine which gave the same refusal as the olive and fig trees. Finally the trees went to the bramble or thorns, the least desirable of all

growth. But the bramble accepted the offer and even began to boast of its greatness and power that it could devour the majestic cedars. Of course, Jotham is liking Abimelech to the bramble. He said if they had done right in selecting the bramble and had dealt with the house of his father correctly, then all was well and they should rejoice. But if not, and they certainly had not chosen a worthy man and had been most despicable toward the rest of the family of Gideon, Jotham prayed that fire would come upon Abimelech and Shechem and devour them. He left little doubt where he stood in this matter. But being in the precarious situation he was, he then fled the scene.

Verses 22-41

22 When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel,
23 Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

The events recorded here is of the breakdown of the alliance of Abimelech and the Shechemites. Whereas they had begun as allies, now there was great strife between them. Abimelech had ruled for three years before this strife broke into open conflict. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and his partners in crime and the Shechemites dealt treacherously with Abimelech. They set an ambush against him, but it was revealed to Abimelech before he fell prey to their plot.

We now meet a man name Gaal who becomes the leader of the Shechemites. Gaal was very arrogant in raising strong words and opposition to Abimelech, telling the people they should not serve him. Gaal was not raising a revolt against Abimelech on behalf of Jotham but for himself and the people of Shechem followed him. He challenged Abimelech to come out and fight to the death.

There was another man named Zebul who was an ally of Abimelech and he was angered by the actions of Gaal. He was a man of influence in Shechem because he was an officer, probably serving as the local ruler at the time. There was a divided loyalty among the Shechemites. Zebul sent word to Abimelech what was taking place and their preparation for battle. He suggested Abimelech plan an ambush of his own which he did.

When Gaal and his men came out of the city Abimelech made his attack and it seemed to Gaal that there were enemy soldiers coming out of the mountains and the middle of the land. Abimelech had many followers still loyal to him. Two evil forces were locked in combat. Seeing the desperate situation that now faced Gaal, Zebul taunted him by saying, "Where is now thy mouth...?" Gaal had

done some “big” talking about what he could and would do about Abimelech, but it proved all talk and the tide had turned against him. Gaal went to the fight but he fled before Abimelech. Zebul then thrust out Gaal and his followers from among the Shechemites. What civil conflict raged during these years! What strife, hatred, grasping for power, lack of control and instability for the land that dominated the scene! Little wonder that the period of the Judges has been described by some as the Dark Ages of the history of Israel even though Israel endured many different periods of hardship. But the age of the Judges was a chaotic and tragic time because the nation vacillated back and forth in their loyalty to God, suffering or enjoying the very different consequences of their choices.

Regardless of what one may think of Abimelech’s personal character, and it was not honorable, he proved himself a very capable leader of men and a power with which the inhabitants of the land had to deal. Furthermore, he was not through yet.

Verses 42-49

42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech.

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.

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.

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.

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 ax 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.

Abimelech was not satisfied with simply putting down the revolt caused by Gaal. He severely punished the people of Shechem for what they had initiated and allowed. His one-time friends and allies were now his targets and enemies. He made an attack against the people in the fields when they came from the city and slew them, fighting against the city and sowing it with salt. Such action would render the city almost uninhabitable, making the destruction of it a perpetual one. His wrath was vented against them sternly.

He then turned his attention to the tower of the city which was a prominent fortification of any city. Here we read of the house of Berith, a false god that was worshipped by the people. Many had fled there for safety only to die there.

Abimelech cut down limbs from trees and urged his men to do as they saw him do. This reminds us of the great leadership of Gideon when he told his men to do as they

saw him do. Possibly Abimelech had learned some of his leadership qualities from his father. The limbs were laid against the tower of the city, their watchtower and fortification, and set ablaze. Many had fled there for they considered it to be a place of safety. But they met a fiery death.

Verses 50-54

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

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.

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.

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.

Abimelech next turns against a place called Thebez. Evidently the people of that place had been an ally with the opponents of Abimelech from Shechem and now they were to be punished. As in Shechem he attacked their tower and intended to burn it as he had done previously. But Abimelech met his doom. As he came to the tower and went toward the door a woman above him dropped a piece of millstone on his head and broke his skull. He was not killed instantly but asked his armor-bearer to slay him lest it be reported a woman killed him. Is this not an indication of his vanity even unto death? Does not this remind us of

the request Saul made when morally wounded by the Philistines some years later? The armor-bearer did as commanded and Abimelech met his death.

The wickedness of those involved in the record of chapter nine is almost beyond description. We search in vain for one who was commendable. Such was the status of Israel during so much of the period of the Judges.

Verses 55-57

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

56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren:

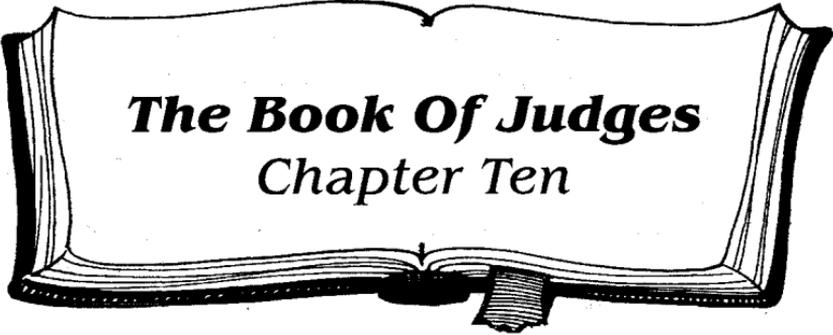
57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

With their leader dead, the forces of Abimelech dispersed to their homes. He had met his destruction and God had providentially accomplished it because Abimelech had slain his brothers. The evil of the Shechemites had also come upon them, and the curse upon them pronounced by Jotham had come to pass. I think it would be most interesting to know what became of Jotham. But there is no revelation regarding that.

As the career of Abimelech closed, it is easy to see that he was an exception to the rule regarding the other Judges. He was not chosen as were the others. Nor did he deliver the Israelite people from outside enemies and oppression as did the others. So even though he is usually counted as one of the Judges there is good reason to exclude him and consider him as one who usurped authority and as a result wrought great havoc on the people Israel.

Questions on Chapter Nine

1. To whom did Abimelech go seeking support for his quest for power?
2. What argument did he use with them that he was the most suitable?
3. What evil thing did he do to his potential rivals?
4. Who escaped this slaughter?
5. Relate and explain the fable of Jotham.
6. What occurred between Abimelech and the Shechemites?
7. What man became the new leader of the men of Shechem?
8. What other man of Shechem was an ally of Abimelech?
9. What was said to Gaal when things began to turn against him?
10. How did Abimelech punish the city of Shechem?
11. What did he plan to do to the city of Thebez?
12. How did Abimelech meet his death?
13. Name the first six Judges.



The Book Of Judges ***Chapter Ten***

Verses 1-5

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.

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

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

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

5 And Jair died, and was buried in Camon.

After Abimelech we read very brief accounts of two men who defended Israel from their enemies and judged the people. One was named Tola, of the tribe of Issachar, who judged for twenty-three years. The other was Jair, a Gileadite, who judged for twenty-two years. Who might have been the enemies at this time is not revealed.

As much as from any other source the record of these men gives some evidence that the Judges are not recorded in chronological order and that they all did not do their work over all the tribes of Israel. In fact, the independence the tribes exercised one from the other during this period of history is notable. It could well be that some of the Judges were ruling concurrently, one in part of the land

and another meeting some need in another part. On this matter was have little evidence, but only blurred indications.

Verses 6-9

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.

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.

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.

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.

Time after time we see the cycle of Judges in operation. After deliverance and success the Israelites again do evil in the sight of the Lord and that brings upon them deserved punishment in the form of oppression from the enemies in the land that they had not destroyed when they entered Canaan as God has instructed. The evil that is most often named is idolatry, serving gods like Baalim, Ashtaroth, and the gods of various areas and heathen peoples. This way of forsaking the Lord was not to be overlooked as a small thing and it provoked the Lord's hot anger against them.

They were as slaves to the Philistines and Ammonites on the west side of Jordan and to the Amorites on the east side of Jordan. The territories occupied by the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim were the prime targets of

their enemies. This would mean the oppression we presently have under study was in the southern portion of the land of Canaan. Israel was sore distressed.

Verses 10-16

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

The children of Israel once again did as they so often do when under the weight of the heel of their enemies. Acknowledging that they had sinned against God by serving false gods, they cried unto the Lord once again. This time the response from God was not as immediate in the selection of a deliverer as we had seen in former instances. This time God embarks on an effort to teach the people the error of their ways and shame them into repentance that would be genuine and lasting.

He reminded them how He had delivered them from the nations of the land, beginning with the Egyptians and listing a number of the inhabitants of Canaan. He had answered their cries over and over. Yet they persisted in forsaking Him, and now they were asking for deliverance once again. They would not be warned, would not learn, would not remain faithful for very long, but committed the same folly generation after generation.

The Lord told them to go cry to false gods they had chosen to worship and see if they would bring their deliverance from tribulation. Of course, the Lord and Israel both knew that these false gods, which they had chosen and by which they brought themselves into misery, had no power to do anything. This was one of the points God wanted to impress upon them. It showed how foolish Israel was to turn to these gods at all any time.

But Israel confessed their wrongs and said whatever punishment God executed against them they would accept, if only God would deliver them from the hands of their foes. They put away their strange gods and served the Lord. This was enough for God to decide to drive their enemies from them once again. Surely, His compassion for this rebellious and unstable nation was beyond measure for its greatness.

Verses 17-18

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.

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.

We shall read of the selection of the next Judge in the next chapter. This chapter closes with the gathering of the forces of the enemy and the people of Israel also preparing for the conflict. But Israel was lacking one to lead them. In order to entice someone to step forward and assume the leadership of this effort they promised that whoever would do this and if they were successful then after the conflict that person would be granted the power to be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. The stage was set for someone to be found and the battle to begin.

NOTE: As we read of these accounts of Israel's sins, God's punishment, God's deliverance, certain principles of God's dealing with mankind come to the forefront. Sin cannot and will not be tolerated by the Lord. He will not allow people to remove Him from their lives and still be blessed. This lesson our world needs to learn also.

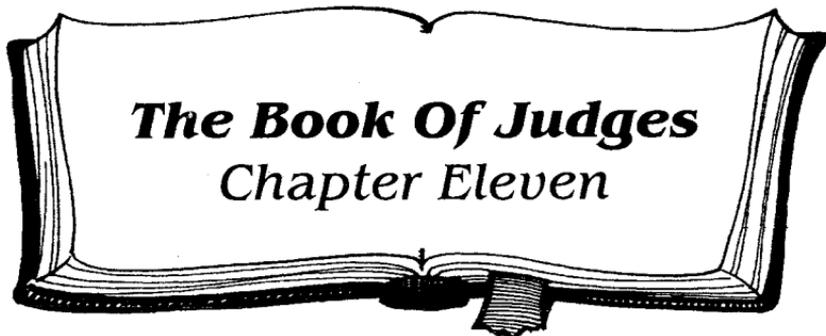
Sin deserves punishment and will be punished. God is a disciplinarian. We learn how God chastised those in sin because He loved them and wanted them to follow the righteous paths rather than that which always brings destruction. It was not to satisfy an evil spirit of retaliation or "getting even" that God did to Israel what He did.

We do not always know what and whom God may use to bring the sinner to his senses. We know His will is revealed in His word, but how God might produce a situation so a person would be receptive of His word we do not always know. We know without His word we would never know how to please God.

Do we not see that God is gracious and will bless those who turn from the error of their way and come to Him? How could anybody miss this point in Judges?

Questions for Chapter Ten

1. Name the first eight Judges.
2. What caused Israel to become servants of their enemies once again?
3. What problem did Israel have that had to be resolved before they entered battle?
4. What promise was given to whomever would take the leadership and succeed?
5. How did God remind the Israelites of His blessings to them in the past?



Verses 1-4

11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

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.

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.

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

We are now introduced to the man who would come to the leadership role for Israel in this struggle against these enemies that distressed them. His name is Jephthah. He is called a mighty man of valor. Whether he had this reputation before the battles of deliverance or whether the report, which was obviously written after the battles, takes note of the reputation he gained, we cannot tell. He was the son of a harlot, therefore not one who would receive equal portions of his father's inheritance. In fact, the legitimate sons of his father cast him out because they did not want him to inherit anything since he was the son of a harlot. The hardship leveled upon Jephthah at this time was no fault of his own, but the fault of his father and the

jealousy and greed of his half brothers.

So Jephthah fled from before them, gathering with him a company of vain men. His companions at this time were not honorable people. Nonetheless he was their leader. The time came when his services would be needed as Israel prepared for war against Ammon.

Verses 5-11

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:

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

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?

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?

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 Mizpeh.

As the time approached for the conflict to become heated, the elders of Gilead sought Jephthah to be their captain. Jephthah reminded them of how they had expelled him from them, and now wondered why they came seeking his help. Their response may indicate Jephthah had proven himself capable of the task in some previous adventure

because they said they turned to him “again.” To what that referred we have no way of knowing. However, they sought him to be head over them. The proposition was that whoever led them successfully against the Ammonites would be head over them all.

Jephthah did not immediately agree to lead but asked if they would retain him as their head once the Ammonites were defeated. They agreed that he would be the head. Do you not wonder if there was some insincerity in their promise, or possibly a reluctance among them to make this agreement with Jephthah? Nonetheless, they were forced to see how they had acted hastily and improperly toward Jephthah previously. But the agreement was made and Jephthah becomes the leader of the people. Notice that Jephthah uttered his words before the Lord, which indicates his strong faith in God and determination that God’s will be done. This quality made him an exceptional choice for the task before them all.

Verses 12-27

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.

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;

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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,

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?

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.

The first one with whom Jephthah dealt was the king of Ammon. He asked why the Ammonites had come against Israel in Israel's land. The king of Ammon disputed the claim Israel made on the land and contended that Israel had taken the land from them and should now restore it.

Jephthah proceeds to show the king of Ammon that Israel had not wrongfully taken the land of Ammon and Moab when they came out of Egypt. Israel had asked permission to come through their territory on their way to Canaan, seeking permission also from Edom, but none would consent to let them pass. The king of Sihon had also refused Israel's request. None would cooperate with Israel whatsoever.

Jephthah further contended that the land in question had once belonged to the Ammonites but had been taken from them by the Amorites. Israel took it not from Ammon but from the Amorites, therefore Ammon had no claim to it and should not have come against Israel because Israel occupied the land.

The Lord delivered these nations into the hands of Israel to possess the lands, so why should Israel now feel obligated to restore it to them? If God drove them off the land, and God gave Israel the land, then the former inhabitants lost claim over the land and Jephthah would not only not return the land but would continue to possess it for Israel even if it necessitated warfare.

It is interesting how that the conflicts in that part of the world today still are over the land and to whom it belongs. The heathen nations that were there lost their right to it because of their idolatry and immorality, and God gave it to Israel. However, Israel lost their right to the land

because they were not faithful to God. Neither of the present combatants for the land today have any divine right of the land. The purpose for which the land was given to Israel has long since been accomplished and the claim of Jews today that the land still belongs to them is false. Once it did. Now neither can claim it to the exclusion of the other.

Jephthah further reasoned that other nations had not attempted to retake the land from Israel, why should Ammon. There had been times in the past when recapture might have been accomplished if the effort had been made, but the effort was not made. Israel had held the land for over three hundred years and none attempted to claim them. They all knew the land belonged to Israel. Therefore it was wrong for the Ammonites to be threatening war against Israel in this matter. Jephthah made a very convincing series of arguments against the king of Ammon and the king should have turned away and left Israel alone. Jephthah even called upon God to be the judge of this issue. Not only was Jephthah recognized as a man of valor, but we must recognize him as a logician and persuasive defender by his words of reason. Possibly his fellow countrymen knew these qualities were within him and this is why they wanted him to guide the affairs of state.

Verse 28

28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Jephthah's words were such that they could not be refuted, but they did not convince the king of Ammon to pull back. He would not hearken to Jephthah. Nothing else remained but to fight it out to the finish..

Verses 29-40

29 Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

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, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

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.

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.

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.

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, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

God was with Jephthah as he went into battle. Now Jephthah does another thing that later causes him deep grief. He made a vow that if Ammon is defeated, and he returned in peace, that whatever he first met that came from his house upon his return he would offer as a burnt offering. Before we go further into this matter there is something of substance we should understand. It ought to be evident that this proposal had its limitations. Not just anything was acceptable to be offered as a burnt offering. If some unclean animal had met him, that sacrifice would not have been pleasing to God. It can therefore be safely assumed that it was implied by Jephthah that he would offer as an acceptable sacrifice to God whatever first met him. We approach this matter with caution because good men have widely varying views as to what really took place upon Jephthah's return.

Jephthah did fight against the Ammonites and the Lord delivered the enemy into his hands, and they were subdued before Israel. The yoke of bondage and oppression, formerly the burden of Israel to bear, was removed.

When he returned home the first thing that greeted him from his house was his only daughter. This grieved Jephthah and he was regretted his vow. The fact that he rent his clothes is strong evidence that, regardless of his intentions in making the vow, he had vowed thoughtlessly and rashly, promising more than he was willing to do.

Possibly he never intended to mean he would offer his daughter as a sacrifice. But his words did not expressly state an exclusion from his promise, although there is the previously mentioned reason that it was implied. But Jephthah was determined to do whatever he vowed, saying "I cannot go back."

The daughter of Jephthah was most cooperative with her father in this matter and told him to do whatever it was he had to do. You have to admire his daughter because it so vitally affected her. The Lord had blessed Israel with victory and it was right for Jephthah to keep his vow.

The big question is whether Jephthah actually did slay his daughter as a sacrifice to God. Just what did his vow actually demand?

Not everyone will agree with the conclusion of these comments, but whatever we concluded there would be a difference with some. We first must determine if Jephthah intended to please God. Surely, he did. His vow was to please God and he wanted nothing except what was acceptable to God. Would just any animal be an acceptable sacrifice? The answer to that is, "No." Would a human sacrifice please God? Where is any evidence that God would accept and be pleased with human sacrifices? True enough, he instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, but He stayed his hand before it was done. The Lord wanted Abraham, not Issac. Was it not true that human sacrifice was more like the manners of the heathen and pagan people with whom God did not want Israel to associate? Why would God ever be pleased or allow a sacrifice which He abhorred in others? The evidence seems to me to be that Jephthah made a rash and hasty vow, but never intended to sacrifice human life,

nor would God ever accept a human sacrifice. Therefore, it seems most likely that no sacrifice of human life actually took place. In its stead there was another sacrifice made that did involve Jephthah and his daughter.

This may be a good place to raise another question. Are we to keep our word? Are we to fulfill what we promise? Few, if any, would say we have a right to go back on our word. But what if our word called for something wicked? Shall we keep that word anyway? Let me illustrate. Suppose a man promised to be the driver of the get-away car for some bank robbers, but before the robbery took place he realized he had promised to do wrong and went back on his promise. Would we not commend him for this decision?

There is such a thing as doing evil that good may come, and this very thing is condemned (Romans 3:8). It may well have been a good thing for Jephthah to keep his word, but certainly not at the price of doing evil. This principle helps us conclude that the evil act of sacrificing human life to God could not be the case.

Jephthah's daughter seems to have suggested an alternative sacrifice to the burnt offering. She was Jephthah's only daughter and yet unmarried. She was a virgin and would remain so, therefore, would never bear a child and the lineage of Jephthah would die with her. In Israel for woman not to bear a child was considered degrading. Jephthah and his daughter would have to bear the reproach. Jephthah's seed would perish from the earth. That this was celebrated among the daughters of Israel indicates this was done.

We must admit, however, that the statement that

Jephthah “did according to his vow which he had vowed” allows that he foolishly did slay his daughter. That remains a possibility. But for the reasons mentioned, another scenario might have occurred. Precisely what was “according to his vow” is the problem to be resolved. We cannot dismiss his intentions, nor what pleases God as we make our conclusions.

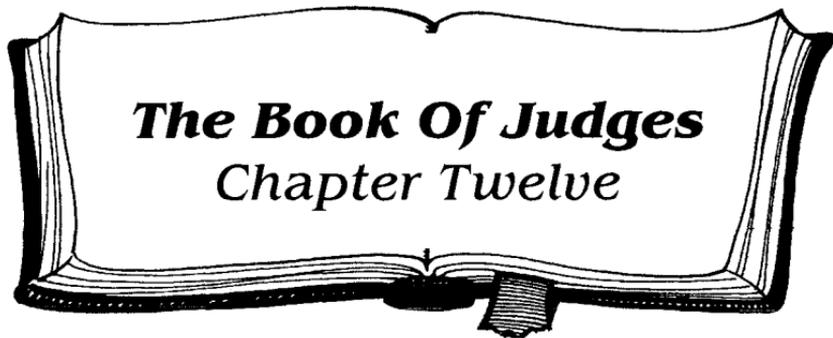
One additional note on the subject. Some commentators have suggested that the word “and” in verse thirty-one, where Jephthah made his vow, ought to be the word “or.” Whether there is sufficient evidence to sustain that view is not mine to know. The idea is that the vow Jephthah made called for whatever met Jephthah would either be given to God, or be sacrificed as a burnt offering. While it does harmonize with much we can understand, it is not conclusive. But enough of this.

Another episode of sinful behavior, repentance and deliverance has taken place. The Book of Judges is a book with this repeated procedure. The next chapter continues with other activities involving Jephthah.

Questions on Chapter Eleven

1. Who is the Judge in this chapter?
2. Why did the family of Jephthah cast him out?
3. What did they later ask Jephthah to do?
4. What agreement did Jephthah make with Gilead before accepting leadership?
5. Who came up against Gilead?
6. What demand was the king of Ammon making on the Israelites?
7. How did Jephthah reply to that demand?
8. How did the king of Ammon react to Jephthah’s reply?

9. What vow did Jephthah make before going into battle?
10. Discuss how this vow was handled upon Jephthah's return.
11. Why did the daughters of Israel mourned for Jephthah's daughter?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Twelve

Verses 1-4

12:1 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.

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?

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.

This is the second shortest chapter in the book of Judges. It brings up a problem that was similar to one that had been faced by Gideon by the same tribe. Ephraim was complaining to Jephthah that he had not called them to fight against the Ammonites. But there is a difference in their approach from the way they came to Gideon. They threatened Jephthah and his people because they felt slighted. The truth of the matter is that Jephthah had called them, just as Gideon did, but they did not respond and

Jephthah had to go it alone, or at least, without them. The Lord had been with him and he was victorious.

Not only was the complaint similar, and Ephraim's approach more threatening, Jephthah was not as gentle in handling them as Gideon had been. Gideon flattered them and pacified them. Conditions were different this time. Jephthah had to protect himself and gathered the men of Gilead together to fight against Ephraim. This episode of civil war among the Israelites is a pathetic scene. They had enemies enough without turning on one another. In the conflict which followed the Gileadites smote the Ephraimites, and the boasting of the Ephraimites soon ceased.

Verses 5, 6

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;

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.

In the course of battle, the men of Gilead seized passages that crossed the Jordan River, the very passages some Ephraimites would have used to escape. The men of Gilead had a very special way to detect whether one who wished to cross was an Ephraimite or some other tribe. They would ask a person if he was from Ephraim. If the response was, "Nay," they put the person to a test to say the word "Shibboleth." If the person could not pronounce it correctly, and said "Sibboleth," they knew he had lied

and really was from Ephraim because the people of Ephraim could not speak that word, the only difference being the letter "h" in our present spelling. Even here we see that people spoke with different accents that would betray their home location. Once the identity of the person was revealed, if an Ephraimite, he was slain.

Verses 7-15

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

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.

10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11 And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

12 And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

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.

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.

This concluded the rule of Jephthah as Judge in Israel, and he led the people for six years. After him three more Judges are named in this brief chapter with little said about what they did.

Ibzan was of Bethlehem and judged Israel for seven years. He obviously was one who made the mistake of giving his children into marriages with foreigners, which God had disapproved.

Ibzan was followed in the record by Elon, of the tribe of Zebulun, and he judged Israel ten years. Nothing else is said of his work.

Then came Abdon who judged Israel for eight years. He is called a Pirathonite, a place in northeast Israel, probably of the tribe of Ephraim.

These three men were obviously not near so prominent and influential as Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, or even the man Abimelech. They are named but nothing is said about their work. It could have been that they served in times that were relatively calm and had no great conflicts to face. It may have a period in which Israel enjoyed a few years of relative rest as compared to the turbulent years that usually characterizes the record of Judges.

Whatever of that, we have now considered twelve of the thirteen Judges whose lives and work are recorded in the Book of Judges. There being fifteen in all, we must go to First Samuel to study about the last two, Eli and Samuel. We shall continue our study in Judges through the work of Samson, which occupies four chapters.

Questions on Chapter Twelve

1. What tribe registered a complaint against Jephthah?
2. What was the nature of their complaint?
3. How valid was their complaint?
4. How did they threaten Jephthah?
5. How did Jephthah respond to their complaint and their threats?
6. Discuss how differently Gideon dealt with Ephraim from the way Jephthah did.

offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD.

The desire of Manoah for the messenger to come again was granted. He came again to the woman alone, who quickly went to her husband so he could converse with the angel. Manoah asked the angel how they should deal with the child. The angel reminded them both of how his wife to was treat herself until the child was born.

Is it not evident that this record in Scripture assumes the child to be born was already a person when in the womb of his mother? The son was to be a Nazerite from the womb, and this required his mother to keep the provisions of the Nazerite vow while carrying the child within her. How could any fair-minded person think that this child, yet unborn, was less than a child, a person? What evil and vicious treachery lurks in the heart of those who consider the unborn child nothing more than a blob of tissue, like a diseased tissue, and refer to it as merely a “fetus” as if it were not yet a person! One of the hideous scars on the current history of our land is the flippant destruction of human life that is being practiced by abortion in mass numbers. Usually there are two reasons why abortions are performed. (1) An attempt to cover immorality and escape responsibility for the child, or (2) selfishness for one’s own life without the hindrances and cares that come in child-rearing. Career-minded people, those who are more concerned for their own way and their own desires rather than the life of the child, will murder the child through abortion. Hell will be fueled by such people who do such things.

Sometimes it is claimed that an abortion is done to

anything unclean, that which would defile her in any way, spiritually or physically. The son would carry the Nazerite vow from even before his birth which required he not cut his hair, touch no dead body and abstain from strong drink. One might have the Nazerite vow for life or for a limited time. For this child it was to be a lifetime commitment.

She was told that he would be the deliverer of Israel from the Philistines. She told her husband what the angel had told her and recognized the angel (messenger) to be a man of God, but she failed to ask his name. Manoah wanted the messenger to appear once more and tell them more how they were to teach the child and what to do to accomplish the purposes for which he would come into this world.

Verses 9-16

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 showed 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?

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.

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

follow. But the Philistines played a major role in the history of Israel, not only in the past and at the present time of this record, but in the future during the lives of Samuel, Saul and David.

Verses 2-8

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.

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.

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

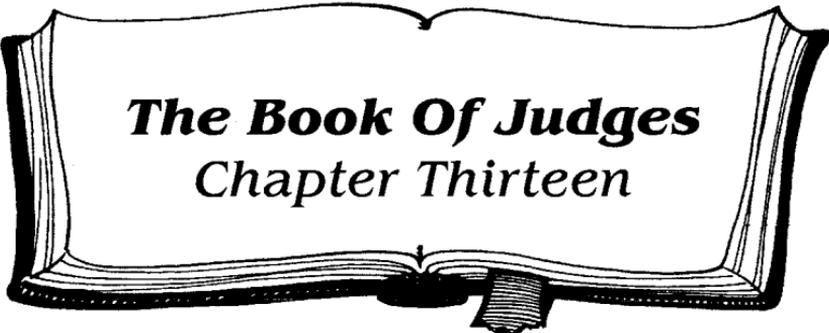
5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel 6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance 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.

8 Then Manoah entreated 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.

We are introduced to a man of the tribe of Dan whose name was Manoah. He and his wife had no child. But an angel appeared to her to inform her she would bare a child, a son, and gave certain instructions regarding her care before the his birth and for his care after his birth.

She was to abstain from strong drink and not eat



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Thirteen

Verse 1

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 sad and familiar theme is replayed once again. How many times do we read that Israel recovered only to fall away once more? How anyone could read this history of Israel and ever sincerely contend for the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is beyond reason. One of the major lessons that we learn from this book is that people of God, individually and collectively, can leave the paths of righteousness and return to the ways of sin to their spiritual, and often their physical, destruction. Judges teaches us the necessity to ever be on guard, that one generation must teach the next, that each generation must follow the truth or the dire consequences of sin will flood upon them.

This time the enemy that God used to chastise Israel was the Philistines. Israel would be subject to them for forty years. This heathen and idolatrous people had been their persecutor before this and had been subdued by Shamgar, the third Judge, who waged war against them with an ox goad. An ox goad shall once again become the weapon of choice in the deliverance that would ultimately

7. What differences existed in the two situations?
8. How did the men of Gilead identify whether one was of Ephraim?
9. What three Judges followed Jephthah?

All of this commotion that Samson was stirring was creating some concern in Judah lest the Philistines make things harder upon them. After all, the Israelites were still being oppressed by the Philistines and not yet released from their persecution. Men of Judah came to Samson to bind him. When they asked Samson for an explanation for his actions he simply said he had done to them what they did to him. They offended him and he returned the favor. How different from the "Golden Rule" of New Testament Christianity (Matthew 7:12). There were some three thousand men who made their presence before Samson. Possibly they thought a large host of people coming for him would impress him that he should cooperate. Do we not wonder if there was some apprehension among them, however, seeing how Samson had handled other situations he did not like?

Samson seemed to have allowed the men of Judah to bind him and turn him over to the Philistines just so long as they, his fellow countrymen, would not fall upon him. They promised not to kill him (they must have really thought they could do it) and bound him with new cords. The behavior of Samson during all of this is almost a mockery of the people who came, who must have thought they would now have him overpowered.

When he was taken to the Philistines his enemies shouted for joy. He had been a menacing force among them. But their joy soon turned to despair. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and he broke the new cords as if they were nothing, broke the bands from his hands, took a jaw bone of an ass and slew a thousand Philistines. He was an unstoppable force; a one-man army. Neither friend nor foe

degree of self-control.

He went out among the Philistines, smiting them with a great slaughter. Again it appears that Samson used as a weapon only his bare hands as he had against the lion. The text says he smote them "hip and thigh." Some commentators suggest this was how Samson worked, kicking his opponents to death, using his hip and thigh. However, not much importance can be placed on this, but only that he fought and killed many of them.

Verses 9-15

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.

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.

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.

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.

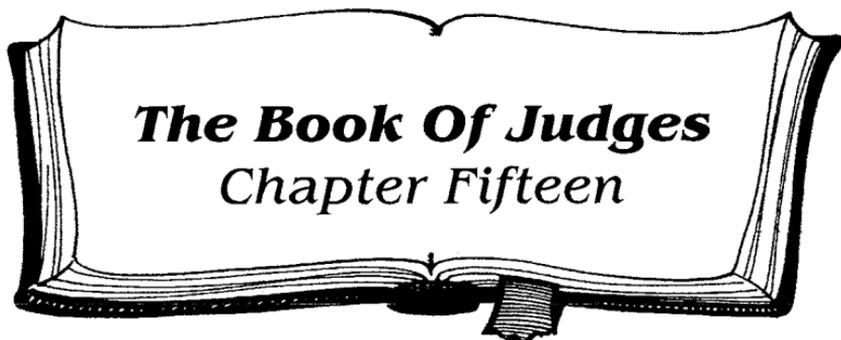
15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.

return visit would produce “fireworks” between Samson and the Philistines. When he arrived the father of Samson’s wife would not allow him to have her explaining that he thought by Samson’s conduct of returning home without her that he no longer wanted her and so he gave her to another. But in an attempt to pacify Samson he offered Samson his wife’s sister, which he claimed was even fairer. The treatment of women in these instances is deplorable according to Christian standards. There is no indication that Samson accepted the alternative offer.

But Samson would have none of that and convinced himself he would do no harm to even the score with the Philistines. He went out and caught three hundred foxes, tied their tails together, putting firebrands (straw) between them and setting the straw on fire and turned the foxes loose to run through the grain fields of the Philistines. Of course, the result was that the harvest of the Philistines was destroyed. That is what Samson intended to do. This was his way of punishing the Philistines for what he considered to be an injustice done to him. Samson was a man to whom reaping vengeance was the norm.

How unlike the conduct expected of Christians!

Once it was known that Samson was responsible for such a deed, the Philistines took out their revenge on Samson’s father-in-law and his house, burning them. It speaks somewhat of their fear of Samson that they did not seek out Samson to vent their wrath. But their attack on the house of Samson’s father-in-law only provoked Samson all the more and he determined to have revenge for it all. We need to be impressed with the extent of anger of which Samson was capable. He was not a man who had a large



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Fifteen

Verses 1-8

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease.

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.

After an unspecified length of time Samson cooled and determined to go to his wife. He evidently did not know she had already been given to someone else. This

they would never have learned of it except they had “ploughed with my heifer.” What an uncomplimentary thing to say about his wife, but what a betrayal of him she had committed! The marriage began in a very bad way.

Samson was angry over the incident but paid his debt by slaying thirty men and taking their garments and giving them to those who told his riddle. Again, this is another indication of his great and superior physical strength that others could not overcome. He then, his anger continuing, returned home rather than remaining with his wife. He was surely angry with everyone in Timnath for not keeping his secret, but he had not kept it himself. Upon his return home his wife in Timnath was then given to another man. This later produces some real conflict between Samson, his wife’s family and the Philistines.

Questions on Chapter Fourteen

1. Where did Samson find a woman he wanted for his wife?
2. Why was this a mistake according to what God had instructed the Israelites?
3. Did God force Samson to select this Philistine for a wife?
4. Why did God allow Samson to do this thing?
5. What did Samson do to a lion he met in the way?
6. What was his weapon?
7. What did he later find in the carcass of the lion?
8. What riddle did Samson propose to the Philistines?
9. What was the prize to the winner of the contest?
10. How did the Philistines learn the answer to the riddle?
11. How did Samson get the garments he had to give?
12. How did all of this affect Samson’s disposition?
13. Seeing Samson had returned home, what was done with his wife?

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.

20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

The feast that Samson hosted gave him an opportunity to show his superiority over the Philistines. There were some thirty persons who came to the feast. Samson proposed a riddle for them to solve. He suspected they would be unable to do it and this would show him smarter than they.

The riddle was, "Out of the eater came forth meat; and out of the strong came forth sweetness." They had seven days to find the answer and the prize to the winner would be thirty sheets and thirty garments. These were pieces of apparel of that time.

Three days passed and the Philistines could not solve the riddle. But then they urged Samson's bride to learn the answer for them. They even threatened to burn her and her father's house, probably including his family, if she did not learn the secret and reveal it unto them.

Samson's wife wept before him and contended he did not love her unless he told her the riddle. He complained he had not told anyone, even his parents, and he was not going to tell her. But she kept up this behavior all week until he relented and told her. The riddle had to do with the lion and the honey. The honey, meat and sweetness, had been taken from the lion, the strong and the eater. Once the riddle was told her she obliged to tell her Philistine friends.

When it seemed Samson would win the contest the Philistines entered and told him the riddle. Samson said

But we cannot say much in way of commendation for his strength of character. Physical strength and character strength are both desirable, but of the two a person of strong character is by far more to be desired.

Verses 11-20

11 And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

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:

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.

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?

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.

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.

19 And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went

first instance we have of the great physical strength that Samson possessed. His parents must not have been in the exact location where Samson was when this occurred because they knew nothing of it.

Since marriages were often arranged by parents of the prospective bride and groom, negotiations were completed for Samson to marry this unnamed Philistine, so Samson and his parents returned home to await the marriage date.

As Samson went again to Timnath to be married, he took note of the carcass of the lion in which a swarm of bees had made honey. He partook of the honey and continued his journey. He even gave some honey to his parents, but did not tell them how he had killed the lion.

It was the custom for the bridegroom to host a feast before the wedding and this Samson did among the friends of his bride, the Philistines.

We might wonder here whether Samson and his handling of the lion did not violate his Nazerite vow, at least the part about touching a dead body. Possibly this only applied to a human body. But it may well have extended to all bodies as seems to be the case in the description of the vow in Numbers 6: 2ff.. It is not likely that Samson killed the lion without touching the dead animal. He possibly even touched it while gathering the honey. It may be a small matter but it does give some indication that Samson was not too observant of the requirements of being a Nazerite. He certainly allowed his hair to be cut later, and that would be another violation. Samson was a man of great strength and this strength was used to remove the yoke of the Philistines off God's people.

But this proved to be the way that God used to get Samson among the enemies he would later defeat. We are not to think that God approved of what Samson did but God used what Samson did to further His purposes. Samson did what he did of his own choice. Often we see how God uses even that which He disapproves to advance His cause. The case of Pharoah is a classic example of this. There is a difference between approving something and allowing something. God allowed Samson to do as he wished in this matter. But God used it to the advantage of Israel nonetheless.

Verses 5-10

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.

6 And the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

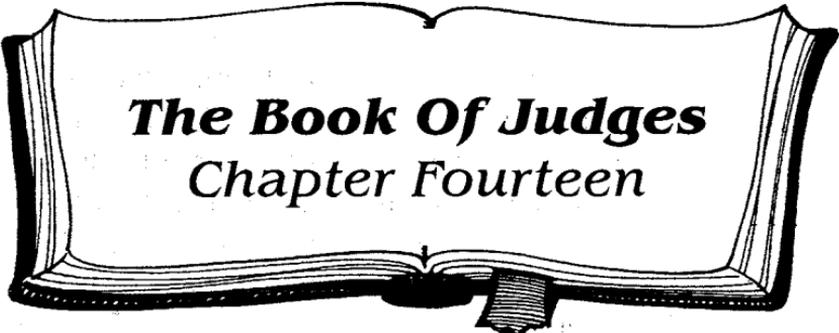
7 And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

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.

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.

10 So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

As Samson and his parents went to Timnath Samson encountered a young lion. Samson used the great strength that he had to kill the lion with his bare hands. This is the



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Fourteen

Verses 1-4

14:1 And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

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.

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.

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.

Timnath was the name of a place among the Philistines. Samson saw a woman there he desired. His passion for women was his weakness and downfall. He returned from Timnath to tell his father he wanted that woman for his wife. His father and mother objected and said he should marry among his own people, not the uncircumcised Philistines. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel and the Israelites were to confine themselves to the nation of circumcision. But he persisted in his demand even though it violated God's directions to Israel about intermarrying with the heathen inhabitants of Canaan.

25 And the spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

The entire episode was frightening and disturbing to Manoah and his wife and they feared they would die because “we have seen God.” Actually what they had seen was an angel from God. They became aware of all this just as Gideon had done years before when the Lord called him to his work.

But his wife reasoned ever so consistently that they would not die. Why would God accept their offering, assure them they would have a son and tell them how to rear that son if God was going to kill them?

The son was born and his name was Samson. He grew and was blessed of God. The Spirit of God began to lead him to the work for which he was born.

Questions for Chapter Thirteen

1. What was the cause of a renewed oppression of Israel?
2. What nation would be the oppressor?
3. To what man of Dan are we introduced?
4. To whom did an angel of God appear?
5. What was his message?
6. What restrictions and directions were given regarding before and after this birth?
7. Who was next informed of the coming birth?
8. After the angel ascended into heaven what did Manoah fear?
9. How did his wife reason that such would not be the case?
10. What was the name of the child?

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.

We have additional conversation between Manoah and the angel. Manoah asked his name but that remained a secret. Manoah offered an offering and the angel did a wondrous thing but we are not told what he did. Possibly the wondrous thing referred to is how he ascended back into heaven and Manoah and his wife saw him no more. Whereas Manoah had not accepted the fact the messenger was an angel of God prior to this point, he is now convinced.

This leaves little doubt that there are angels in heaven with God. That God used angels to accomplish some of His purposes is affirmed once again. The use of angels by the Lord today is something about which we have little information and we endanger matters to speculate and imagine. We do well to leave what is not revealed to remain exactly that way.

Verses 22-25

22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

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 showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.

24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

preserve the life of the mother. This is exaggerated and such occurs very rarely, if ever. Even if this rare instance did occur, it would be a procedure for the preservation of life, not a deliberate death. This rarity has been used to justify wholesale abortions as being humanitarian. It is one of the most anti-human practices this modern and degenerate age has condoned. War is not more vicious than the practice of abortion. It is a deliberate, premeditated destruction of innocent human life and that is called murder.

The child in the womb of Manoah's wife was just exactly that, a child, a person, a human being, and God knew that and his angel wanted these parents to know that. Why cannot we know that today? We could except the minds of so many are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Manoah suggested an action of homage to the angel but the angel refused it. It seems that Manoah did not fully appreciate the fact the messenger was an angel from the Lord. Just how he considered him is less than clear even though he had been told by his wife that this was the same man who had appeared unto her earlier and she had suggested (verse 6) that he was an angel of God.

The angel told Maniah if he was going to offer a burnt offering he must offer it unto God. No gift would be received by the angel.

Verses 17-21

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?

19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

was able to bring him to subjection. Little wonder all men, especially the Philistines, feared him and desired that he be brought under control.

Verses 16-20

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.

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 Ramathlehi.

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?

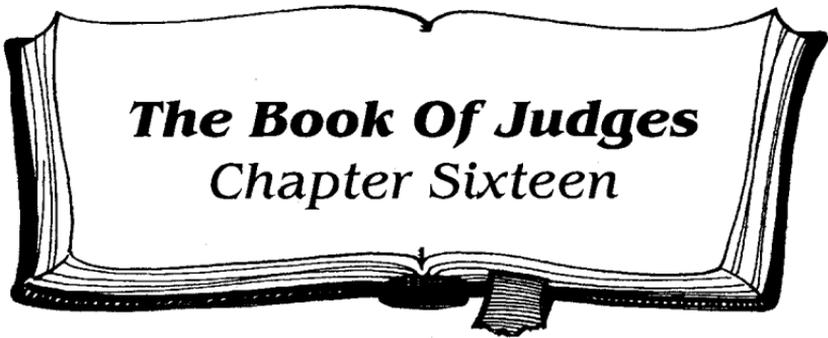
19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.

20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

Samson boasted of what he had done to the Philistines. Later, after throwing the jaw bone away and he found himself thirsty, he found water that God provided for him in the jaw bone. Even though his time is not yet done, we have recorded here the number of years he judged Israel which was twenty. The deliverance from the Philistines seems to have now been accomplished, but Samson's personal conflict with the Philistines continued because they sought revenge against him.

Questions on Chapter Fifteen

1. When Samson returned to Timnath what did he learn regarding his wife?
2. What explanation was given him by her father?
3. What did Samson do in revenge for this he considered an injustice?
4. Why were the men of Judah concerned about the deeds of Samson?
5. What did they come to Samson to do to him?
6. What request did Samson make of his fellow countrymen?
7. When presented as a captive to the Philistines being bound, what did he do?
8. What was his weapon?
9. How many did he slay?
10. When thirsty, where did he find water?



Verses 1-3

16:1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

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.

Even though the deliverance of Israel from the dominion of the Philistines was now accomplished we have an extended record of the life and work of Samson which included much more havoc against the Philistines, and reveals more of the mixed character of this man that God used. In spite of his many flaws that cannot be readily dismissed, he is mentioned as a man of great faith in Hebrews chapter eleven.

Samson goes to another Philistine city named Gaza. There he saw and went in to a harlot. The moral standard of Samson would certainly not be acceptable to the way of Christ. It even violated the Law of Moses under which Samson lived. News quickly spread among the people that

Samson was in their midst. Likely as this news spread so did fear in the hearts of the people of Gaza. So they decided to ambush him, lying in wait at the gates of the city all the night, waiting until morning to attack him from an ambush.

To their surprise Samson awoke at midnight, went to the gates, pulled them up, and carried them away on his shoulders to the top of a hill. This, of course, left the city without a primary defense against intruders and certainly made it known that he was not to be captured. The Philistines of Gaza were up against a power far greater than they had encountered previously.

Verses 4-21

4 And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

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.

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.

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.

12 Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers 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;

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 showed 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.

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.

As we have taken note, one of Samson's weakness was his love of women. He met and loved another named Delilah. Once again the enemies of Samson attempted to get to him through the woman he had chosen, somewhat as they had done in solving Samson's riddle. They sought Delilah to learn of the source of Samson's strength that they might overpower him. So long as he remained as he was they were vulnerable to his attacks. They offered her a handsome bride that evidently was sufficient for her to make the attempt to learn his secret. It is difficult to decide whether the bribe of eleven hundred pieces of silver was the total of the bribe offered her or whether each one involved in the bribe would give her eleven hundred pieces of silver. In either case, she was bribed to do their bidding.

Samson seemed to have "played along" with Delilah in her attempt to learn what she wanted to know. He told her that he would be as powerless as any other man if he was bound with green withs, very tough and strong wood. So the Philistines brought withs to her and she bound him. Why in the world Samson could not see that Delilah was unfaithful to him and was aligning herself with his enemies we cannot know. Possibly he knew but did not particularly care what she did so long as she pleased him and he knew he could not be bound anyway.

Now bound, when the Philistines approached him, he simply broke the withs as if they were burnt thread. Delilah knew immediately she had been mocked by Samson. He surely must have delighted in the way he was able to handle the Philistines and Delilah. But the secret of his strength was not made known.

Another attempt was made and Samson told her that

if was bound by new ropes he would be helpless. He had broken new ropes once before when the men of Judah had bound him and he knew such an effort was fruitless. But she then bound him and called for his enemies to take him. She must have really wanted that bribe money. Once again Samson broke the new ropes with ease and could not be captured.

It seems almost foolish that Delilah would now complain that Samson had lied to her. What was she trying to do to Samson? Could he not see? But Samson offers another potential solution to the Philistines' problem, and this time he is getting closer and closer to his downfall. It had to do with his hair. If she would weave his hair with the web and fasten them with a pin to the wall, he would be weakened. This she did, only to see when the Philistines came for him, Samson rise up and walked way with the entire apparatus.

Delilah continued to complain that Samson really did not love her or he would not deceive her. Did it occur to her how her actions showed she had no love for Samson? What confused characters we see in this events! She continued to harass him for information.

Finally, Samson told her if his head were shaved he would lose his strength. He was a Nazerite which meant his hair was not to be cut. He must have been faithful to this part of the vow until now. The real strength was not in the hair but in keeping the vow of the Nazerite.

Delilah sensed he had told her the truth this time and she cut his hair. When the Philistines came upon him while he was asleep, he arose thinking he would be as strong as before, but this time his enemies were able to overpower

him. They took him and put out his eyes, bound him with brass, and forced him to grind in the prison-house as if he was an animal of burden. The affliction imposed upon him was to blind, bind and grind. How humiliating this must have been for this once powerful figure! We do not read words of specific regret on the part of Samson but we must think as he was pressed into this forced labor with his eyes gone and his loss of strength that he had time to reflect upon the folly of his life, especially the folly that brought him down. In the condition he found himself, there could not be much joy that he had delivered Israel.

Verses 22-31

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.

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.

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.

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.

The end of the labors of Samson were drawing to an end. His recovery from captivity would not be his to enjoy. His physically debilitating problems would remain with the exception that he would regain his strength for one last effort.

The desire of the Philistines to make sport of their former foe proved to be their undoing. They made a great supper at which they claimed their god had delivered Samson to them. It is true that Samson had so conducted himself that he not only brought reproach upon himself and Israel, but also on the God of Israel. The implication of the words of the Philistines is that their god was more powerful than the God of Samson and that is why they held him captive. This certainly contributes to the seriousness of Samson's folly. How careful we, too, must be that our conduct in life does not bring reproach of the true God of heaven who were worship.

The feast in process, they called for the presence of Samson, doubtless to gloat and boast over his subjection.

He would become a laughing-stock before them. Surely, this was the low point of his life, but soon he would turn it all around and make it the greatest of his victories over the Philistines.

As he was brought in before the crowd, being led by a mere lad, which indicates how harmless he was perceived to be, he asked to be placed between the two main pillars of the building. This was done. The house was full with many Philistines on the upper level as well as the lower level. The count is given at three thousand people.

Samson prayed to God for the restoration of his strength this one time, and also that he might die in the process of what was to occur. In this way his full revenge would be satisfied. He took hold of the two primary sustaining pillars of the arches of the building, pressed against them with all his might, and they were toppled. The result was the collapse of the entire structure and the death of those that were present. It is said he killed more Philistines with that one act than he had done previously in all his life. But he also died with the fall. (Samson died of fallen arches.)

His kin came to retrieve his body and take it back to his homeland where they buried it in the burying place of his father Manoah. There must have been some respect among the people of Israel for Samson to have treated his body this way. Again it is stated that Samson judged Israel twenty years.

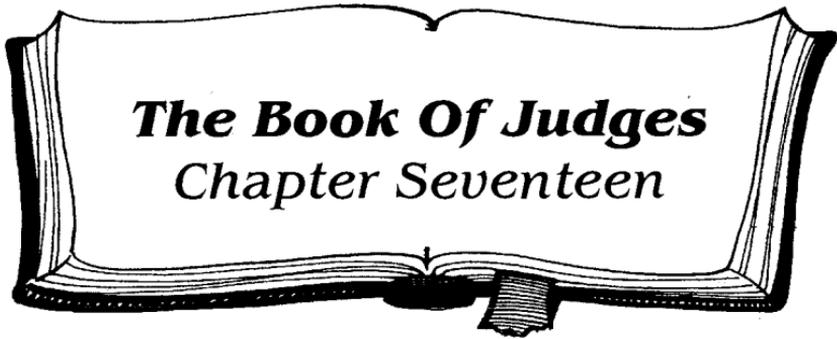
Questions on Chapter Sixteen

1. What city in Philistia does Samson visit?
2. What immorality does he commit?
3. How did the men of Gaza think they might overpower Samson?
4. What did Samson do with the gates of the city?.
5. For what woman does he have love?
6. How did the Philistines scheme to learn of the source of his strength?
7. What three ways that were false did Samson suggest he might be controlled?
8. What was done that did deprive him of his strength?
9. What did the Philistines do with Samson once they overpowered him?
10. To what place was he brought and for what reason?
11. What request did he make of the lad who was leading him?
12. How did Samson avenge himself?
13. Where was his body buried?
14. Can you name the thirteen Judges of the book of Judges?

NOTE: So ends the record of specific Judges of whom we read in the Book of Judges and a turbulent, restless, wicked, and unstable period of time for Israel it was. Thirteen men, plus Deborah, were involved in the great work of delivering Israel from the sore conditions they brought upon themselves by their rebellion against God. The other two Judges, Eli and Samuel, are reported for us in First Samuel.

The repetition of the sins and transgressions of Israel strike us with force. The unwillingness to profit from the experiences of the past amaze us. The need for every generation to be faithful to God is impressed upon us. The

blessings that belong to man when he is obedient, and the difficulties he must bear when he rebels against God, cannot be dismissed. God's discipline and chastisement of those who sin and those whom he loves is demonstrated throughout the book. Whether our lives bring glory to God or shame upon His name should be a major concern in our thinking. Great learning can be ours from the book of Judges, if only we will learn.



As we have noted regarding the chronology of the book of Judges, it cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty the order in which all the Judges came. It is entirely possible that more than one Judge was operating at the same time but in different areas of land. Although it is possible that they are presented to us in chronological order of their appearance on the scene. That is of minor importance because the lessons to be learned from it remain the same.

It becomes even more difficult to establish a chronology for the next five chapters. The things recorded happened during the age of the Judges but under which Judge, or even between which Judges, we cannot know with certainty. There is evidence that what is recorded in these final chapters occurred early in the times of the Judges because of the man named Micah. This Micah may have been the grandson of Moses as mentioned in chapter eighteen, verse thirty, where the name Manasseh is an alteration of the name, Moses. These things could have happened shortly after the days of Joshua.

Whatever be the case, the things depicted give us a better concept of how far removed from faithfulness to God the people often took themselves and reveals some of the wicked measures that characterized them in this period.

Should such things happen now we would be horrified. The sad reality is that similar things do happen now among some people, but some do not seem to care.

Verses 1-5

17:1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

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.

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.

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.

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.

The seventeenth chapter is the shortest chapter in the book of Judges. We are introduced to a man named Micah who is the central person of the next few verses. Micah was a man of the tribe of Ephraim. It seems he had taken a considerable sum of money, eleven hundred shekels, from his mother without her knowledge. But he confessed to taking it and his mother blessed him for telling her. When he restored the money to his mother she told him she had dedicated the money to the Lord, but for an evil purpose. Notice she intended to do something for the Lord, but

wanted to use the money to have a graven and molten image made. She, like so many during the age of apostasy in the Judges, made an attempt to serve God and idols at the same time. This was the sin of Israel when Aaron made them a golden calf to worship in connection with a feast unto the Lord. The Bible shows the anger of Moses at the very idea and the severe punishment that followed. Of course, such could never be done acceptably unto God. Even yet people attempt to serve God and other priorities at the same time today.

Nonetheless she took a portion of the money restored to her by her son and used it for that evil purpose. So Micah now had his gods and even ordained one of his sons to be his priest. The Law of Moses required all priests to be of the tribe of Levi. But when a person decides to do things his own way, the way of God does not impress him any longer. Sometimes people will have what they will have.

Verse 6

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

This is a general and summary statement of the spiritual attitude of the people of Israel during the period of the Judges when they would wander from a period of faithfulness and prosperity into the depths of sin, punishment and poverty. There was no king. This meant there was no permanent enforcer of authority. The law was not upheld among the people. Everybody did whatever he thought he should and could do. It amounted to spiritual anarchy. Each one was his own lawmaker, judge and jury.

Although some attempt to deny it, those who contend that men today are guided by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit contend for a similar condition. Each person "hears from the Holy Spirit" what he thinks is right and wrong, and each does as his own will dictates. The Holy Spirit does not tell these people the same message. With all claiming that the Holy Spirit guides them directly, they are contending there is no absolute and objective truth by which to measure what is acceptable to God. The doctrine that we should let our conscience be our guide produces the same confusion and division. The doctrine that sincerity is sufficient and what you do does not really matter is of the same family of error. The idea that everybody can "join the church of his own choice" contributes to the same lawlessness and disrespect of divine authority. The teaching that "one church is just as good as another church" is no different from what we read of the sorry spiritual state of Israel in this historical period. It is an attitude, "You go your way and I'll go mine, and both will be all right." Such foolishness ought be seen as foolishness by anybody with reasonable sense. People say, "Everything is beautiful in its own way." Nothing could be further from the truth. This is precisely what was dominating the spiritual scene in Israel in so much of the period of the Judges. "Do your own thing" was the order of the day. Little wonder that they would digress to such an extent that God would have to punish them severely before they would repent. It is the same liberal attitude that holds absolute authority in contempt that we see even yet.

Verses 7-13

7 And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

8 And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah 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 Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

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.

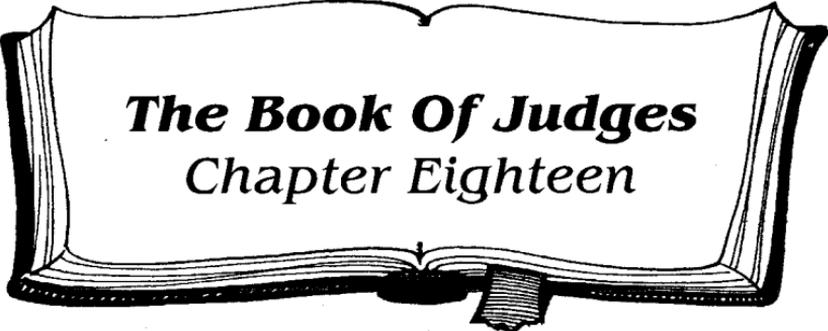
12 And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

We now are introduced to a Levite who was searching for a home. He came to Mt. Ephraim where Micah lived. After learning why the Levite was there, Micah hired him to be his priest. He was truly pleased with this for now he had a priest from the proper tribe. He believed, regardless of all the other errors of his situation, that having a Levite as priest would bring him into God's favor. Why Micah thought he was the proper one to ordain this man as priest is not revealed. Just how that priest could consent to be a priest for a man of a mixed religion of service to God and idolatry is difficult to fathom. It is a demonstration of people doing as they pleased and contending that God will accept it anyway. This helps us to understand the problems of the time of the Judges.

Questions on Chapter Seventeen

1. Who took money from his mother?
2. What had his mother intended to do with it?
3. Why would this not be acceptable to God?
4. Who did this man first make his priest?
5. Why would this not be acceptable to God?
6. What was the general attitude of the people of Israel during the period of the Judges?
7. Who came to the home of Micah?
8. What did Micah do with him?
9. Why would this not be acceptable to God?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Eighteen

Verses 1-19

18:1 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.

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?

4 And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest.

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.

6 And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go.

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.

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, aFd, 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.

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 Kirjathjearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjathjearim.

13 And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah.

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?

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?

During the days without a king, which denotes the period of Judges, the tribe of Dan had trouble settling. They had not taken all the land they were supposed to conquer. Spies were sent from the Danites who come to the house of Micah, presumably the Micah of the previous chapter.

They seemed to have recognized the Levite, at least recognized that he was not of the house of Micah, and inquired why he was there. He told them Micah had hired him as his priest. So the men of Dan asked the Levite to inquire of God if their journey would be prosperous. We are not told specifically what the purpose of their journey was except they were searching for other territory in which to settle. The priest told them to go in peace.

The spies finally came to a portion of the land inhabited by Zidonians, a people who usually kept to themselves, having no business with others. They seemed to be a quiet people and vulnerable to having their land extracted from them. The spies returned to their own people and reported that they had found a territory that might be taken, a land where there was an abundance of whatever was needed. So the Danites began their move against the Zidonians.

They came to the house of Micah. They were reminded by the spies that Micah had gods and a priest. So the men of Dan came into the house of Micah and took his gods and images away from him for themselves. They were asked by the Levite who served as priest what they were doing. He was told to be quiet and that he was going with the Danites. They offered him a better deal than that which Micah offered him. The priest gladly joined them for now

he could be priest to many rather than a few. Such personal ambition is often seen among religious leaders in our age.

Such lawlessness ruled the land. A man could not protect himself against such invasions. Depriving others of what was theirs was not uncommon. Even though what Micah had was not proper, the Danites had no right to just walk in and confiscate whatever they wanted. But this is the way it was when everybody did whatever was right in his own eyes. It is easy to see how far removed from God's religion they had drifted.

Verses 20-31

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.

21 So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them.

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.

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.

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.

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 Bethrehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

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.

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.

31 And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

We do not say to the credit of the Levite that he was joyful over his new opportunity to serve with the Danites. He should have seen the evil behind it all. But, after all, everybody was "doing their own thing."

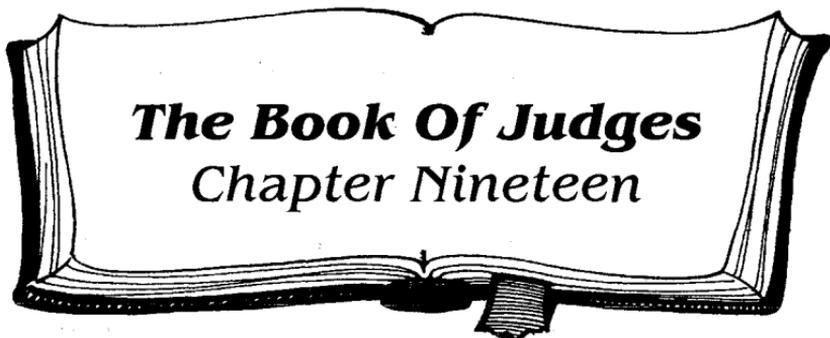
When the Danites left Micah's house they took whatever they wanted to take but Micah and his people were not willing for that to happen peacefully. They pursued the Danites and condemned the actions against him. The Danites in essence told him to "shut up" lest "angry fellows run upon thee," and take your life and the lives of those with you. Such threats were to be taken seriously seeing the kind of people the Danites had shown themselves to be. Micah backed off because he saw he was no match for them.

The Danites not only exploited the house of Micah but went to their destination and conquered it, taking it from the inhabitants there who had no deliverer, setting up their idols. They ordained priests from whatever tribe they wished. They set up their own place of worship. Such an accumulation of violations of the law of God we seldom

see in the history of man. Nothing was done as God taught them but “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” These people, like nearly all of Israel, were very religious but not righteous. One can be religious and never please God. One cannot be righteous without adhering to the law of God. This condition continued to exist among them until that tragic hour when the ark of the covenant was taken from the tabernacle at Shiloh by the sons of Eli and captured by the Philistines.

Questions on Chapter Eighteen

1. With what tribe are we concerned in this chapter?
2. Why did the Danites send out spies into the land?
3. To whose house did they come?
4. Did they find land they thought would be good for them?
5. On their way to taking the land what did they take from the house of Micah?
6. How did Micah react to this invasion?
7. From whom did the Danites take more territory?
8. Once they had the land, what did they set up for themselves?



Verses 1-4

19:1 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 Bethlehemjudah.

2 And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehemjudah, 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.

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.

This chapter reports the most dastardly deeds of which you can read that mankind could commit. The very fact that such a thing could even happen in Israel broadcasts the spiritual depravity that gripped the people of Israel during the time when there was no king, or the period of the Judges.

It begins with a Levite who takes a journey with his concubine (things already starting off in sin) and his concubine was unfaithful to him. Can you imagine a concubine becoming a whore; yet, this is the case. How

low can a people go! But before we lambaste these people let us be made aware that such conditions are around us also.

Her husband went to try to bring her back unto him and he brought her back to her father who rejoiced to have his daughter back.

Verses 5-14

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.

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.

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.

The husband stayed with his father-in-law much longer than he intended. Whenever he started to leave the father-in-law would urge him to stay longer. He did this several times. But he finally left, taking his concubine with him, and went to Jerusalem intending to continue their journey on the morrow. They did not want to stay with complete strangers and Jerusalem had been conquered by Israelites previously. So they stayed the night there and moved toward Gibeah in the land of the Tribe of Benjamin.

Verses 15-21

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.

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.

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 Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, 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.

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.

Once in Gibeah they found no place for lodging. There an old man who took them in with hospitality which was the custom of those times and those people. The old man made necessary provisions for them and their beasts of burden.

Verses 22-30

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Now we come to the hideous wickedness that shows the sinfulness of the people in Gibeah. The men of the city approached the house of the old man and demanded that he deliver his visitor to them that they might use him for homosexual purposes. This account is similar in nature to what the people of Sodom did when angels came to the house of Lot (Genesis 19). The old man refused their demands, but (and this is unimaginable), he offered them his daughter for them to do with her whatever they would. It is notable that he called their homosexual purposes “vile,” for surely homosexuality is an abomination before God in spite of all of the efforts of those of degenerate mind today who would like to have it accepted as an alternative and acceptable lifestyle. What does this episode also say as to the condition of women among those people at this time? Thank God for the demand of the restoration of the dignity and respect of womanhood by Jesus Christ!

But the men of the city would not be content with the old man’s daughter. The situation becomes harder to understand. The traveler then offered his concubine to them and she was taken throughout the night. Can you imagine

the horrors perpetrated against that poor soul? To be sure she had shown herself a most immoral person, but to be subjected to such behavior as mentioned here is only indicative of how viciously wicked these people often were during the days of the Judges.

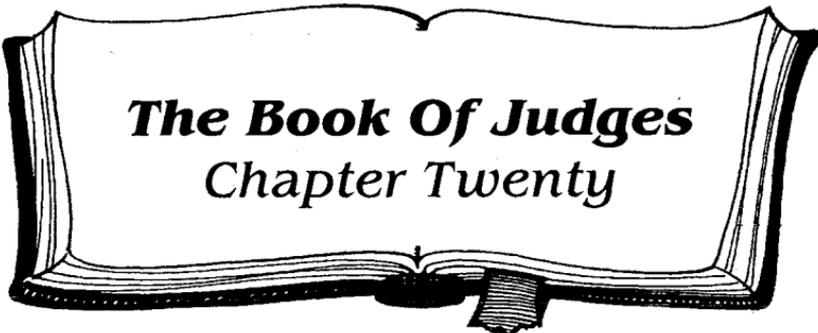
The next morning the woman made it back to the door of the man's house where her master was. He comes out and simply tells her to get ready to travel. But she was dead. The man picked her up, took her with him, took his knife and carved up her body into twelve parts, sending the parts to all the coasts of Israel, surely one part per tribe. His purpose for doing this we are not certain. It has been suggested he did this in order to arouse the anger of others at this evil so that something might be done to avenge this deed. This is how events unfolded. But how could he find fault with others when his sins were so grievous?

The final verses of this passage states that this kind of thing had not been done before in Israel and was not typical. But it does show us to what a low level people sink when they decide they will "do their own thing" and when there is no enforcer of authority of absolute law among the people, every man doing that which was right in his own eyes. Evidently some thought what transpired was all right. If everyone has a right to do as he pleases, then none could find fault even with this travesty against righteousness.

Questions on Chapter Nineteen

1. From what tribe was the man who took his concubine on a journey?
2. What did his concubine do that was disloyal to him?
3. Once he brought her back to her father, where did the man and his concubine stay?

4. In what city did an old man offer them hospitality?
5. What did the men of that city demand of the traveler?
6. What did the old man offer in his place?
7. What did the man offer?
8. What happened to the man's concubine?
9. After continuing his journey with her body, what did he do with the body?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Twenty

Verses 1-11

20:1 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 Mizpeh.

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 Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?

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.

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.

11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man.

From this chapter, which seems to follow in order the events of the preceding one, we see how the entire nation of Israel was aroused to anger at the deeds perpetrated by the people of Gibeah. Nothing is said of the evil of giving the concubine or offering of a daughter to such depraved people. But all were sufficiently angered to prepare for war against Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. They asked the man to rehearse for them what had been done and he told them, then asked for their advice. They all agreed to go up by lot against the offenders and do unto the people of Benjamin according to the folly of Gibeah. They were all united in this effort., but their goal was not as easily achieved as they anticipated.

Verses 12-48

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:

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.

16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.

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.

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.

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.)

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.

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.

27 And the children of Israel inquired 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.

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.

33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: 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.

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.

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 enclosed 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.

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.

47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

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.

The tribe of Benjamin was commanded to hand over the ones guilty of the crimes of the last chapter, but they refused. Rather they gathered themselves together to go to battle. Civil war among the people of God was at hand. How foreign to what God would desire for His people! Among the men of Benjamin were seven hundred left-handed men who were marksmen with the sling.

The other tribes asked counsel of God who should go first into the battle and the Lord commissioned the tribe of Judah to lead. But the men of Benjamin proved themselves quite capable of defending themselves and caused the men of Israel to fall back. The tribes of Israel rallied themselves for further conflict. They asked the Lord if they should go up against their brother, and the Lord said, "Go up against him." From this we can see that God was using the other tribes to bring punishment upon Benjamin for the vile deeds which were committed by their people. God obviously thought Benjamin deserved harsh treatment.

But once again the men of Benjamin were able to destroy the forces of the other tribes. This caused the other tribes to weep and offer sacrifices unto God. They were not accomplishing what they had set themselves to do. Defeating Benjamin was difficult.

Once more they arrayed themselves against Benjamin. This time Phinehas, the priest, told them God would deliver Benjamin into their hands. (This may be a help in dating this event shortly after the days of Joshua, but that is uncertain). As at other times the men of Benjamin began to push the other tribes backward. But the battle plan had changed. The front forces charged the men of Benjamin and then fell back and pretended to flee. The men of Benjamin thought once again they had their foe on the run. But actually the other tribes were leading the men of Benjamin into a trap and ambush. When the time was right, Israel rushed Benjamin from both sides and smote them successfully.

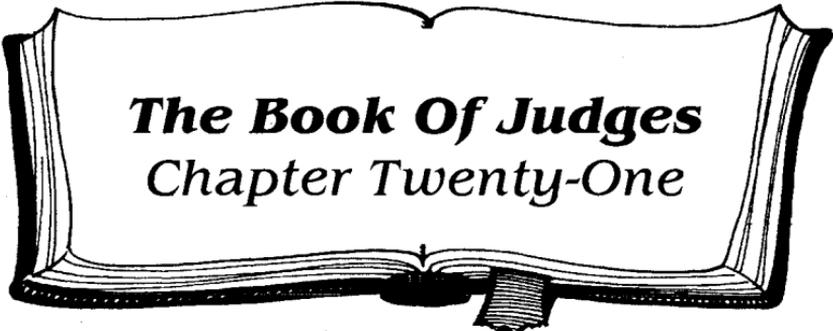
While the men of Benjamin had been drawn away from their city by a pretended retreat, other Israelites rushed

into their city and set it ablaze. The men of Benjamin looked back and saw their city in flames. At that the Israelites began to readily defeat the men of Benjamin. The men of Benjamin turned and ran into the wilderness, but they could escape from the battle. In this fashion Benjamin, after several successful efforts against the rest of the tribes, was now thoroughly defeated. The Israelites then went from one city to the other and burned them. Such was the punishment against Benjamin for their crimes and their unwillingness to produce those who had committed these crimes that they might be punished. The whole tribe suffered because of what a few had done.

The record of Judges causes one to weep and wonder how the people that God brought out of Egypt and had nourished for many years, that had been blessed with provisions, God fulfilling the promises made to them, giving them a land in which to dwell, how could they have been so hard of heart and seared of conscience to do the things they did against each other and in violation of the will of God; not once or twice, but over and over and over again. What a rebellious and wicked nation the Israelites had become and what a contrast to the glorious days of victory and faithfulness under the rule of Joshua! With hundreds of years being spent in this fashion, little wonder the people began to clamor for some other manner of rule over them after two more Judges. But if they had only obeyed the Lord, they would not have had to suffer these unbearable burdens, but could have enjoyed the prosperity of the land that flowed with milk and honey that God wanted them to have.

Questions on Chapter Twenty

1. Which tribe was guilty of the crimes of the previous chapter?
2. How did the rest of Israel react to the call to arms against Benjamin?
3. Did the other tribes subdue Benjamin easily?
4. How did the battle turn against Benjamin?
5. Is this not a civil war among the people of God?



The Book Of Judges

Chapter Twenty-One

Verses 1-24

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.

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;

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.

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.

6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day.

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 Jabeshgilead to the assembly.

9 For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead 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.

11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead 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.

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.

14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: and yet so they sufficed them not.

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.

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.

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.

Further punishment against Benjamin was thought proper by the other tribes. What was proposed was that none would give their sons or daughters to the tribe of Benjamin for marriage. There were some who bewailed that the strife among the tribes had come to this point of separation. But there were others who sought punishment against any who had not joined in the battle against Benjamin. They sought for such people to be put to death. So the cleavage among the tribes was deep and serious.

But those of compassion and forgiveness seemed to have won the day and Israel turned from the hard treatment being given to Benjamin. But it was discovered that none from Jabesh-Gilead had come to the fight and it was determined that those people should be destroyed for their failure to help in time of need.

In time a reconciliation and compromise was worked out among the tribes and once again there was an exchange of potential mates for marriage. Their stiff sanctions against Benjamin could have threatened the continuation of the tribe, since it was the smallest among them. That a tribe would cease to exist was more than what anybody really wanted. At the same time there were those still quite hostile toward Benjamin and refused to intermarry with them.

A plan was worked out, and a strange one it was, that on a given day when the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance that a man of Benjamin might rush in and take one of them for his wife and return to the land of Benjamin. If anyone

complained, they would simply be asked to hold their tongue. This was done and in this way the tribe of Benjamin was prevented from becoming extinct.

Verse 25

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

This verse is almost identical to chapter seventeen, verse six. It is that general and summary statement of the conditions and attitude that persisted throughout the period of the Judges. The cycle went around and around, and the events never were able to teach the people the folly of faithlessness, and fortune of faith.

Questions on Chapter Twenty-One

1. What was the continued sanction that was placed against Benjamin?
2. Why was it lifted?

NOTE: The next book in the Bible is the book of Ruth. The events recorded in Ruth were in the days of the Judges. We do not know which Judge was ruling at the time. It was a time when the Moabites would allow some of the Israelites to flee the hardships imposed on them and come to Moab to live. But that time cannot be ascertained with any certainty. The time element of the book of Ruth, like much of Judges, really does not matter that much to know. The lineage of Christ is why Ruth is important.