

THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL

An Inductive Study of the Book of Judges

By

O. William Cooper

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DEDICATION

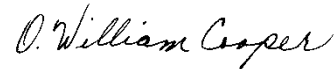
It is not uncommon for attention to be paid to the pastors and lay leadership of the church. Such praise is well intentioned and represents jobs well done - people investing great portions of their time, skills and themselves in the service of the God they love. I would add my voice and thanks to this chorus.

There is another group less heralded, but often equally committed to the service of the Lord they love. These are the unsung hero's of the faith. They are the people of the pew who listen with intention to the message God brings to them through their pastor. They are the people who sanctify themselves; set themselves apart from the things in life that would hinder them from making God the priority of their lives. They work long and joyfully and yes, unnoticed, at whatever needs to be done so that the ministry God has entrusted to their community of faith may be carried out in such a way that God can say, "Well done good and faithful servant..." These are those who walk the path of the Brother Lawrences in the church.

These are the people whose lives and service were transparent examples of the truth the pastor taught when I was old enough to understand the example of a life; too young to understand the preached word.

For these great servants of God, I rejoice and give great thanks to God. They form part of that "great cloud of witnesses" whose example spur me on to live a life more holy; a service with greater joy and gratitude.

To this cloud of witnesses, I humbly dedicate this book.



O. William Cooper

Livermore, Colorado

INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual to hear non-Christians, new believers and, on occasion, believers who have been long-term members of God's family say they cannot or will not read the book of Judges. The reasons are varied, but some seem to be repeated again and again.

Some are repulsed by the repeated reports of brutal killings and gory details. To make matters worse, God is involved in some of these episodes. Such reports offend their sensibilities. They cannot believe a loving God would send thousands of men into battle to be slaughtered. We must affirm that there are a number of gory episodes in the text. In the text, God did send thousands of men into battle and it was predictable that they would be killed. This is a problem that is involved in one's understanding of the nature of God.

Some people do not believe that divine judgment is a biblical concept. At this point, therefore, they would question whether the book of Judges belongs in the Biblical canon. There are several instances in the text where God pronounced judgment both upon Israel and the pagan nations who lived in and around the Promised Land.

Again, some people are offended by this judgment because they believe that this contradicts the New Testament picture of a loving and merciful God.

There are those who name the name of Christ who do not believe in spiritual warfare. One must admit that there are repeated instances in this book which carefully describe the intense warfare between the kingdom of God and the forces of evil. Further, the struggle described in Judges is a life or death encounter between the forces of God and idolatry.

We must admit that these issues are quite real for those who are offended by them. This study will attempt to deal directly with each of these issues.

In the matter of the brutal killings and gory details, one must make some clear distinctions whether this is a flaw in the divine nature or the consequence of the sinfulness of people, their thoughts and actions. Rather than a flaw in the divine nature, this study will attempt to point out that this is a picture of just how flagrant the sinfulness of mankind had become.

There is no doubt that there are repeated instances of divine judgment upon both Israel and their idolatrous neighbors. Judgment, even divine judgment, must deal with abject sinful thought and action.

This is not the only place in Scripture where the issue of judgment is addressed. The prophets wrote about it. Jesus preached about it in the Gospel records. It is illustrated in the Torah. Paul, Peter and John all wrote about the judgment of sin and the blessing of God upon the righteous. At this point, then, the issue becomes whether one accepts the Biblical record as authentic or not.

There is another issue concerning judgment. Some believe that the judgment found in the book of Judges is contrary to the loving and merciful picture of God in the New Testament. It is the position of this study that there is a loving purpose in the divine judgment. This study will attempt to demonstrate that the instances of divine judgment, particularly those dealing with Israel, were intended to bring Israel back into fellowship with their

God. If you will look at these instances in the text, you will find that on each occasion, God punished Israel and almost immediately the people cried to God for help and promised to serve Him again. It is the position of this study that these experiences of judgment were expressions of God's love and mercy rather of His anger and abuse.

There are those who do not believe that there is such a thing as spiritual warfare. It should be affirmed that there are many expressions of spiritual warfare in this text. Further, most of the New Testament describes instances of spiritual warfare that have taken place. The New Testament also deals with spiritual warfare that is yet to take place. Here, again, the issue appears to be one's understanding of the validity of Scripture.

The author of this work has found the book of Judges to be a source of comfort rather than a source of frustration and fear. Seeing how patient God was with Israel and knowing that God never changes gives him hope for his own failures to be all that God wants him to be. It has also been his experience that when people discover the mercy of God in judges, their fear of the book is greatly diminished.

This is an inductive study of the book of Judges. It is designed to allow the text to present its clear message to our hearts.

This is the way God reveals Himself and His will for our lives in the Scriptures. The format is designed so that a person can approach the study in one of two ways: One can answer the questions which precede each chapter and then compare their study with that of the author. On the other hand, one can go directly to the study recorded by this author.

It is the fond hope of the author that in this study you will sense the presence of a loving, merciful and patient God on every page.

Further, it is hoped that the reader will discover, anew, a deeper understanding of his/her relationship with God and how to live that relationship in a world that is as hostile to salt and light as the pagan neighbors of Israel were in the time of the judges.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1
JUDAH LED ISRAEL AGAINST THE CANAANITES
JUDGES 1:1 - 36

1. There are eleven paragraphs in Judges chapter one. There is a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

1:1-7	
1:8-10	
1:11-15	
1:16-21	
1:22-26	
1:27, 28	
1:29	
1:30	
1:31, 32	
1:33	
1:34-36	

2. In Judges 1:1-7, the author described the defeat of Adonai bezek by Judah and Simeon.
- a. Verse one suggests the way Israel went about determining their future after the death of Joshua. What did they do? What does this say about them?
 - (1). What was Israel's question?
 - (2). How did God answer that question?
 - b. Verse two describes God's response.
 - (1). What was Jehovah's response?
 - (2). What was the tone of God's response?
 - c. God said, "Behold I have given the land into his hand."
 - (1). What did God really say?
 - (2). Look at the tenses of the statement. What do they tell you?
 - d. Look at Judges 1:3
 - (1). Why would Judah choose Simeon to go and do battle with them in order to claim their mutual inheritance?
 - (2) How would you describe the agreement made between Judah and Simeon?
 - e. Look carefully at 1:4.

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- (1). The author said, "...and the Lord gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands." How do you account for this when the soldiers of Judah and Simeon did the fighting?
- (2). The author does not explain why he indicated the number of soldiers Judah defeated. At the same time, he gave no indication of the number of soldiers Judah had. What suggestion can you make for this situation?
- f. In 1:5, 6, the author identified the king of the city of Bezek.
 - (1). Look at his name. What does it suggest to you?
 - (2). In verse six, the author described a horrendous event. What would be the purpose of such a terrible deed?
- g. The king is quoted, in 1:7, as saying that he had cut off the thumbs and great toes of 70 kings.
 - (1). What does this tell you about him?
 - (2). Adonai Bezek said, "So God has repaid me..." What does this tell you about his understanding about God?
 - (3). Adonai Bezek was king over a pagan city. Where would he gain such an understanding of God in such a culture?
3. In Judges 1:8-10, Judah attacked several southern cities
 - a. In 1:8, the sons of Judah captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem.
 - (1). In 1:7, Adonai Bezek was taken to Jerusalem by his Jewish captors. Now, in 1:8, the author tells us that Judah captured and destroyed Jerusalem. How can we explain this?
 - (2). The text says that Judah "set the city on fire". Why would they burn the city rather than using the city as a place of residence?
 - b. In 1:9, the author indicated that Judah was not content to capture Jerusalem, but went on to fight the Canaanites in the hill country, the Negev and the lowlands.
 - (a). Why would they do this?
 - (b). What does this tell us about Judah?
4. In 1:11-15, Caleb dealt with his daughter, Achsah.
 - a. In 1:11, Caleb continued his military campaign.
 - (1). Look at a map in an atlas or your Bible to locate the places Caleb attacked in 1:8-11. What information does this provide?
 - (2). How can we explain this action?
 - b. In 1:12, Caleb and his men were fighting at Debir.
 - (1). Why would the author refer to this city as Kiriath sepher?
 - (2). The fact that Caleb offered his daughter to the man who captured Debir gives us some information. What does this tell us?
 - (3). We are offended, to different degrees, by the offer Caleb made in verse 12. How can we explain this?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1

- c. In 1:13, Caleb's younger brother captured the city and received his niece as his wife. What can we say by way of explanation of this situation?
 - d. In 1:14, it is reported that Achsah was riding "her donkey." What might this tell us about her?
 - e. Also in 1:14, we are told that Achsah convinced her husband to ask Caleb for a field. What does this tell us about Achsah?
 - f. In 1:15, Achsah also asked her father to give her springs.
 - (1). Why would she want this?
 - (2). What does her request tell us about her?
 - (3). What was Caleb's response?
 - (4). What does this tell us about Caleb?
5. In Judges 1:16-21, Judah drove out Canaanites: Benjamin did not.
- a. In 1:16, there is a strong contrast.
 - (1). What is the contrast that exists between Judah and the Kenites?
 - (2). How can we explain this situation?
 - b. In 1:17, Judah and Simeon attacked Zephath.
 - (1). There is a contrast between verses 16 and 17.
 - (a). What is the contrast?
 - (b). What is the significance of this contrast?
 - (2). The author wrote that Judah and Simeon utterly destroyed Zephath and changed the name to Hormah.
 - (a). Consult a Bible dictionary or Bible helps to discover the meaning of the name "Hormah".
 - (b). What is the significance of this name change?
 - c. In 1:18, 19, there is a contrast.
 - (1). What is the contrast?
 - (2). How can we explain the fact that "The Lord was with Judah", but they could not drive the Canaanite inhabitants from the valley?
 - d. In 1:20, Caleb finally received the land set apart for him.
 - (1). What did Caleb do?
 - (2). What does this say about him?
 - e. In 1:21, there is a contrast with Caleb's experience in 1:20.
 - (1). The author said, "the sons of Benjamin DID NOT drive out the Jebusites." What does this mean?
 - (2). How would you evaluate the author's statement, "So the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day"?
6. In Judges 1:22-26, the scene shift back to the sons of Joseph.
- a. In 1:22, there is a comparison with the events of Judah in 1:16-21.
 - (1). In what way are the two stories similar?

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- (2). What message does this comparison convey?
- b. In 1:23, the author reported that “the house of Joseph spied out Bethel.”
 - (1). If God was with them, why was this necessary?
 - (2). The author identified both the former name of the city “Luz,” and the new name “Bethel.” What is the significance of this report?
- c. In 1:24, the spies encountered a native of Bethel.
 - (1). What did they ask of the man?
 - (2). If you were he-man, how would you feel?
- d. In 1:25, the man responded to the spies' question.
 - (1). What did the man tell the spies?
 - (2). What did the spies do?
 - (3). How did the spies treat the man?
- e. In 1:26, the man of Bethel left the area.
 - (1). Where did he go?
 - (2). What did he do?
 - (3). What can we learn from these facts?
- 7. In Judges 1:27, 28, Manasseh attacked Beth-shean.
 - a. In 1:27, Manasseh failed to obey God. What did the tribe do?
 - (1). Why did they do this?
 - (2). What were the consequences?
 - b. In 1:28, the author adds additional information.
 - (1). What new information did he provide?
 - (2). How does this affect our understanding of Israel's situation?
 - (3). How would this affect Israel's relationship with God?
- 8. In 1:29, Ephraim took over the city of Gezer.
 - a. In view of God's command, how do you account for this situation?
 - b. Why didn't Ephraim expel the people of Gezer?
- 9. In 1:30, Zebulun didn't drive out the Canaanites.
 - a. Why didn't Zebulun drive out the Canaanites?
 - b. What did Zebulun do to the inhabitants.
 - c. What new information does this suggest?
- 10. In 1:31, 32, Asher conquered seven cities.
 - a. What did the men of Asher do?
 - b. What difference did this make?
- 11. In 1:33, Naphtali attacked the northern city of Beth-shemesh.
 - a. What were the results of this campaign?
 - b. Why did Naphtali act as he did?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1

- c. What inevitable consequences did the people of Naphtali face?
12. In 1:34-36, Dan had a strange experience with the Amorites.
- a. When God was with His people, how can we explain the situation in 1:34?
 - b. 1:35, adds information to our understanding.
 - (1). What did it add?
 - (2). The author said, “But when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong...”
What is the implication of this statement?
 - (3). If you were a member of the tribe of Dan and this verse was said of you, what would you be thinking?
 - c. In 1:36, is the closing verse of this chapter, how does the verse bring the chapter to a close?
13. Now review your study of chapter one. How would you express the message of this chapter in one sentence?
14. Review the chapter and record the things the author has told us about God.

LESSON 1: JUDGES 1:1 - 36

JUDAH LED ISRAEL AGAINST CANAANITES

There are eleven paragraphs in Judges chapter one. There is a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table:

1:1-7	Judah and Simeon Defeat Adonai-bezek
1:8-10	Judah Defeated Several Southern Towns
1:11-15	Caleb Gave His Daughter to Conqueror of Debir
1:16-21	Judah Drove Out Canaanites; Benjamin Did Not
1:22-26	Joseph's Family Conquered Bethel
1:27-28	Manasseh Did Not Drive Canaanites from Beth-shean
1:29	Ephraim Did Not Drive Canaanites From Gezer
1:30	Zebulun Did Not Drive Canaanites from Kitron
1:31, 32	Asher Did Not Drive Canaanites From Cities
1:33	Naphtali Did Not Drive Canaanites From Beth-Shemesh
1:34-36	Dan Forced into Hills; Joseph's Family Made Amorites Servants

Judges 1:1-7 - Judah and Simeon Defeated Adonai Bezek

If you read the closing paragraph in Joshua and then the first paragraph in Judges, it sounds as though Judges is a continuation of Joshua. It is possible, but that cannot be confirmed. Look at the way the author begins the book.

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" Judges 1:1

In the Hebrew text, the book begins with the word "and." This suggests that it is a continuation of a previous work. There is no way to confirm this suggestion, but it seems appropriate.

When Joshua was dead, there is no record of the name of the new leader. Are we to assume that they were without a leader for a time? Whether they had a leader or not, the people asked God whom He had chosen to lead the people into the battle to claim the land God had given them. It suggests that they knew that they were going to have to battle the inhabitants for the land even though God was giving it to them. They took nothing for granted. At least, it suggests that they were determined to do as God instructed them.

The divine response would suggest that God was not offended by their question.

And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." Judges 1:2

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If you look carefully at this verse, God speaks of it as something that is already accomplished. The question arises, why would God chose Judah? He was not the oldest son. Jacob's oldest son was Reuben. He, however, was never considered the leader of the family. Joseph received the coat with long sleeves, which was the indication that he would be the heir, the ruler of the family when Jacob died. When Jacob sent his sons into Egypt to buy grain, it was Judah who took over the leadership of the family. By identifying Judah as the head of the family, God was only affirming who Jacob had already named as the leader of his clan. We cannot be sure if this continued during the time of Moses and Joshua, but it probably did, even if at a lower level of control.

Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you." So Simeon went with him. Judges 1:3



There appears to be no question, on the part of Judah, concerning whether or not he would be the first to go into battle to reclaim the land. If you look at the book of Joshua, you will note that much of this territory was conquered by Joshua prior to the time of his death. We do not know why it had to be done again. It may well be that the Canaanite peoples had ventured back into the territories taken by Joshua some time before. We cannot say for sure.

The question arises, why would Judah choose to take Simeon with him into battle? If you look at the map, you will note that the territory granted to Simeon looks as though it is part of the land given to Judah. It would be only natural for these two tribes to unite in the fight against the Canaanite peoples. Also, you will notice that no other tribe had land in this area.

And Judah went up, and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands; and they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek. Judges 1:4

It is clear that Judah and Simeon did the fighting, but the author stressed the fact that it was the Lord who gave the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hands.

It is interesting that the author told us the number of soldiers who fought on the side of the Canaanites, but did not tell us how many soldiers fought for Judah and Simeon. We cannot be certain, but it appears that this may suggest that there were many more Canaanites than soldiers of Judah and Simeon. It could suggest that the two tribes won this battle against insurmountable odds.

And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek and fought against him and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Judges 1:5

Adonai bezek was the ruler of the Canaanites. The use of the word "adonai" in the name of the king causes one to wonder if the Canaanites had some common language ties. That appears to be the case.

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The word "adonai" means lord or master in Hebrew. It would not be unusual for the people to think of their ruler as their master. He would be considered the master of the city of Bezek.

Observe that the text says that "they found Adonai-bezek." This suggests that they had been hunting for him. We must remember that these city-states had been soundly defeated by Joshua and the rumors of their deliverance from Egypt were fresh in the minds of all the Canaanite peoples. Their reputation had preceded them and struck terror in the hearts of the people in the land.

But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Judges 1:6

This tells us something about the character of Adonai-bezek. Many great kings and generals have been taken captive with their army. There is probably a flaw in the character of a king who flees when his army is defeated. We will say more to this later.

It seems a terrible thing to cut off a person's thumbs and big toes. One wonders why a person would do such a thing. Look at the consequences of these atrocities. If you cut off a person's thumbs, he cannot hold a weapon. This would be one of the major reasons to do such a tragic thing. There is another possibility. If a person has no thumbs, it would be very difficult for him to do most anything. It would be humiliating for that person even to try to hold food in his hands to eat. The element of humiliation is very important in this issue. We will say more about it later.

If you cut off a person's big toes, he will have a very poor sense of balance. This would be extremely important if the person ever tried to engage in combat again. Balance is absolutely essential to stay alive in combat. Again, however, people of royalty are accustomed to beauty and ceremony. When a king loses his big toes, he would no longer be able to present himself in a stately manner, but would stumble with almost every step he took. The crude, base desire to take joy in watching a defeated foe stumble unceremoniously through life at your table every day was probably the greatest purpose in inflicting such an atrocity upon a captive.

And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there. Judges 1:7

This is exactly what we spoke of in verse six. Adonai-bezek had done this to seventy rulers in the time that he was king. Conquering kings would make captive kings grovel for their food and do all sorts of things to humiliate them. It became a daily reminder of the king's victory over a foe. Apparently it made the king feel great and victorious to see an enemy grovel.

Observe that this pagan king spoke of God. The name he used for God was "Elohim" and this is the name which highlights the mercy of God. This suggests that he was well versed in the knowledge of the God of Israel. His understanding of God suggested that God did to him what he had done to others. This is interesting since it is certain that it was a Jewish soldier who cut off his thumbs and toes. Still he spoke of this as God performing this agonizing punishment upon him. How did Adonai-bezek know about God? Ultimate-

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ly, we do not know. Abraham had lived in this area a long time before. It is possible that these people knew about God from this encounter. It is also possible that some of them had become worshippers of Jehovah. As we saw earlier, everyone in that part of the world knew about Jehovah, but they knew Him as the irresistible God of the Hebrews.

From the fact that the text says that he was taken to Jerusalem and died there, it appears that Adonai bezek suffered the same fate as the 70 who groveled at his table. He was apparently subjected to the most humiliating kinds of abuse and degrading experiences.

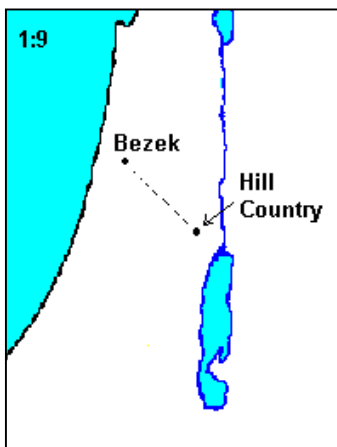
He was taken to Jerusalem. This assumes that the people of Israel controlled the city. At this time, there was no place called Jerusalem. It was called "Jebus" because it had been inhabited by the Jebusites. This identification may have been added later. We do not know for sure. Jerusalem, however, is located in Judah and it was the army of Judah that conquered him. Whatever the course of events, life for Adonai-bezek had to be one of pain and humiliation until the day he died.

Judges 1:8-10 - Judah defeated Several Southern Towns

Then the sons of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. Judges 1:8

There is a slight problem here. In the previous verse, the author told us that Adonai-bezek was taken to Jerusalem. In the very next verse, we are told that Judah and Simeon fought against Jerusalem, conquered it and burned it to the ground. As happens in Biblical historical books, there is more emphasis placed upon the message the author is trying to convey than upon the historical chronology. There are several possibilities. He may have been taken to the area around Jerusalem, for Bethlehem was an important village in that time. It is possible that when the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt, the leader of Judah lived there and Adonai-bezek was taken there to be humiliated. In that day, it was common that there would be more than one place with the same name. We have no knowledge of such a situation in relation to Jerusalem, but it is possible.

Jerusalem was a very important place for the Canaanite people. It was one of their religious sites. The Jebusites lived there and they were very powerful. The city was located high in the hills and would be very difficult to attack. The fact that the two tribes could attack and conquer it was a great feat in itself.



Observe that they burned the city. This is a way of saying that all the inhabitants of the city were destroyed. It also suggests that they considered the place as polluted because of the religious significance it had for the pagan people. The only way to deal with such a situation was to burn it down. This they did, and probably for that reason.

And afterward the sons of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country and in the Negev and in the lowland. Judges 1:9

It is interesting that this was a campaign that was to be a joint effort between Judah and Simeon. In this verse, however, it is stressed that Judah was the one who went down to

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fight against the Canaanites in the hill country. This is an area just south of Jerusalem, but north and a bit west of Hebron. This area is very hilly. This makes it a difficult area for combat. There is a myriad of places for soldiers to hide and surprise their attackers. For Judah to be able to fight well enough to conquer these people in such a place is amazing. Usually an army would set up a guard and wait for the enemy to come out their hiding places in need of food. Judah did not do that.

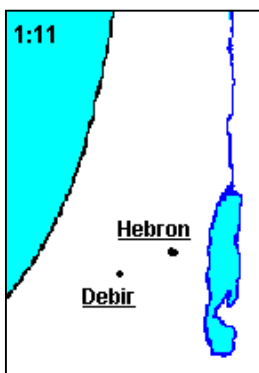
So Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba); and they struck Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.
Judges 1:10

Having defeated the army that was hiding in the caves and the hill country, Judah turned their attention to the conquest of Hebron. This city was very important to Israel because this is where Abraham was buried. In verse ten, the author refers to the fact that the former name for Hebron was Kiriath arba. The earliest mention of Kiriath arba was in Genesis 23:2 and in that verse, which describes the death of Sarah, it also mentions the fact that though she died in Hebron, the former name was Kiriath-arba. The use of the name Kiriath-arba has to be extremely old.

Notice, also, that Judah then went on to wage war against three other communities. Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai were named after three of the sons of Anak who lived in the vicinity of Hebron. The communities that bore their names were suburb cities of Hebron. They would not be walled cities and would not be difficult to take over. The problem was that these villages were populated by people who were unusually large in stature. This made them a formidable foe on the battlefield. Nevertheless, Judah attacked and conquered them. Judah was not satisfied to take the land that was to be theirs and settle down. God commanded them to drive the inhabitants out and they were busy being obedient.

Judges 1:11-15 - Caleb Gave His Daughter to Conqueror of Debir

Then from there he went against the inhabitants of Debir (now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher.) *Judges 1:11*



Having won the conquest of Hebron and the three villages which surrounded this well defended city, Judah turned their attention to city of Debir or Kiriath-sepher. As you can see on this map, Debir is located slightly to the south of Hebron and about halfway to the Mediterranean Sea. Though Debir is in the hill country, it is not as precipitous as the area around Hebron. As we will see, this city proved to be more of a challenge than they expected it to be.

And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife."
Judges 1:12

Caleb was the one in charge of the battle at this point. Though the text does not say so, it appears that the Israelite army must have been becoming weary of battle, for they were not taking the city as they should have been able to do.

In an attempt to stir up motivation in the forces, Caleb made an offer. It seems cold and calculating in our minds. Actually, it was not all that uncommon in that day. This

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tells us that Caleb was very committed to winning this battle. It also tells us that Caleb's daughter must have been a very desirable woman. We should also keep in mind that this was not as generous an offer as it may seem at first. It was Caleb's responsibility to find a husband for his daughter whether they took the city of Debir or not. It should be kept in mind that this was not much different from the normal negotiating that took place in the securing of a wife. One benefit that Caleb would realize was that he would be sure to have a brave man for a son-in-law.

And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. Judges 1:13

Othniel was the son of Kenaz, Caleb's older brother. It is not certain, but it is possible that Kenaz was the leader of the tribe of Judah at this time. Othniel was Caleb's nephew, but it did not disturb them, in that day and culture, to marry a first cousin. We now know that this is very dangerous for the children who follow, but it was probably not true at that time.

Caleb made the promise and kept it. We should remember that Caleb had received this area as a gift for his work as a spy and his conviction that Israel could easily conquer the land.

The fact that Debir, Hebron and other towns had more than one name suggests that they were politically unstable. Whenever one group conquered a city, they would change the name.

Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" Judges 1:14

Achsah, Caleb's daughter, does not seem to be shocked by this arrangement. The text says that when she was given to Othniel she convinced her husband to ask her father for a field. This is an area where there are many hills. There is also a lot of wasteland, but very few tillable fields. It was good to receive the wife, but they would need a field if they were to make a living on the land.

The text does not say it that way, but she must have gone back to her father shortly after being given in marriage. He would know that she had something very important in mind for her to leave her husband and come home. This would account for the fact that Caleb asked her what she wanted. It was certain that this was the purpose of her visit.

The text also states that she convinced her husband to ask her father for a field. In a culture where the husband was totally dominant, this tells us something of the personality of Achsah and the way she was brought up in her family.

The fact that she had a donkey suggests that she was already a person of wealth when she first got married. It may also suggest that this is the way the bride was taken to her husband's place of residence. Most people would not have any animals at all when they first got married. One might guess that this was a gift from her father, though indeed if Kenaz was the leader of Judah, he would have access to some wealth.

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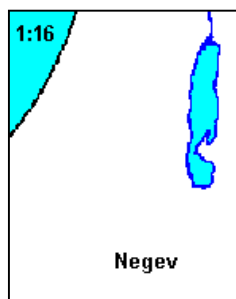
And she said to him, "Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. Judges 1:15

We should remember that these villages are on the edge of the Negev desert. The land is not good, and there is little in the way of moisture producing rains. Her response to Caleb, her father, was that he had given them land in a desert area. If that land was to be of any good to them, they would need a source of water that they did not have. Notice that she did not just ask for water. She asked for springs, plural.

Judges 1:16-21 - Judah Drove Out Canaanites; Benjamin Did Not

And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people. Judges 1:16

As you know, the people of Israel were instructed to either kill the inhabitants or drive them out. The Kenites, the family of Moses' father-in-law, decided to live among the Canaanites rather than to kill them or drive them out. This, of course, is in direct disobedience to the command of God.



These people had been living in "the city of the palms." This is the city of Jericho. As you can see, the Kenites, though not members of the tribe of Judah, nevertheless traveled with them.

The sons of Judah were committed to obeying God's command and drive the inhabitants out of the land. The Kenites, however, were content to dwell with the pagan Canaanites.

The People of Judah and the Kenites went into the wilderness of Judah. As you can see on the map, this is the area just south of the city of Arad.

Then Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Judges 1:17

Verse 16 concludes by saying that the Kenites lived among the people. This, of course, was in direct disobedience to God's command. Verse 17 begins with the fact that the sons of Judah took the descendants of Simeon, as previously agreed, and attacked the Canaanite residents of Zephath. Again, as you can see on the map, this is a distance of about 25 miles, but it is all through the mountains and wastelands.



Our text states that they "utterly destroyed it." The word that is used here means to devote something to destruction for religious purposes. This means to totally reduce it to ashes.

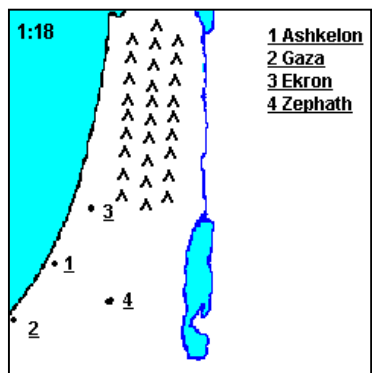
Because the Hebrew people were so graphic, they responded well to things that helped them remember. One of these means was the use of specific names. They changed the name Zephath which means "reserved" or "protected," to Hormah, which means "devoted

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to destruction." In the understanding of the Jews, "devoted" meant that this place was totally given to God and they could take absolutely nothing for themselves. It must be destroyed and burned so that absolutely nothing of value would be left for any human being to take. This is how enthusiastic they were to follow God's command explicitly.

And Judah took Gaza with its territory and Ashkelon with its territory and Ekron with its territory. Judges 1:18

In the previous verse, it speaks of Judah and Simeon both fighting against the city of Hormah. In this verse, however, the author speaks of Judah going against the three cities. The text does not clarify this situation. It may be that the two tribes parted company. It seems unlikely. The agreement was that the two would fight together and deliver the land of both tribes. We know that Judah was the leader of all the tribes and would probably have been the leading tribe in this conquest. It would seem more likely that the author only mentioned Judah, but that it was still a combined effort.



Observe, on the map that they captured three cities. The travel through this entire campaign was through the mountains. It is rough traveling. The text speaks of each city "with its territory." This is reference to the small un-walled villages which surrounded large cities and depended upon them for their living. Elsewhere in the Bible this is spoken of as a city with its "daughters." As you look at this map, you can see that this military campaign made a sweep through southern Israel and circled back toward Jerusalem, from whence it started.

Now the LORD was with Judah, and they took possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots. Judges 1:19

There is a strange situation in this verse. It begins with the statement, "The Lord was with Judah..." In most instances, this suggests that the Lord was giving them victory.

The very next section of the verse suggests that Judah took possession of the hill country. This is surprising. It is nearly impossible for an army to conquer another army which has retreated to the hill country. It is not safe. There are hundreds of places from which enemy soldiers can surprise and kill you. For this reason, it was common procedure that soldiers seldom if ever chased after enemy soldiers who fled into the high country.

Nevertheless, God was with Judah and they were able to take control of the hill country. This was a total surprise to almost everyone.

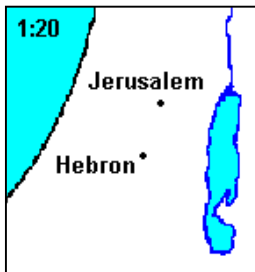
You will also observe that Judah was completely unable to drive out the inhabitants of the valley. The reason the text offers is that the enemy had iron chariots. One can understand why, under normal circumstances, the presence of iron chariots would be frightening to an army. The chariot was to their army what nuclear weapons are to ours.

There is a problem here. The people of Judah wanted to obey God. Despite the fact that chariots were fearsome weapons of terror, God was able to deliver even the iron chariots into the hands of Judah. The text gives us no clue as to why Judah was not able to de-

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feat the army in the valley. We will see shortly, that they were able to defeat another strong foe. We can only conjecture as to the reasons for Judah's failure. It would be difficult to believe that they did not want to drive people out as God commanded. It would be easier to accept the idea that they faltered, if only temporarily, in their expectation of God to do the impossible.

Then they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had promised; and he drove out from there the three sons of Anak. Judges 1:20



The record of this promise can be found in Numbers 13:4-16. You will remember the story. Moses chose one man from each tribe to spy out the land of Canaan. Upon their return, only Caleb and Joshua gave a positive report while the other ten spies said that Israel could not possibly conquer Canaan. As a result, Hebron was to be given to Caleb. In Joshua 14:13, Joshua decreed that Hebron was to be given to Caleb in fulfillment of this promise. It is appropriate that the city of Hebron was given to Caleb. This city was in the area assigned to Judah, and Caleb was a member of that tribe.

Observe, however, that Hebron was not a gift without strings. The text talks about the three sons of Anak. The mention of "the three sons of Anak" can be misleading. In all probability, these are the heads of large households. These men are "sons of Anak." They may not have been giants, as such, but they were very large and fearsome men. This could be quite disconcerting to Jewish men who were usually slight of build.

Caleb, nevertheless, drove out the three clans from the territory around the city of Hebron.

But the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. Judges 1:21

Observe that the sentence begins with the word "but." This suggests that there is a contrast between the content of verse 21 and the material that preceded it. In verse 20, Caleb was given the city of Hebron as an inheritance because he believed God would give them the land. In verse 21, however, Benjamin did not drive the Jebusites out of the city that was to be called Jerusalem. Observe the way the author worded his report, "the sons of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites..." The author did not say they "could not," but that they "did not." This was a decision to disobey.

The very next statement in the text is a devastating pronouncement - "So the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day." This is the result of disobedience. We should be aware, however, that the Jebusites were a pagan nation and it would be hard for the people of Benjamin to refrain from joining with their neighbors in this worship. The Jebusites would fear the anger of their gods if someone lived in their area and did not worship their gods.

Judges 1:22-26 - Joseph's Family Conquered Bethel

Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. Judges 1:22

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The word “likewise” suggests that there is a comparison being described. The author compared the events of 1:16-21 with those of this paragraph, 1:22-26. The comparison points are these:

- a. In both instances God was with them.
- b. In both instances, the people were bent on obeying God’s command to drive the people out.
- c. The results were the same - they were victorious.

The author spoke of the "house of Joseph." This is a reference to both Ephraim and Manasseh. As you can see, this is a huge portion of the land mass dedicated to the 12 tribes of Israel. This verse states that these two brothers went up against Bethel. Observe again, on the map, that this was a different tribe and the encounter takes place in an entirely different part of the land of Canaan.

Repeatedly through this chapter, when the tribes would attempt to carry out the Divine instruction the text would then say, “and the Lord was with them.” This is not accidental.

And the house of Joseph spied out Bethel(now the name of the city was formerly Luz.) Judges 1:23

The house of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, were committed to taking the city of Bethel. They took a cautious approach to their task. By using spies, they increased the possibility of their attacking the city and taking it without being surprised.

Notice that the author referred to the former name of the city as "Luz." The city had not been called this since the time of Jacob. We must ask why the author would chose to included this information about the former name. The new name, “Bethel, means “house of God.” It may well be that this was their way of ascribing the victory to God and dedicating the city to His name.

And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him," Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly. " Judges 1:24

Having scouted the city as well as they could, the two tribes now dispensed with all thought of covert activity. It was clear that they were going to attack the city. They frankly told the resident this information when they asked him concerning the entrance of the city. Now the only question was when they would attack.

Observe that the two tribes promised the man that they would treat him kindly if he would lead them. This took a lot of trust on both the part of the man and of the two tribes. Neither could be certain that the other would keep their word.

So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free. Judges 1:25

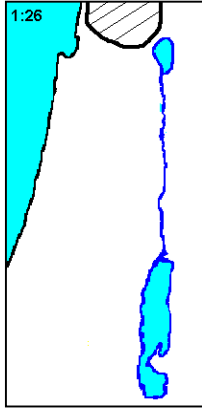
The man from Bethel/Luz was in an awkward position. He must either give the men of Joseph’s lineage the information they wanted or he would die. He made the only choice that he had if he wished to continue to live.

The men of Ephraim “put the city to the edge of the sword.” This means that they totally destroyed the city and killed the inhabitants. You will observe that though this was a

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situation of war, the people of Ephraim kept their word. They let the man and all his family go free.

And the man went into the land of the Hittites and built a city and named it Luz which is its name to this day. Judges 1:26



This is a parenthesis in the story of Israel. This man came from Bethel, which for centuries had been called Luz. The text said that this man went into the land of the Hittites. The Hittite empire covered a large area of land. We do not know exactly where he settled. On the map you can see the general area occupied by the Hittites.

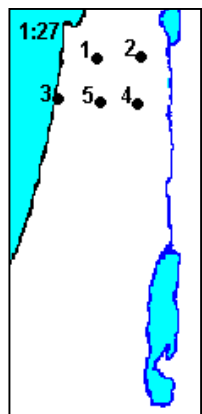
One might wonder why the man would call the name “Luz” when there was already a city by that name. The text does not give an answer. It is fair to assume that this may have been his way of indicating that he was sure that the original city of Luz would be destroyed.

Observe that the author gave this additional piece of information, “which is its name to this day.” This piece of information suggests that this book was written quite some time after the events that are described within it.

Judges 1:27, 28 - Manasseh Did Not Drive Canaanites from Beth-shean

But Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; so the Canaanites persisted in living in that land. Judges 1:27

Verse 27 begins with the word "but." This indicates that a contrast between this verse and the material which preceded it. If you read verses 25 through 27, the contrast will be very clear. In verse 25, Ephraim and Manasseh were very cautious, but they attacked the city of Bethel and struck the city with the edge of the sword. This is a way of saying that the city was totally destroyed and the people were killed.



Verse 27, in contrast with this, Manasseh had the opportunity to take five wealthy cities in the richest farming area of all Canaan and they did not even try to capture them. They are as follows:

1. They did not take possession of Bethshean.
2. They did not take Taanach.
3. They did not take Dor.
4. They did not take Ibleam.
5. They did not take Megiddo.

This meant that they had to live wherever the Canaanites were not living.

The location of these cities can be seen on the adjacent map. The author made the obvious observation that because Manasseh made no effort to do as God commanded them, these results came about:

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- a. They disobeyed God. The cities were never devoted to God as a response to His glorious power.
- b. The people of Manasseh were denied the privilege of living in some of the very best places God had prepared for them.
- c. Because these pagan people remained in the land, Israel was constantly exposed to the greatest possible temptation to participate in their pagan, immoral worship.

Because Israel did not conquer these people, but simply moved into their area in order to coexist with them, Israel became the intruders, rather than the owners. God had clearly instructed Israel to drive the inhabitants out of the land. What they did was clearly disobedience.

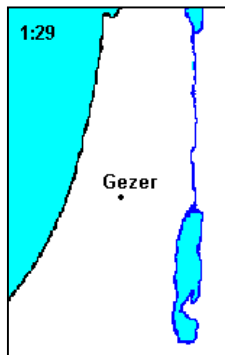
The way the verse is written suggests a very strong emphasis on the message of the verses. It is for this reason that the author wrote as he did.

And it came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely. Judges 1:28

The fact that the text mentions the fact that, "when Israel became strong..." suggests that there was a time when Israel was not strong. Hidden in the background of this statement is the fact that there was probably a substantial period of time when Israel not being strong was subjected to great tensions, pain and problems by their pagan neighbors.

When Israel was strong enough to do so, they forced the Canaanites to be their servants. This, of course, was contrary to the command of God. The author has given us a picture of the reason for the current situation. The people of Israel were more interested in having servants, in humiliating the Canaanites by making them their servants than they were in obeying God. They bowed at the shrine of materialism. Things were more important to them than being obedient to the God who had delivered them.

There is a fact hidden in this verse that could be easily overlooked. Notice that the author said, "...they did not drive them out completely." This suggests that they probably did drive some of the people out of the land, but not all of them. It is possible that they drove out the weak and kept the stronger ones to make them servants. Whatever the scenario, Israel mistook partial compliance with God's will with obedience. This was a fatal flaw in their thinking.



The tragedy of this scenario is that Israel was strong enough to defeat the Canaanites, but they did not have the will to do so.

Judges 1:29 - Ephraim Did Not Drive Canaanites From Gezer

Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. Judges 1:29

In this situation, we are not dealing with the inability of Ephraim to drive out the Canaanites from Gezer. It is clear they were very capable of driving out the Canaanites. Again, they knew that God had said that they were to drive out the Canaanites. This is a clear illustration of their choosing to do what they wanted rather than what God had told them to do. They accepted the Canaanites as neighbors.

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The people of Ephraim moved into Gezer and took up residence among the Canaanites. It was more than that, however. The people of Ephraim were exposing themselves to many different kinds of temptation. The young men of Ephraim would be tempted to take a Canaanite woman as wives. The entire tribe would be tempted to take part in the immoral, pagan religious orgies of the Canaanites.

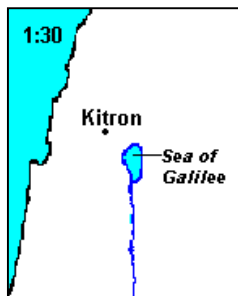
At the same time, the people of Ephraim were knowingly disobeying the command of God. They knew that they would never get away with this, and they did not. They were bound to be punished for their sin, and they were. Their punishment was that they received what they wanted. If you think about it, very often our punishment is that we get what we want.

Judges 1:30 - Zebulun Did Not Drive Canaanites From Kitron

Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor. Judges 1:30

Obviously, Zebulun knew that God commanded them to drive out the inhabitants of Kitron. It appears, also, that the men of Zebulun were well able to defeat the soldiers of Kitron and drive them out of the land, just as God commanded. The assumption from this information is that they were able to obey the command of God.

Unless there is further information with which we are not familiar, the men of Zebulun chose to disobey the clear command of God. This was a tragedy because God had shown them just how powerful He was on their behalf.



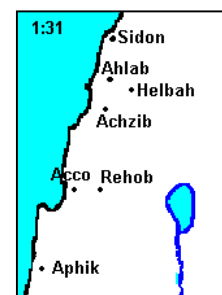
Because of their decision, the men of Zebulun moved into the area of Kitron and put the people of Kitron to forced labor. This later fact is evidence that if they are able to put the people of Kitron to forced labor, then they were certainly able to drive them out of the land.

This decision subjected the people of Zebulun to some severe forms of temptation. They ran the risk of being tempted to take the women of Kitron as their wives. They ran the risk of offering their daughters to the men of Kitron as their wives. They all faced the terrible temptation to become involved in the orgy practices of the pagan people of Kitron. All of this at the time they were disobeying God.

Judges 1:31, 32 - Asher Did Not Drive Canaanites From Cities

Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco, or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. Judges 1:31, 32

As you can see on the map, This was not just a single decision. There are several decisions and all of them were made in opposition to the command of God. Again, Asher knew the command of God. This was a deliberate decision to do the thing that God commanded them not to do. The men of Asher were quite capable of driving the Ca-



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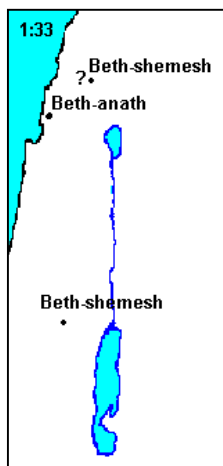
naanites out of the land. If this had not been true, they would not have been able to move in among the Canaanites. People did not take kindly to strangers moving into their land. It would mean that there was less land and less grazing area for everyone's herd of sheep. It was only possible for the people of Asher to move into the land controlled by the Canaanites because they were stronger than the Canaanites.

Also, it was more than just a simple wrong decision. As you look at the verse, you will notice that there were seven decisions that were made to move in among the pagan Canaanites. It is more than a question of location. It was a question of obedience or disobedience. Asher, also, was disobedient. Because of this the author wrote the sad words which are reflected on this map:

1. Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco.
2. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Sidon.
3. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Ahlab.
4. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Achzib.
5. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Helbah, which is the same area as Ahlab.
6. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Aphik.
7. They did not drive out the inhabitants of Rehob.

Judges 1:33 - Naphtali Did Not Drive Canaanites from Beth-Shemesh

Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; and the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath became forced labor for them. Judges 1:33



There is a sad sound to the reading of this verse. Naphtali did not have to drive out the Canaanites all by themselves. Though the text does not mention this fact when dealing with each of the tribes, it was stipulated that they would help each other. Even the tribes whose land was east of the Jordan were to help their brothers win their land.

If you think carefully, this verse might create a problem for your understanding. The land which was allotted to Naphtali was located just north of the Sea of Galilee. The city of Beth-shemesh, however, is located in the southern part of Judah. The question arises, why does our author talk about Naphtali in relation to a city located in the southern part of the territory of Judah? The truth is that there is more than one city named "Beth-shemesh." The map shows where this city of Beth-shemesh is located.

If you look up the name "Beth-shemesh" in a Bible Dictionary, you would discover that it means "house of the sun." We must be careful about drawing conclusions from this fact, but it is very possible that the people who lived there were among those who worshipped the sun. If this is the case, then it gives us an indication of one of the dangers that Naphtali faced when disobeying God concerning the people in their territory. The worship of the sun involved some very tragic, immoral orgies and it would not be long before the people of Naphtali would be involved in them. The very same thing happened when

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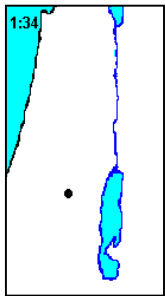
Naphtali came to the city of Beth-anath. The name “Beth-anath” means “house of the goddess Anath.”

It is clear that Naphtali was stronger than the people of both cities. It cannot be claimed that it was impossible for them to drive out the people. If they were able to put these people to forced work, slavery, then it would also be possible for them to drive the people from the land.

There is another issue involved in this situation. When our first parents sinned, part of the consequences for that action was that their work would be drudgery. No one was to be excluded from work that was difficult for them. This was an attempt to skirt those consequences. Again, God created people to be free. When Israel was oppressed in their slavery, God came to their rescue. Now, Naphtali wanted to subject the Canaanites to the very same kinds of hardship from which God had delivered them in Egypt. Slavery was not God’s original design for Israel or any other people.

Judges 1:34-36 - Dan Forced into Hills; Joseph's Family Make Amorites Servants

Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley; Judges 1:34

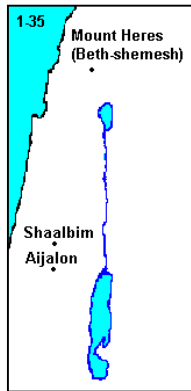


The name “Amorites” literally means “highlanders.” They were one of the seven general tribes who made up the Canaanites. We tend to think of the Amorites as people who lived east of the Dead Sea, and they did. One must deal with the question, How did the people of Dan come to be fighting with the Amorites who had lived east of the Jordan River when Israel came from Egypt? We will address this question just a little bit later.

At this point, we should acknowledge that the Amorites who were accustomed to living and fighting in the mountains had a decided advantage over the people of Dan. They were hardly experienced fighters at all, much less fighting under the disadvantage of being in the mountains. This was a most difficult place to fight. In most instances, armies tried never to get into battle in the mountains because there was no hope of success there. This suggests some information about the men of Dan. They were not as strong as the Amorites. Thus, the Amorites were able to force the men of Dan into the unfortunate position of trying to fight in the area they were least prepared to do battle. This creates a problem for our consideration. God had promised to be with the people of Israel as they went into the land to claim their inheritance. If God was with them, then why were they unable to come out of the hill-country and defeat the Amorites? These Canaanites were under the curse of God because of the way they had treated Israel on the way from Egypt to Canaan. Still, the Amorites forced the men of Dan into the hill-country and would not let them come down to the plain where they wanted to live. The answer may be that they were not placing their trust in God who was with them. It also may be that Dan was trying to defeat the Amorites by themselves when Ephraim and Manasseh should have been there to help them. This may suggest that the sons of Joseph did not attempt to come to the aid of Dan until they had become very strong. We can not say for certain.

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yet the Amorites persisted in living in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim; but when the power of the house of Joseph grew strong, they became forced labor. Judges 1:35

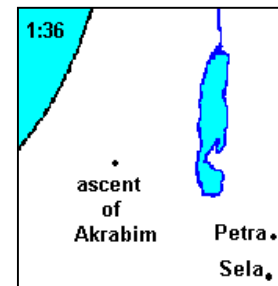


This verse represents a shift in the direction of the author. In the previous verse, he mentioned that the Amorites refused to allow the men of Dan to come down out of the hill-country. Now in verse 35, the author tells us that the Amorites persisted in living in the three cities of Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim. Also, there is no mention of the “sons of Joseph” in verse 34, but now the author mentioned that the sons of Joseph grew strong and forced the Amorites to become slaves for them. It would be appropriate for the people of Ephraim and Manasseh to come to the aid of the tribe of Dan because they were neighbors. We cannot explain why they were not involved when the army of Dan was held at bay by the Amorites and not allowed to come down from the hill-

country.

And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela and upward. Judges 1:36

On the accompanying map, you can see where Sela is located. This is a long distance from the place where they were challenging the children of Dan. The “ascent of Akrabbim” is located south and east of the southern tip of the Dead Sea. You will also notice that the city of Sela is located even farther to the south of the Dead Sea. It is located, in fact, about half way between the Dead Sea and the city of Eilat. We cannot be certain why the Amorites were involved in this confrontation on the west side of the Jordan when their territory is located on the east side. It is possible that they saw the disarray of the tribes of Israel and decided to attempt to take some land away from them. It happened to be in the area of Dan. It is interesting that this is the area that they chose to attack. It has some proximity to their own land on the east side of the Jordan River. It is not, however, some of the best land in all Canaan. That territory is located in the north, in the vicinity of Megiddo.



Conclusion

Now, take a look back over the chapter again. There is a process in motion that could easily be missed.

- a. 1:10 - Judah destroyed the Canaanites and drove them out.
- b. 1:16 - The Kenites, the family of Moses' wife, went in and lived among the people.
- c. 1:21 - Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites.
- d. 1:23 - The sons of Joseph put the city to the edge of the sword.
- e. 1:27 - Manasseh - the Canaanites persisted in living in the land. Manasseh put the Canaanites to forced labor.
- f. 1:29 - Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites and lived among them.

JUDAH LED ISRAEL AGAINST CANAANITES

- g. 1:30 - Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron. They lived among these Canaanites and put them to forced labor.
- h. 1:31 - Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of seven cities, but rather lived among these pagan people.
- I. 1:33 - Naphtali did not drive them out, but lived among them and put them to forced labor.
- j. 1:34 - Dan - the Amorites forced Dan into the hill-country. Eventually, Joseph's family helped put the Amorites to forced labor.

Israel started out right. Notice, however, that after the Kenites, not really Jews, broke the command, each of the tribes that followed did the same. It ended with the Danites not even being able to conquer or drive out the Amorites. In other words, the covenant relationship with God was damaged, if not completely broken.

Throughout this book, the author tells the story of Israel after the time of Joshua, but that is just the foundation upon which the author tells us a number of things about God. In each chapter, we will attempt to identify what it is that the author tells us about God.

- 1:1, 2 **God answers Prayer** - When Joshua died, Israel's leaders inquired of God who should go up first against the Canaanites. God instructed that Judah should lead.
- 1:4 **God fights for His people** - God delivered the Canaanites and Perizites into the hands of Judah.
- 1:7 **God is just** - He repays evil deeds - Adonai-bezek was humiliated in defeat. He said God repaid him for his treatment of other kings.
- 1:19, 22 **God is with His people** - God was with Judah as they conquered the cities in Canaan.
- 1:27-33 **God commands His people** - but this does not mean that they obey Him. Several tribes did not drive out the Canaanites.
- 1:27-33 **God allows freedom of choice** - but with each choice also comes the consequences.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2

GOD RESPONDED TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION

JUDGES 2:1 - 23

1. There are four paragraphs in the second chapter of Judges. On the table which follows, write a title of seven words or less for each paragraph.

2:1-5	
2:6-10	
2:11-15	
2:16-23	

2. In 2:1-5, the angel of the Lord spoke to Israel.
- a. In Judges 2:1, the angel of the Lord said three things to the people:
 - (1). What three things did the angel say?
 - (2). What is the basic message of these three things?
 - (3). Why was it necessary?
 - b. In 2:2, the angel had two instructions for the people.
 - (1). What are the instructions?
 - (2). Why are they important?
 - (3). The instructions are followed by the word "but." What hint does this give us?
 - (4). How did the angel evaluate the conduct of the people?
 - (5). Read the verse again. There is a hint concerning the emotional condition of the angel as the message was given. What is it?
 - c. Judges 2:3 begins with the word "therefore."
 - (1). What does this suggest?
 - (2). In your own words, describe the punishment these people were to receive.
 - (3). In this verse, God said, "I will not drive them out before you." What does this tell us?
 - d. In 2:4, the people responded to the angel's announcement.
 - (1). What was their response?
 - (2). In view of their previous actions, why would they respond in this way?
 - e. Judges 2:5 is additional information.
 - (1). In a Bible Dictionary or Exhaustive Concordance, look up the name "Bochim."
 - (a). What does it mean?
 - (b). Why would they give this name to that place?
 - (2). In the last part of this verse they "sacrificed to the Lord."
 - (a). In view of the rest of the paragraph, what kind of sacrifice would this be?

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- (b). Why would they do that?
- 3. In Judges 2:6-10, the author described the death of Joshua.
 - a. In 2:6, we seem to encounter a problem.
 - (1). Reread 1:1 and then reread 2:6.
 - (a). What problem do you encounter?
 - (b). How can we understand this?
 - (2). Now read Joshua 24:29.
 - (a). At what point did this really happen?
 - (b). How can we explain this situation?
 - b. In 2:7, there is a summary statement.
 - (1). What conclusions can we draw from this statement?
 - (2). What is the significance of the fact that the "people served the Lord..." and that this lasted as long as Joshua and the elders "who survived Joshua who had seen all the great works which he had done for Israel"?
 - c. In 2:8, the author recorded Joshua's death. What does it add to the story when the author indicated that Joshua died at age 110?
 - (1). In a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia, look up the name "Joshua." Record your findings.
 - (2). What does this add to our understanding of the impact of his life?
 - (3). The author described Joshua as "the servant of the Lord." In simple terms, what does this mean?
 - d. In 2:9, the author described the burial of Joshua.
 - (1). From this verse, what has the author told us about the character of Joshua?
 - (2). In view of the fact that we have three accounts of the death of Joshua, what does this verse suggest concerning the death of Joshua:
 - (a). Was it in the land or before they came into Canaan?
 - (b). Was it before or after the first crossing of the Jordan?
 - e. In 2:10, the author described a serious problem.
 - (1). What is the problem?
 - (2). On the basis of this verse, what is the cause of the problem?
- 4. In 2:11-15, there is a cause and effect relationship between God and Israel.
 - a. In 2:11-13, the author made eight statements about Israel.
 - (1). What are the eight statements?
 - (2). The author said, "the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord". How is this statement changed by the addition of the words "in the sight of the Lord"?
 - (3). The author took special care to describe "the Lord" in these terms:
 - (a). The God of their fathers
 - (b). Who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.
 - (c). What do these statements add to the meaning of these three verses?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2

- (4). In verse 11, the author accused Israel by saying, “and served the Baals.” In 2:13, however, the author said, “they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashteroth.” What is the significance of this?
- b. In 2:14, 15, the author described God’s response to Israel’s worship of idols.
- (1). What were God’s responses?
 - (2). What was the effect upon Israel caused by God’s response?
 - (3). What does this sobering statement tell us about God?
5. In 2:16-23, the author gave a brief summary of Israel’s experiences with the judges.
- a. Read 2:11-15 again, and then read; 2:16.
- (1). What is your reaction?
 - (2). Something in the content of 2:16 is shocking. What is it?
 - (3). How can you explain this shocking turn of events.
 - (4). What did the Judges do?
 - (5). Why would God give them over to the plunderer and then send a judge to deliver them?
- b. In 2:17, there is a different kind of shock.
- (1). What is this shock?
 - (2). How can we explain the shock?
 - (3). What illustration did the author use to describe Israel’s actions?
 - (4). What is the significance of this?
 - (5). The author said of Israel, “they turned aside quickly.” What is added to the meaning of the statement by the use of the word “quickly”?
 - (6). The author also added “they did not do as their fathers.” What is the implication of this statement?
- c. In 2:18, there is a severe contrast with verse 17.
- (1). On the following table, record the information verses 17 and 18 which create this serious contrast.

Verse 17	Verse 18

- (2). What is the message of this contrast?
- d. In 2:19, the author continued the contrast.
- (1). What indictment does the author make in this verse?
 - (2). Why does the author say, “When the judge died”?
 - (3). What picture has the author painted of the people of Israel?

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- e. In 2:20, 21, the author quoted the Lord's indictment of Israel.
 - (1). How would you describe the author's picture of God when he said, "The anger of the Lord burned against Israel"?
 - (2). What is the implication when God said, "I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died."?
 - (3). What was the basis of God's announced punishment of Israel?
- f. 2:22 is a continuation of God's announced judgment of Israel.
 - (1). What is a "test"?
 - (2). What is the difference between "testing" and "tempting"?
- g. In 2:23, there is an interesting statement about the pagan nations.
 - (1). In the text, the author said, "so the Lord allowed these nations to remain." Why would God do this when His clear desire for Israel was that the nations be driven out?
 - (2). The author also said, "not driving them out quickly." What is added to the idea of the text by the inclusion of the word "quickly"?
 - (3). There seems to be a problem with this verse. In 1:1 and 2:8, the author reported the death of Joshua. Now, in 2:23, it seems that he speaks of Joshua as still being alive. How can we account for this apparent confusion?
- 6. Review your study of this chapter. What do you discover in the author's message concerning the nature of God?

LESSON 2: JUDGES 2:1 - 23

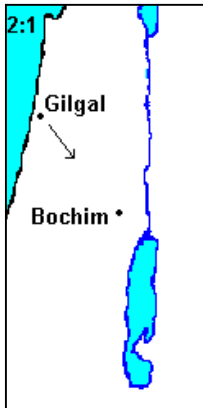
GOD RESPONDED TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION

There are four paragraphs in the second chapter of Judges. A summary of each paragraph is reported on the following table.

2:1-5	The Angel's Warning
2:6-10	The Death of Joshua in Canaan
2:11-15	Israel Forsook God; God Delivered up Israel
2:16-23	Summary of Experiences with Judges

Judges 2:1-5 - The Angel's Warning

Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, Judges 2:1



As you can see on the map, Bochim is located near Bethel. Notice that the text said that the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. This suggests that this angel is not everywhere present. The question surfaces, why did the angel come? The answer, at least in part, can be found in the message which the angel brought.

The angel spoke on behalf of God. The message was simple, God was faithful; He brought them safely out of Egypt. He kept His word and brought them into the land He had promised to their forefathers. The angel reminded them that God had promised that He would never break His covenant with Israel. They could absolutely depend upon God to do exactly as He had said he would.

and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? Judges 2:2

Having reminded Israel of God's faithfulness, in verse two the angel changed the focus of the message. The angel called on Israel to refrain from doing two things:

- Make no covenant with the inhabitants. The suggestion here is that there is real danger that Israel will do just that. It had happened before and it appeared that they would do the same again.
- Break down their altars. Again, the suggestion is that there was real danger that they would not break down the altars, but would join the inhabitants and use these pagan altars for the worship of the idols.

A second time the author changed the direction of the message. This change begins with the use of the connective "but." This suggests that a contrast is being presented. The angel

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had indicated what God wanted them to do, but now the angel would identify what Israel was doing. The two, of course, are not the same.

The report is an indictment - "You have not obeyed me." The angel was saying that Israel had disobeyed God; they had rebelled. This is a key issue throughout this book. God had given ample evidence of His power and faithfulness. Nevertheless, Israel refused to do as God commanded them.

If you read verse two again, you will notice that there is a hint of frustration in the closing question, "What is this you have done?" Some translations report the question, "Why have you done this?" It is like saying, "Your actions do not make sense. When God has been so faithful and powerful on your behalf, why would you disobey and rebel against Him?"

"Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" Judges 2:3

The word "therefore" suggests that a conclusion is going to be presented. The conclusion is most interesting and gives a hint of one of the major teachings of the book. It is as if the angel said, "You did not obey my command to drive them out, therefore, I will not drive them out before you." The indication is that God would have driven them out had Israel been willing to obey. In effect, their punishment is that God is going to allow them to have what they wanted along with the consequences of that choice. They will have the Canaanites to live among them. The angel announced that these Canaanites would become a thorn in their sides. The angel continued by saying that one of the consequences of choosing not to drive the people out is that their pagan idols would become a snare to Israel. That, of course, is exactly what happened to Israel as the Canaanites continued to live among the people of Israel.

And it came about when the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Judges 2:4

Human nature is interesting. They were quite willing to rebel against the command of their faithful God. When the consequences were announced, however, they were upset. They wanted the freedom to make their own choices. They did not want to suffer the consequences of their choices.

The word "wept" is "bakah" (בָּכָה) and means "to wail," "to lament feverishly." This is an attempt to describe just how intense was their weeping.

So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the LORD. Judges 2:5

The people of Israel were very expressive and graphic people. They were prone to visual and descriptive images. This was a place where they had wept intensely when the judgment of God was announced. With that in mind, they named the place "Bochim" which means "weepers." It is a way of remembering that this is a place where their weeping was most intense.

The text also says that "they sacrificed to the Lord." Though the text does not say what kind of sacrifice they offered, it is appropriate to assume that it is a sin offering. It is a form of repentance. It is like saying, "I am sorry I did that. I will not do it again."

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Judges 2:6-10 - The Death of Joshua in Canaan

There is a problem in this paragraph. In Judges 1:1, the author dealt with the death of Joshua. His opening words were,

Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" Judges 1:1

Now in 2:6-10 we see a report of the death of Joshua as though it had just happened. That, of course, is not possible. This and other events in the book suggest to us that the book does not make a strong attempt to be chronological, though usually is. The book uses historical events to convey a serious message about God. This is not the only place in the book where we will encounter this situation.

When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. Judges 2:6

The context of this verse is that Joshua had given his farewell address to Israel. He had given them instructions concerning their conquest of the land just as Moses had prior to his death. Now Joshua was about to die as well.

The author said, "Each to his inheritance to possess the land." It is interesting that the author puts the statement in this way. If you look at the book of Joshua, you will see that some of the tribes did not go in to possess their land, but moved in with the inhabitants. At the particular point the author has described, the tribes went to possess their land. It suggests that their intent was good at the beginning.

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Judges 2:7

This verse gives us some new information. As long as Joshua was alive, the people served the Lord. It went even further. As long as the elders who lived on after Joshua died, Israel served the Lord. These were the people who had witnessed the miracles that God had done on behalf of the people of Israel. The author was saying that Joshua and the elders had a very significant impact on the lives and conduct of the people of Israel. That appears to have changed when these men had all died.

Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten. Judges 2:8

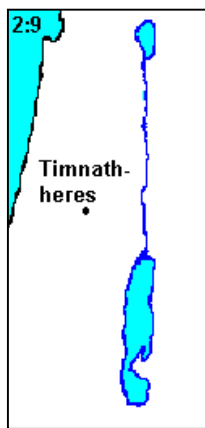
This is the first identification of Joshua's lineage. The name "nun," in Hebrew, means "fish." We know that Joshua and his father were members of the tribe of Ephraim. This tribe was not held in high respect among the children of Israel. Ephraim was the younger of Joseph's sons and therefore not considered primary in importance. The conduct of the descendants of Ephraim was anything but stellar among the people of Israel. One wonders how Joshua could come from such humble beginnings and become the leader of all Israel. His beginnings were humble, but his favor with God made him a great leader. This gives us an impression of the greatness of the man and his favor before God. Beyond this, we know little of Joshua's background.

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The author went on to describe the character of Joshua in a brief statement. He said that Joshua was “the servant of the Lord.” What an accolade! Imagine how you would have to live so that others could evaluate your life by saying that you were “the servant of the Lord.”

The author also indicated that Joshua died when he was 110 years of age. This may sound like a simple statement of fact. It is, however, more than that. The people of Israel thought that if a person was very godly, they would not only be comfortably wealthy, but would also live to great old age. One hundred and ten years was substantially more than the life expectancy in that day.

And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. Judges 2:9



On the map, you can see that Timnath-heres was located well within the land of Canaan. This poses some problems if they are to bury him immediately as was their custom. We need to ask how we can account for this situation. There are some possibilities:

- a. He could have died and they carried his bones into the land and buried them in the land assigned to him.
- b. He could have died after they crossed into the land and immediately they buried him in his own tract of land.

There is no statement in the text to clarify just what the author meant by the statement he made concerning the burial of Joshua. In view of this verse, it would appear that the people had crossed over into Canaan before the death of Joshua and when he died, he was placed in a grave in his own assigned land in Ephraim. This was a beautiful area which was set aside for Joshua's use.

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Judges 2:10

This is a devastating statement concerning Israel. Joshua's generation had experienced the great power and grace of God to defend and deliver them on their way back to the land of promise. These people, however, failed to pass this information and faith on to their children. Most often, this occurs when the people have experienced a decline in their own faith and expectation of what God would do on their behalf. This may occur when they experience a decline in their own enthusiasm for God. As this happens, the children grow up with no basis for their own faith and expectation. In a time of trouble, they need great faith, but have no basis for it.

This is always the dilemma of God's people. They are always under the command to do two things very well:

- a. They obey God and trust Him implicitly for their deliverance.
- b. They must teach their children to trust in God and provide for them some basis for placing their trust in Jehovah. If they fail to pass this on the ability to trust Jehovah, they will have no foundation upon which to remember what great works God had done for their forefathers.

GOD RESPONDED TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION

Judges 2:11-15 - Israel Forsook God: God Delivered up Israel

As you study this paragraph, you will observe a cause and effect relationship between verses 11-13 on the one hand and 14-15 on the other. Watch for this as we study the paragraph together.

Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. Judges 2: 11-13

When people do not know God; when they are not aware of His power and His ways, they will inevitably turn to an evil lifestyle. Observe the way the author described the evil lifestyle of the people of Israel:

- a. They did evil in the sight of the Lord.”
- b. They served the Baals.
- c. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, the one who brought them out of Egypt. This speaks of both rejecting God and a failure to be grateful for the way God brought them out of their bondage.
- d. They followed other gods from among the people who lived around them.
- e. They bowed themselves down to the Canaanite gods.
- f. They provoked the Lord to anger.
- g. They forsook the Lord.
- h. They served Baal and Ashteroth - this places an emphasis on their involvement not only in idolatry, but in the orgies which made up much of their worship.

Observe that twice, (in c and g), the author referred to their sin as “forsook the Lord.” This is a way to add emphasis to his statements. Observe, also, that what began simply as a participation in idol worship ended up in their participation in the sexual orgies which characterized these idolatrous relationships.

As indicated earlier, this paragraph is a cause and effect relationship. Verses 11-13 represent the cause. We will now turn our attention to the effect the author reported.

And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed. Judges 2:14, 15

The author described the response of the Lord in six different ways:

- a. God's anger burned against Israel (look up burned).
- b. God gave Israel into the hands of plunderers.

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- c. God sold them into the hands of their enemies who lived around them. This suggests that though the Canaanites lived among the Israelites, there was built up anger against Israel. It was an uneasy truce at best.
- d. The hand of the Lord was against them wherever they went. It is one thing to be defeated, it is another to have everything you do go wrong. That was the plight of Israel.
- e. They were severely distressed.
- f. God took an oath against them.

This is obviously a strong statement of judgment. We find it difficult to think of keeping the covenant to be with Israel and at the same time giving them into the hands of their pagan neighbors. That may be difficult for us, but it is exactly what God did. He never broke His covenant, though Israel broke it constantly. God did, on the other hand, give Israel into the hands of their pagan neighbors.

One must wonder, when considering such ideas, where the mercy is in this paragraph. We will make an attempt to answer this question very shortly.

Judges 2:16-23 - Summary of Experiences with Judges

This paragraph, and particularly verse 16 come as a bit of a surprise. Notice how the author reported the scene.

Then the LORD raised up Judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Judges 2:16

In the previous paragraph, the author reported the response of God to the sins of Israel as they turned to the worship of the gods of the Canaanites. In the very next verse, the author reported that the Lord raised up Judges who delivered them from the plunderers whom God had just allowed to ravish the nation. Notice that in verse 16 it states that the Lord “raised up Judges “ (plural). This suggests that this was not a single incident, but a process of deliverance that took a prolonged period of time.

We are forced to ask the question, Why does God show mercy almost immediately following His display of judgment? First of all, we are dealing with God whose character is merciful. Mercy is God’s intent, and judgment was only given in order to drive the people back to God so that He could continue to give them mercy. Observe that there is no record of Israel asking for a judge. It just says that God gave them judges.

The Judges reversed the judgment that God allowed to come upon Israel. The fact that God raised up the Judges suggests that God wanted the Judges to reverse the judgment He had initiated. This is the mercy, the intentional action of God.

And yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. Judges 2:17

There is a different kind of shock in this verse. The author used a verbal picture in this verse. He compared Israel’s worship of idols to the actions of a wife who abandons her husband in favor of a life of prostitution. We should keep in mind that in the Old Testa-

GOD RESPONDED TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION

ment as well as among the Jews in the time of Jesus, the punishment for adultery was death by stoning. As in the New Testament, God thought of His relationship to His people as that of a husband and wife. He had been faithful, but they had not been faithful, having prostituted themselves in favor of other gods.

There is another part to this visual picture. The intimate relationship between a husband and wife are beautiful and mutually beneficial. The immoral relationships of a harlot, however, are totally destructive and lead to an untimely death.

And when the LORD raised up Judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. Judges 2:18

The content of verse 18 is no less shocking. We need to observe the serious contrast which exists between verses 17 and 18.

verse 17	verse 18
Israel did not listen to the Judges	The Lord raised up Judges
Israel played the harlot after other gods	The Lord was with the Judges
Israel rejected the ways of their fathers	The Lord delivered them
They did not obey the commandments of the Lord	The Lord was moved to pity because of their groanings

Israel was looking for new and exciting ways to sin. God looked for more compassionate ways to show His mercy. The author found a host of ways to show just how patient and merciful God really was. This is a recurring theme in the book of Judges.

Verse 19 is a continuation of this contrast.

But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways. Judges 2:19

It looks as though the people could hardly wait for the judge to die so that they could go back to their evil ways. This is a picture of determined evil direction. The text makes it clear that the people, though they went along with the judge, had no intention of abandoning their evil ways. They just postponed their evil designs. This was a struggle of wills. God was determined that they would serve Him. The people were just a determined that

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they would follow their evil designs. Stubbornness is a vital ingredient in rebellion. They made the very most of their opportunities.

Observe that the text speaks of the example of their fathers. It was not seen as an example that they should follow. They rather saw the example of their fathers as a starting place to see just how far they could stray from it.

So the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, Judges 2:20, 21

Again, the response of God to the sin of Israel was exactly the same. He was burning with hot anger. He punished them. This is another clear picture of judgment. Look, however, at the judgment that God placed upon Israel. Their punishment was that they got just what they wanted. They did not want to drive the nations out. God left the nations to reside among the Israelites. Though the text does not indicate so, they must have felt that they had won quite a victory.

Observe, also, that it was not Israel that had been driving the nations out. The author said, "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations..." Though Israel's army participated, it was God who drove the nations out before Israel. By the same token, when Israel did not want to drive the nations out, God allowed that to happen. God decreed that He would no longer drive the nations out. If the nations were to be driven out, God would not be the one doing it.

Notice also that God said, "I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died." The work of driving out the nations was an unfinished task when Joshua died. This suggests that the plan of God, that all nations be driven out, would be left incomplete, at least for the time being.

in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD TO walk in it as their fathers did, or not. " Judges 2:22

Having announced the punishment for Israel's sin, God immediately started talking about mercy. He mentioned the possibility that they might walk in the way of the Lord. God still held out the hope that they might remember the ways of their fathers and follow them. What an expression of patience and mercy!

So the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua. Judges 2:23

Earlier in this chapter, 2:8, the author told of Joshua's death. In this verse it sounds as though Joshua is still alive. Remember, we said that this is a summary. It is as though the author was standing at the beginning of the book and giving us a summary of the way God will work throughout the book. That is exactly what he did.

Notice it says, "not driving them out quickly." The insertion of the word "quickly" suggests that God is going to drive them out, but not at this time. These people need some time with these nations to discover why God told them to drive the people out, to discover why it was not in their best interest to have these people still in the land.

GOD RESPONDED TO ISRAEL'S REBELLION

If God just wanted to inflict pain on Israel, He would have left the people in the land indefinitely. As it is, God wanted them to experience some of the pain. It would teach them why God wanted the nations to be driven out. God did not want to hurt the people, He wanted to teach them.

This is one more piece of evidence to show us that God was not determined to hurt and devastate Israel, but to use the punishment to bring the people back to Himself. It may not have seemed so for Israel, and it may not sound like it to us, but it was a great expression of patience and mercy on the part of God.

Conclusion

We need to reflect upon this chapter as we have studied it. There are several pieces of information reported and emphasized in chapter two.

1. 2:1 - God intervenes in the affairs of people in order to meet their needs and facilitate His will in the world.
2. 2:1 - God is faithful to His people.
3. 2:2 - God is jealous to be the unique object of the worship of His people.
4. 2:2 - God is determined that His people will obey Him.
5. 2:3 - God often punishes the disobedient by giving them what they want.
6. 2:10 - The knowledge of God is best presented as one generation impresses this knowledge of God upon the next generation which has no experience of His great faithfulness.
7. 2:11-13 - God will show mercy to His people even when He knows they will rebel against Him.
8. 2:14, 15, God will even allow His reputation to be damaged in order to allow His people to experience the consequences of their rebellion and return to Him.
9. 2:16 - The purpose of God's punishment is to allow people to suffer in order to draw them closer to Himself.
10. 2:17 - God sent Judges to show Israel mercy and deliver them in spite of the fact that He knew that they would quickly rebel again.
11. 2:18 - God is filled with compassion for His people.
12. 2:19 - God's mercy is only paralleled by the propensity of His people to rebel against Him.
13. 2:20, 21, God works on behalf of His people to defend them.
14. 2:22 - God will test His people in order to show them their faithlessness.
15. 2:23 - God controls the affairs of nations.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

EHUD KILLED EGLON, THE MOABITE KING

JUDGES 3:1 - 31

1. There are eight paragraphs in the third chapter of Judges. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

3:1-6	
3:7-11	
3:12-14	
3:15-23	
3:24, 25	
3:26-30	
3:31	

2. In 3:1-6, the author identified the nations God left in the land of Canaan.
 - a. In 3:1-3, the author identified two reasons God left the nations in Canaan.
 - (1). What are these reasons?
 - (2). In view of the fact that this was Israel's judgment, what does this tell you about God?
 - (3). Study the names of the mountains in this verse. What did you discover?
 - b. In 3:4, the author gave another reason for the nations to be left in the land.
 - (1). What reason did he give?
 - (2). What does the author mean when he wrote "for testing Israel"?
 - (3). How can we explain what the author meant when he wrote, "to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord"?
 - c. In 3:5, 6, in view of what God had just done for Israel, what do these verses tell us about Israel? Study the list of the people among whom Israel lived and intermarried. What information did you discover?
3. In 3:7-11, the Mesopotamians conquered Israel.
 - a. There is a cause and effect relationship between 3:5,6, and 3:7.
 - (1). What is the cause?
 - (2). What is the effect?
 - (3). Study the three descriptions the author gave of Israel's rebellion. What did you discover?
 - b. In 3:8, the author gave God's reaction to Israel's sin.
 - (1). What did he say?

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- (2). What did the author mean when he said, “He (God) sold them into the hands of...”?
- c. In 3:9, you can see an interesting response on the part of Israel.
 - (1). What was that response?
 - (2). If this situation was God’s punishment, why did God send a judge to deliver them?
 - (3). Look at the identity of the judge. What did you learn?
- d. In 3:10, the author said, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel...”
 - (1). What does this mean?
 - (2). The author also indicated that “the Lord gave ...the king of Mesopotamia into his hands.” How can we explain what this means?
- e. In 3:11, the author identified the results of this victory.
 - (1). Reread 3:8 and then reread 3:11. What did you learn?
 - (2). Reread 3:11 again. What is the relationship of the first part of this sentence with the second part?
- 4. In 3:12-14, the author described Israel’s next attempt to do evil.
 - a. In 3:12, 13, the author described how God dealt with His people when they disobeyed.
 - (1). Why does the author repeatedly use the name "LORD"?
 - (2). Why did God strengthen Eglon against Israel?
 - (3). What reason does the author give for the actions of God?
 - (4). What does this tell you about the character of God?
 - b. Who is the "He" that "gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek"?
 - (1). Who was it who defeated Israel?
 - (2). How can you explain that God used pagan people to accomplish His will?
 - c. In 3:14, the punishment of God is described. What does it tell you?
- 5. In 3:15-23. Ehud killed Eglon.
 - a. In 3:15, there is a cause and effect relationship in the first sentence of this verse.
 - (1). What was the cause?
 - (2). What was the effect?
 - (3). What does this tell you about God?
 - (4). The author mentioned that Ehud was a Benjamite and that he was left handed. Why would this be important information?
 - b. In 3:16, the author described the preparation Ehud made for his task.
 - (1). What, if anything, does this have to do with the presentation of tribute money?
 - (2). What is the significance of the fact that the sword was fastened to his right thigh?
 - c. Recreate, in your mind the scene that is presented in 3:17, 18.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

- (1). What observations came to mind?
 - (2). What feelings did you sense?
- d. There is a surprise element in 3:19.
 - (1). The text says that Ehud, "turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal." What could this mean?
 - (2). When Ehud told Eglon that he had a secret message, the king said, "keep silence." What possible reasons would the king have had to say this?
- e. In 3:20, the author described the scene of the attack.
 - (1). What does this verse tell you about the area in which Eglon lived?
 - (2). When Ehud told Eglon he had a message from God for him, "he arose from his seat." Who is "he" that is referred to here?
 - (3). What does this verse tell us about Ehud's view of his task here in Gilgal?
 - (4). What does all this tell us about God?
- f. In 3:21, 22, the author described Ehud's attack on Eglon.
 - (1). Read verse 21 again. What reason can you suggest why Eglon was not suspicious when Ehud reached under his garment to get the sword?
 - (2). Verse 22 describes the gory details of the attack. It says that "the refuse came out." What does this tell you about Ehud's thrust with the sword?
- g. In 3:23, the author told us what Ehud did after killing the king.
 - (1). What is the significance of his closing the doors and locking them?
 - (2). The author mentioned the "roof chamber" again. What is the significance of this reminder?
6. In Judges 3:24, 25, the servants discovered the body of Eglon.
 - a. In these verses, the author described the servant's dilemma. What was it?
 - b. Put yourself into the place of the servants. How would you describe your feelings on this occasion?
 - c. Now, put yourself into the place of the author. Why would you feel compelled to tell this part of the story?
7. In 3:26-30, Ehud became the leader of Israel.
 - a. In 3:26, the author told us that Ehud "passed by the idols and escaped."
 - (1). To what idols does he refer?
 - (2). What does he mean when he wrote, "He (Ehud) passed by the idols"?
 - (3). What does this tell us about Ehud's escape plan?
 - (4). In this verse, the author also told us that "Ehud escaped to Seirah." What does this tell us?
 - b. In 3:27, the author described Ehud's reconciliation with his people.
 - (1). It tells us "he blew the trumpet in the hill country."
 - (a). What kind of instrument was this?
 - (b). What does this information mean?

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- (2). In this verse, what did the author mean when he told us, "The sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country and he was in front of them."
 - (a). What has the author told us?
 - (b). What does it mean?
 - (c). Why was this vital information for us to know?
 - (d). From which tribe did Ehud come?
 - (e). What does this add to our understanding?
- c. In 3:28, Ehud gave his men a command. Read it carefully.
 - (1). What reason did Ehud give his men for the command that he gave?
 - (2). What did he mean by this statement?
 - (2). What does this tell you about the man?
 - (3). In this verse, the author also told us that they "seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab and did not allow anyone to cross." What is the significance of this information?
 - (4). What does this tell you about the men of Ephraim?
- d. Read 3:29 very carefully.
 - (1). In 3:28, the author informed us that Ehud's men took the ford of the Jordan. In 3:29 he told us that the men of Ehud struck down about 10,000 robust Moabites. What do these two verses have to do with each other?
 - (2). What does it add to our information when the author told us that "no one escaped"?
- e. In 3:30, the author gave us some surprising information.
 - (1). It would be shocking for the author to say, "Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel." What would be so shocking about this?
 - (2). The author indicated that the "land was undisturbed for eighty years." How does this compare with the length of time that they had been troubled?
 - (3). What does this information tell us about God?
- f. In 3:31, the author shifts the focus to the next Judge.
 - (1). In an exhaustive concordance, look to see where else Shamgar is mentioned.
 - (a). What is said about him?
 - (b). What does the author tell us about Shamgar in that instance?
 - (2). The author told us that Shamgar "struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad."
 - (a). What is an "oxgoad"?
 - (b). Why was this information so important as to include it here?
 - (c). Just how unusual was this for the people of Israel?
 - (3). The author adds, almost as an afterthought, "and he also saved Israel."
 - (a). What did he mean by this statement?
 - (b). How does this information relate to the previous statement?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

8. Review this chapter. What have you discovered about God as you studied?

LESSON 3: JUDGES 3:1 - 31

EHUD KILLED EGLON, THE MOABITE KING

There are seven paragraphs in Judges chapter three. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

3:1-6	The Nations God Left in Canaan
3:7-11	Mesopotamia Conquered Israel: God Sent A Judge
3:12-14	Israel Served Moab 18 Years
3:15-23	God Sent Ehud: He Killed Moabite King
3:24, 25	Servants Later Discovered Eglon Dead
3:26-30	Ehud Lead Israel: He Subdued Moab
3:31	Shamgar Delivered Israel from Philistines

Judges 3:1-6 - The nations God Left in Canaan

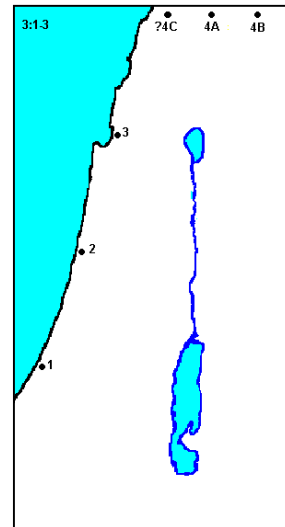
Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly. These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. Judge 3:1-3

These places are located on the map. They are as follows:

1. The Philistines
2. The Canaanites
3. Sidonians
4. Hivites
 - (a). Mt. Lebanon
 - (b). Mt. Baal-Hermon
 - (c). Lebo-hamath

These are the most powerful nations/tribes in all Canaan. Observe on the map, the Philistines, Canaanites and Sidonians are all located along the coast. This is an excellent place for growing food. At the same time, it was also an excellent place for carrying on a battle. There have been more battles fought in that area than in any other place in history.

The location of the three Hivite tribes, however, are all located in the mountains. These three areas are not good places to grow food and they are a difficult place to conduct a battle.



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You will also observe that one of the mountains was called “Baal-Hermon.” This identifies Mount Hermon. It is the highest mountain in that area and was known as a thing of power and beauty. The addition of the name “Baal” was a way of honoring their god - Baal. These people were pagan; they worshipped the idol Baal. It is not surprising that they named the mountain Baal-Hermon since Baal was known as the all powerful god, the god of war.

In verse two, the author gave the reason for leaving the nations in the land. It is usually thought that God left them there to punish Israel. In one sense that is true, but God’s statement, here is different, “Only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war...” Be very clear, this was a punishment for their disobedience, but it was also intended to be a benefit to God’s people Israel. God used this punishment to teach the people of Israel how to do battle. Remember these young people had never had to do battle before. This punishment was intended to be a definite benefit for the untested people of Israel. I am certain that if someone had asked them if this was for their benefit, they would have been shocked at the thought.

and they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. Judges 3:4

The author reminds us, again, that these nations were for testing Israel. A “test” is a way to ascertain the validity of a situation. It was a way to prove the strength of an individual or animal. Before beasts of burden were sold, they had to be proven.

The presence of these harsh pagan nations was a test for Israel to demonstrate just how strong their faith in God really was. The author described it this way, “To find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord.” This information was absolutely vital before a relationship of trust could be reestablished.

If God is omniscient, then why would they have to be tested? It was not to inform God, but to demonstrate, undeniably for Israel, where they were in their relationship to God.

Observe that God was checking on their obedience to the commandments, that had been given to their fathers. There as no way that they could claim that their burdens were more difficult than those given to their forebearers.

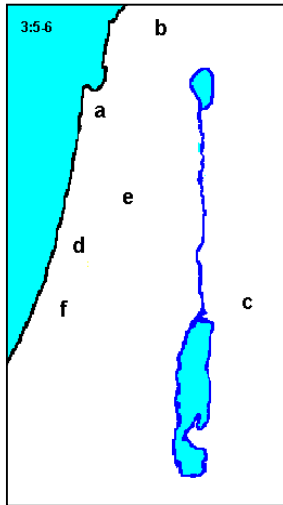
God is never satisfied with untested faith. God will test the faith of His people at every step of their spiritual growth. That is exactly what He was doing in this situation.

And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. Judges 3:5, 6

These verses identify the situation that Israel had created for itself. It was, therefore, a situation that God allowed them to encounter. It was also, however, the one which God had warned them not to allow. This is another instance where God gave the people what they wanted as their punishment.

The author listed the names of six groups of people in these to verses:

EHUD KILLED EGLON, THE MOABITE KING



- a. The Canaanites
- b. The Hittites
- c. The Amorites
- d. The Perizzites
- e. The Hivites
- f. The Jebusites

Observe that all six names were the names of tribes and not of locations. This is because they each represented a tribe that was not located just in one city, but covered an area. The Jebusites were not that large, but some of the others covered an area containing 10 to 20 cities with the surrounding villages. They were definitely forces to be reckoned with.

As you look at the map, you will notice that these tribes were not all situated in one confined area of Palestine. They were located in what would later be called Galilee as well as Judea. Again, they were not all located in the same kind of terrain. Some were in the mountains while others were located on the flat plains along the Mediterranean Sea.

The very thing that God warned them not to do is what they did. They intermarried with their neighbors. This is one reason that God told them to drive out the inhabitants. There were other problems involved in this command of God. This land was a gift to the people of Israel. It was to be exclusively theirs. If intermarriage took place, that would no longer be possible.

Another problem with the failure to drive the nations out was that there was the probability that they would become involved in the idolatrous worship of these pagan nations. This gives us some insight into the reason that God forbade them to allow the people of Israel to live among the pagan neighbors. God was not just trying to inhibit the people; it was not to make things more difficult or life less interesting. The command was given because it was in Israel's best interest.

Judges 3:7-11 - Mesopotamia Conquered Israel: God Sent a Judge

And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Judges 3:7

The natural result of Israel's disobedience to one command inevitably lead to disobedience in another. This is an accurate picture of the way evil works.

There is a cause and effect relationship here. Israel did not obey the command of God to drive the people out of the land. Soon, the people of Israel were intermarried with these people, and then they were involved in the worship of their pagan idols. Disobedience leads to greater disobedience.

There is another cause-effect relationship here. Israel did evil and the effect was that they forgot the Lord their God. When one forgets the Lord, one will turn to other gods. That is exactly what Israel did. The word "forgot" means to misplace and not be able to find. It is to be oblivious to something because you have not given any attention to it.

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“They served the Baals and the Ashteroth.” Baal was the fertility god and Ashteroth was his consort. Notice that the word “Baals” is plural. This is because the main god - Baal - looked different and had slightly different characteristics in each of these places but in all of them he was the god of fertility and Ashteroth was his consort. Whenever both Baal and Asheroth were mentioned together in worship, it involved fertility rites that usually meant a sexual orgy. I doubt if Israel would have thought that they would become so involved, but they did.

Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. Judges 3:8

Again, there is a cause-effect relationship between verses seven and eight. There is a wise saying which reads, “Sin in haste and repent at leisure.” Cushan-Rishathaim was a Hittite conqueror. He overran Canaan. He also overran Israel in the process. God allowed this pagan ruler to conquer Israel. This is, obviously, a part of the punishment of Israel. From this we gather that God sometimes uses pagan, evil forces to accomplish His will and bring His people back to Himself.

There is no doubt that they were under the control of this Hittite ruler for at least as long as they participated in the pagan worship. The text says that they were under his control for eight years.

Again, we have identified the punishment/ judgment. We must now ask, again, where is the mercy that should go with this judgment? In the text so far, we have not seen it, but it will appear. We must be on the watch to identify it.

And when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. Judges 3:9

In verse nine, there is another expression of God’s mercy. There is no indication that Israel repented before they cried to the Lord for deliverance. It seems quite likely that if they had, the author would have recorded it. Whether they repented or not, the Lord delivered them when they cried to Him for help. This is a beautiful picture of what God is like. He delivered the oppressed when they called upon Him, even when they were living in disobedience. In the New Testament this truth was expressed in these words, “He maketh the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.”

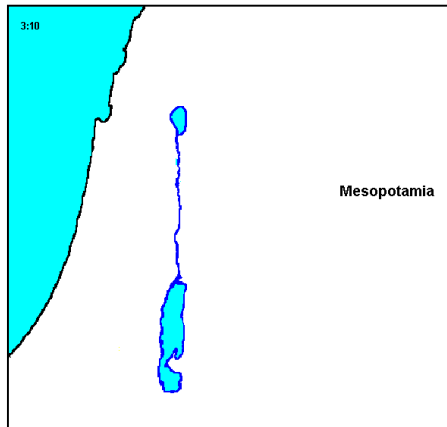
The help came in the form of a judge by the name of Othniel. He was the nephew of Caleb. This and other passages convince us that there is good reason to understand that people of strong faith, like Caleb, were found in families where faith was also strong.

If God is omniscient, and He is, then why was it necessary for the people of Israel to cry to the Lord for help when He already knew that they were in trouble? Because of our fallen nature, it is just like us to think that we have extricated ourselves from trouble when all along it was God who delivered us. When we must call upon God for help, it is clear that the deliverance was not our own doing.

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And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. Judges 3:10

Notice the way that God chose to help Israel in their time of trouble. Even in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was the enabler of God's people. It was not Israel's superior strength. It was the Spirit of God enabling Othniel to rule Israel. It was the Holy Spirit that delivered the king of Mesopotamia into his hand. God helped Israel even though they had forsaken Him repeatedly and He knew that they would do it again. That is the mercy of God.



Notice that it was the Mesopotamian army that Othniel defeated. The map will show that this army was a long way from home, at least 1000 miles from home. The question naturally arises, Why did they come to Canaan? Why did they come now? You will remember that Cushan-rishathaim had conquered all of Israel some time previously. In that time and place, when an army conquered another nation, an army sufficient to control the nation was left in charge of the nation. The care of this army became the responsibility of the conquered people. It is not that the king of Mesopotamia came all the

way around the fertile crescent and down into Israel to fight with Othniel. It was that the resident army of occupation knew that trouble was brewing and came to put a stop to the trouble before it got out of hand.

Keep in mind that every nation wanted to control Canaan. Though it was nothing like the Ukraine or the United States, it was the breadbasket of the whole area.

Again, there was turmoil in the area. During a time of upheaval it is an excellent time for an attempted coupe to take place. Everyone knew that Othniel was not only a successful general; he ruled Israel well. It was the Holy Spirit that enabled him to control this willful nation of Israel. Knowing this, the occupation forces had to step in and try to put down this rise of power.

We must also remember that the Mesopotamian occupation forces were many times larger than the forces of Israel that Othniel commanded. As we have seen before, this is the way God preferred it. When Israel's small army defeated a larger foe, it was very clear that it was the omnipotence of God that gave them the victory.

Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. Judges 3:11

There is an oft repeated theme in this verse. The verse also includes at least four pieces of information:

- 1 The land had not been at peace.
2. The land was now at peace for 40 years. This was most unusual. They had known nothing but war and distress for decades. Now, they had peace and it was a gift of God.

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3. Othneil was a part of this peaceful situation. They all knew, however, that it was the Spirit of God at work in the reign of Othneil that made the difference.
4. Othneil died after 40 years as the judge of Israel. It may not seem like such a long time, but it was a longer time of peace than Israel had ever known up to that time.

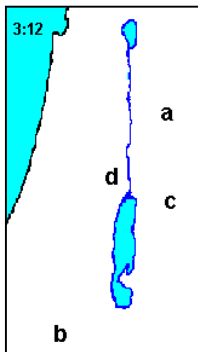
We must remember that longevity tends to suggest that the reign was at least calm, if not a very good one. Earlier, the author made it clear that this was the product of the Holy Spirit working in the rule of Othneil that brought peace to Israel.

Think about this for a moment. All the time Israel went their own way, they had nothing but trouble. Now the Holy Spirit came upon Othneil, and there was peace for 40 years. This was intended to show Israel that their own ways would only bring trouble. If they would trust in God, they could have peace.

Judges 3:12-14 - Israel Served Moab 18 Years

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.
Judges 3:12 13

The children of Israel could no longer claim ignorance. They knew how God dealt with His people. It was not their parents telling them what God had done; they had seen it with their own eyes. These people had sinned before and had been severely punished. Now they could only claim determination to do evil, despite their warnings. We know that people are prone to sin even though they know that they will be punished and it will not be in their best interest to do wrong.



Experience tells us that God will judge evil conduct. God can and will use evil persons to accomplish His will. In this instance, God used the army of the evil king of Moab, Eglon. He was an idolater and one who despised God and His people.

On the map, observe the location of the people who formed this alliance against Israel.

- a. Ammon – He was the son of Lot’s younger daughter. These people were against both God and His people Israel. Because they were distant separated relatives, they had ample reason to hate Israel and desire to see them humiliated. You may remember that these people refused Israel passage when they wanted to enter the land of Canaan. The Ammonites refused them passage through the land. There had been many aggressive incidents between the two over the years. God had placed a curse on them because of their treatment of Israel. Their hatred of Israel went all the way back to Abraham and it was never solved.
- b. Amalek - These are descendants of Esau. They had the same kinds of reasons as Ammon for wanting to see the people of Israel humiliated.
- c. Moab - They were cursed by God

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- d. Jericho was a crucial city to control. Now it was in the hands of unfriendly relatives of Israel. It served as a stronghold from which they could launch their offensive against the rest of Israel.

Eglon was not strong enough to war successfully against Israel. He therefore got the other two groups of distant relatives of Israel to join with him. We should take note that the author spoke very carefully. It was, indeed, the soldiers from Ammon, Amalek and Moab who defeated Israel, but it was God who caused and allowed it to happen.

And the sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. Judges 3:14

Eighteen years is a long time to be in bondage to a foreign country who were really offended distant relatives. The Moabites had been the ones who refused Israel passage on their way from Egypt to the promised land. There was already bad blood between the two groups even before this encounter. Add to this the fact that decades earlier their ancestors had been at odds with each other and had to separate in order to keep from annihilating each other. The Hebrew text states that Israel cried to the Lord for 18 years. This is not hard to understand. We complain about high taxes, but we have nothing to complain about in view of their experience. It was not unusual for a conquered people to pay 75 to 85% of their income in taxes to maintain the army of occupation of their conquerors.

Judges 3:15-23 - Ehud: Killed Eglon

But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. Judges 3:15

Observe that the author did not record that Israel had repented of their sins. They were tired of 18 years of slavery. They were tired of their distant relatives absolutely devastating them and their economy.

Observe that twice in this verse, the author referred to God as “the Lord.” This is the name for God that stresses the fact that He is eternal. This name is repeatedly used to speak of God in situations where justice is being carried out. God raised up a deliverer for Israel despite the fact that they called upon the Lord, but may not have repented.

It is interesting the way the author introduced Ehud to the readers. First, he mentioned the name of his father, Gera. The author also indicated that Ehud was a Benjamite. This is significant. Benjamin was not highly respected within his own family. His lineage held no more respect than their forebearer.

The author indicated that Ehud was left handed. This has no meaning in our culture, but that would not be true in that culture. It was considered inappropriate and unacceptable to be left handed. The left hand was used exclusively for personal hygiene. A person who did anything left-handed was looked upon with suspicion. All of this says that no one would expect anything from a man such as Ehud.

As indicated earlier, Eglon, king of Moab, took a heavy tribute from Israel all the time. Ehud was chosen to be the one who carried the tribute to the conqueror. This can be deceiving. It sounds as though this was a matter of carrying the tribute money to give to the king. It was far more than that. This was financially draining. It was spiritually humiliating. Add to this the fact that the Jewish people felt that they should not give tribute to

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anyone else because it was considered an affront to Jehovah. The conquerors took this time to build their ego by humiliating the tribute bearer. Though the text does not say so, we can be certain that there was more of this humiliation handed out to Ehud than would usually be experienced.

And Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak. Judges 3:16

We were not told whether this was Ehud's idea or if he was encouraged to attempt to do away with the king. Whatever the case, he prepared himself for the dangerous mission. The text indicates that Ehud made his own weapon. This is not surprising. Then as now, people attempting dangerous missions were accustomed to preparing their own gear.

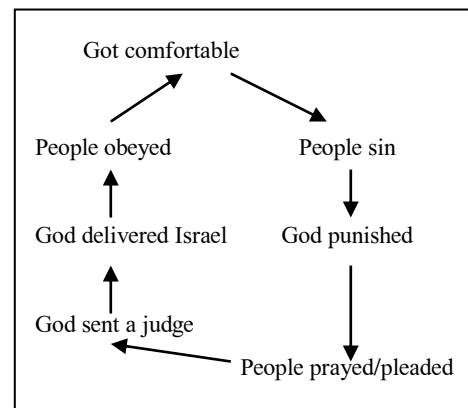
There is a bit of a change here which might go unnoticed. Ehud made a two edged sword. In most instances their weapons were single edged. Though the text does not explain the reason for this, it is reasonable to assume that he knew that he was attempting a nearly impossible task. He would want every possible benefit he could find. If he had needed the extra edge, it would have stood him in good stead. But as we will see, that was not necessary.

The author reported that the sword was a cubit long. A cubit is the distance from a man's fingertip to his elbow. This is approximately 18 inches. In view of the plan, this weapon was a bit long.

Notice that he fastened the sword to his right thigh. This is the very best place to locate it for a person who is left-handed. Notice also that he hid this under his cloak. The clothes that they wore made it very easy to hide a weapon. That is exactly what he did.

There is a scenario that should be noted here. It has happened before; it happened here and will be seen repeatedly throughout the rest of the book. This is a picture of just how great the mercy of God really is. God, knowing that Israel would falter just as soon as the pressure and pain ended, still sent them a judge to deliver them from the consequences of their own rebellion.

And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. And it came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. Judges 3:17, 18



There was no good reason for the king himself to receive the tribute money. Still he decided that he would do so. This suggests that he wanted to massage his ego a bit as he received the blood money.

“He,” in this sentence refers to Ehud. The presentation of the tribute was filled with ceremony. There were others who helped Ehud bring the tax money. When the ceremony was completed, Ehud sent the helpers away. Because there was so much ceremony, sending the carriers away could be easily understood.

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But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he said, "Keep silence." And all who attended him left him. Judges 3:19

It is difficult for us to remember that they thought that when a war was won, it was due to the intervention of their idol. The author spoke of the “idols which were at Gilgal.” As one approached a palace, in that day, one would encounter statues of the idols which were worshipped by the people of that realm. It was a way of celebrating their local god. It was also a way of forcing anyone who came to their palace to participate in a passive form of idol worship simply by passing in front of the image of the idol.

The king was just vain enough to play into the hands of Ehud’s plan. Ehud deceived Eglon saying that he had a secret message for him. This would not be unusual for notables in that era to convey a message through the one who carried the tribute. It was also common for a tribute bearer to attempt to endear himself to the king. It was a way to prolong life. Such a person acted in the capacity of an ambassador.

And Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat. Judges 3:20

The fact that Eglon was sitting in the cool roof chamber indicates that this conversation took place in the late afternoon. This part of the world was very hot, especially in what we call summer. The midday sun made everything very hot. In the New Testament this roof chamber was called an “upper room.” The family would go to the flat roof to get cool. The rest of the house was too warm for comfort. On this flat roof there was usually a breeze in the late afternoon. This made the hot day much more bearable. In this place on the roof, the king would receive guests and dignitaries.

Ehud told Eglon, “I have a message from God for you.” This message was certainly deceptive. On the other hand, it also gives us some understanding of how Ehud felt about his most dangerous mission.

The author also tells us that “he arose from his seat.” The author does not identify who “he” is. We assume that it refers to Ehud rather than to Eglon. The king would not be suspicious if a guest rose to his feet before speaking to the king. This was simply good court etiquette. One never sat in the presence of the king unless invited to do so by the king.

And Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. Judges 3:21

One wonders why Eglon was not suspicious when “Ehud stretched out his left hand to take the sword...” In most instances, a king or dignitary would be suspicious when a person took a message from his garment with his left hand. The left hand was used only for purposes of personal hygiene. It would be considered in very poor taste to touch such a document with the left hand. The text does not say whether or not Eglon was a bit suspicious. It is possible that he was aware of the fact that Ehud was left handed.

It would be common for a person to hide a special document under their flowing robes. A messenger would be charged with his life to deliver such a document. This part of the experience, at least, would not have seemed suspicious to Eglon at all.

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Ehud took the sword he had made and thrust it into the belly of Eglon. This was only possible because the king trusted him to the point that the personal guards of the king were sent away so that this secret message could be conveyed.

The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out. Judges 3:22

There are many symbols of wealth in every era. In our culture, certain kinds of expensive clothes and fine cars are symbols of wealth. The large house strategically located is also a symbol of wealth. The wearing of large jewels is such a symbol.

In that culture, the wearing of finery was certainly a symbol of wealth. If a person was very wealthy or held very high position, they were able to eat all they wanted of everything they wanted. Because of this, the wealthy and people of great power were inevitably extremely fat. In some cases, they were so fat that they could no longer walk without assistance. This gives us an idea of just how fat Eglon really was.

When Ehud thrust the sword through the belly of Eglon, the blade went through the fat with little resistance. This tells us something about the intense force with which he attacked Eglon. It went in so easily that the entire blade entered his body and the handle also. There was so much fat that the fat closed around the handle so that it could not be seen.

The text says, “the refuse came out.” This is a way of saying that the blade made a very large incision and the intestines and body organs fell out in the process. This is a condition from which a person was not going to survive.

Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them. Judges 3:23

The layout of this room on top of a house helps us understand what the author said. We tend to think of any room on the second floor emptying into the first floor. In that culture, a person could exit the second floor down an outside stairway to leave the house. This helps to explain how Ehud could leave the presence of the king and no one would know the difference.

There were times when even the king wished to be left alone. Thus, Ehud could lock the doors to the upper cool room and no one would give it a second thought. We must remember that Ehud needed a substantial amount of time to leave the palace and be on his way. The palace was large and it would take time just to exit the building, much less to flee to safety. Locking the doors gave Ehud the time he needed to escape.

Judges 3:24, 25 - Servants Later Discovered Eglon Dead

When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, "He is only relieving himself in the cool room." And they waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber. Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead. Judges 3:24, 25

We must remember that the servants of king Eglon did not know that their master had been killed. The doors were locked. They could only assume that the king wanted privacy. The author indicated that they assumed that the king locked the doors so that he could use

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the toilet facilities that they had there. Because of this, the servants did not force their way into the chamber to discover the dead king. This allowed Ehud much more time to escape.

The servants of Eglon were in a very awkward position. If they intruded upon the privacy of the king, they would probably be killed. If, on the other hand, they failed to give prompt attention to the desires of the king, they would be properly beaten and may even be killed for that. It is quite understandable that the author would say, "They waited until they became anxious." That was probably a serious understatement.

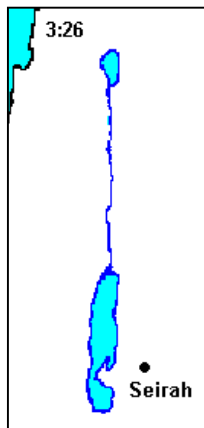
When the servants could stand the tension no longer, they took their lives into their own hands and found the key and forced the door open to see what was the matter. Put yourself in the place of these servants for a moment. You did not realize it, but you stood by while the king was being killed. The fright that they experienced must have been beyond any possible control. They would be certain that they would pay for this with their lives. Could they expect anyone to believe that they had not killed the king? How could they explain why they were not in attendance upon the needs of the king? How could anyone possibly have killed the king without them being aware of it?

Observe that the text speaks of the roof chamber as the "cool room." This was true all over the Near East. In the New Testament, this place was called "the upper room." It is the same word that is translated "inn" when Luke told us, "There was no room for them in the inn." It is the same kind of place where Jesus instructed the disciples to prepare for the Passover feast.

Judges 3:26-30 - Ehud Lead Israel: He subdued Moab

Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. Judges 3:26

The author told what Ehud was doing while the servants were trying to decide what to do about the locked door to the upper room of the king. The delay of the servants gave Ehud time to escape from the palace and even to get out of town.



We do not know, for certain, where Seirah is. Certainly, it is in Moab. It is in the area which Israel had to go around in order to get into Canaan. Our best suggestion concerning the location of Seirah is indicated on this map.

Notice that the text says, "He passed by the idols..." This was not an accidental or casual remark. At every pagan capital, the national idols lined the main entrance to the palace. This accomplished at least three purposes:

- a. It was a way of saying to visitors, this land is guarded and protected by our gods.
- b. It was also a way of offering their deity a place of honor and respect. From this vantage point, the people of the land could show their respect as they came and went from the palace.
- c. One could not enter the palace without recognizing these pagan idols. It was a way of forcing people who did not worship their particular idol to give deference and respect to the god whom they thought protected them.

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Ehud had to leave the way he came in - in respectable procession. No one was any the wiser for the fact that he had killed their king. He killed Eglon and then processed right past the idols who were supposed to protect the king. It was a tongue-in-cheek way of humiliating the Moabite deities. Ehud, as soon as he was safely outside the city, fled to the mountains which surrounded the capital city. In the mountains, one was virtually safe from detection.

And it came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was in front of them. Judges 3:27

When Ehud had returned to his people, he blew the trumpet. This was not a musical instrument such as we would think of today. It was the huge horn from their sheep or goats. In that day, when a person heard the blast of such a trumpet it was like an air raid siren today. They would immediately congregate to see what danger they were to be warned about.

Ehud rallied the men of Israel in the hill country of Ephraim. We must be reminded that this was not his native tribe. Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin. If you look at the map, you will note that this is in close proximity to the route of Moab. It was the closest place inside the land of promise. He was in a safe place. It would not be wise for an army to attempt to capture them in the mountains.

Observe also, that Ehud was in front of the gathered men. This tells us something about his bravery. He was a lot like General Patton. He was willing to take the risks he asked his troops to take.

And he said to them, "Pursue them, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. Judges 3:28

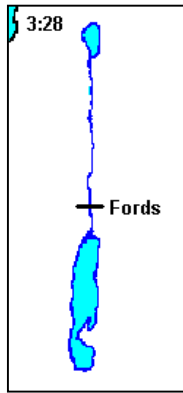
Up to this point, one could easily have mistaken Ehud for a strong nationalist, a man who was brave to defend the nation of which he was so proud. He was brave and had great confidence, but there was more. Ehud was a leader. The men instinctively gave him permission to be their leader. He could command. He could handle the pressures of responsibility for the lives of his men and still order them into combat knowing that some would not survive.

This verse, however, gives us a totally different picture of what this man was like. This is a statement of faith and confidence. Ehud's command to pursue the Moabites was based upon his understanding of God. He said, "Pursue them, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands." Observe, Ehud told the men to go into action. At the same time he told them, "the Lord has given (past tense) your enemies the Moabites into your hands." This may sound like a contradiction, but it is not. This is a way to say two things:

- a. God is in control of the affairs of people.
- b. God's control does not absolve the people of their participation in the playing out of the details of life.

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The actions of Ehud were as strong as his faith. He was not content to wait for God to do something while they just sat by. He knew that God would act. He also knew that God depended upon his actions before anything would happen.



In response to Ehud's call to arms, the men of Israel went to battle against the Moabites. Notice how the author states the issue, "So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross." This was a very strategic move. Look at the map. There is only one place along the banks of the Jordan where armies felt safe to cross. This place was, in ancient times as it is today, the best possible place to cross this famed body of water. It was a bit like controlling a mountain pass. The Alenby bridge now covers this important location. The group who controlled this strategic place, experienced a definite advantage.

And they struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped. Judges 3:29

Though the text is silent, it is to be assumed that Israel was greatly outnumbered. Nevertheless, God enabled them to kill 10,000 men. It is as though the author was not satisfied that he had given this fact sufficient visibility and tried again. He mentioned that the slain men were "all robust and valiant men." Not only did Israel kill ten thousand men, but these were some of the strongest men in the area. To add one more bit of emphasis, the author also added, "and no one escaped." It is difficult for an army to be totally wiped out. It is usually possible for some of the soldiers to escape and hide in the hills. That did not happen in this instance. The Moabites, pagans all, were totally destroyed by the small band of Jews who worshipped God.

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years. Judges 3:30

Up until this time, Moab was a more powerful military force than Israel ever thought of being. Still, God sent Ehud to deliver Israel from these Moabites. God did not drive the Moabites out of the land. He enabled Israel to drive out their enemies. This is a serious glimpse of the divine process. God is in control, but that control is worked out through the lives and efforts of His people.

The author concluded the verse by saying that "the land was undisturbed for eighty years." This is very important. If you read the prior context carefully, you will notice that Israel's time of enslavement was only 18 years. Now God gave them undisturbed peace for eighty years. God was not looking for some way to make life much more painful for Israel than it had ever been. God, rather, found a way to give them more peace than the struggle of their punishment had brought upon them. Add to this the fact that for centuries, the people of Israel had virtually no peace at all. Despite their rebellion, God gave them more peace than pain.

Judges 3:31 - Shamgar Delivered Israel from Philistines

And after him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel. Judges 3:31

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We have just seen a very detailed picture of the ministry of the Judge named Ehud. Now, the author turned his attention to Shamgar. Notice, however, that almost nothing is mentioned about his ministry. It tells us only that he saved Israel and that he had killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. This testifies to the selective nature of the text in this book. The author was not trying to give us a full-blown picture of the history of the times. He rather used the historical information to give us a picture of God that he wanted to convey.

It is interesting that Shamgar is only mentioned here and in the song of Deborah in 5:6. In that instance it tells us that the "highways were deserted and travelers went by roundabout ways." Conditions were so bad that people were afraid to travel through this section of the Promised Land. Travelers would go out of their way to avoid this unfortunate portion of the land. Shamgar probably came from the tribe of Naphtali, but we cannot be certain of this information. We assume that it was Shamgar and not his father Anath who struck down the 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. This weapon was a common tool. It was a wooden shaft about an inch and a half thick. and about four feet long. It was sharpened on one end.

This instrument was used to get the oxen to move or to move faster when pulling a plow or a load. This was not an unusual scenario for the men of Israel. Their army had used garden tools and kitchen utensils as weapons on many occasions.

We should also note that there are a number of things that the text does not say:

- a. It does not say that Israel returned to their sin after Ehud died.
- b. It does not say that Israel cried to the Lord as in other situations.
- c. It does not say that Israel repented of their wrongdoing.

We assume that that all of these are true, but we cannot be certain. It appears that the author was being very selective with the kind of information he was trying to convey.

The important thing about this verse is the final statement, "He also saved Israel." God sent an unknown man armed with faith and courage and little else. As usual, this was all that was needed for God to deliver His people.

As you rethink this chapter, the idea keeps surfacing, God takes the unexpected and uses them to accomplish marvelous works. Notice that God gave them much more peace than He had given them trouble. That is the kind of God the author has described here.

Conclusion

Because this book has so much to say about God, we must take time to highlight the things it tells us about our Him

1. 3:1-3 - God will use even pagan people to test His people; to prepare them for the difficulties that lie ahead.
2. 3:4 – God will place His people in situations where they will demonstrate their commitment to obedience to His commands.
3. 3:8 – God is holy. He cannot countenance evil in the lives of His people.

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4. 3:8, 12 – When the people of god disobey, He will punish, not to destroy, but to bring them back to Himself.
5. 3:9, 15 – When God's people cry to Him for help, He delivers them, even though they have previously rejected Him.
6. 3:10, 28 – God controls the leaders of nations. He gave the king of Mesopotamia into the hands of Othneil.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4

DEBORAH JUDGED ISRAEL

JUDGES 4:1 - 24

1. There are six paragraphs in the fourth chapter of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

4:1-3	
4:4-10	
4:11	
4:12-16	
4:17-22	
4:23, 24	

2. In Judges 4:1-3, we observe the death of Ehud and the rise of Jabin, king of the Canaanites.
 - a. In 4:1, the author tells an all-too-familiar story.
 - (1). What is the story?
 - (2). How do you account for this fact?
 - (3). What does this tell us about sin?
 - (4). What does this tell us about God?
 - b. Read 4:2 very carefully.
 - (1). What is the relationship between 4:1 and 4:2?
 - (2). Who is performing the action in this verse?
 - (3). What does this say about God?
 - c. In 4:3, the author described Israel's response to God's action.
 - (1). What does this tell you about Israel?
 - (2). Why was it important for the author to tell us that Jabin had 900 iron chariots in his army?
 - (3). What did the author add to our understanding by stating that Jabin oppressed Israel severely for 20 years?
3. In Judges 4:4-10, Deborah became the Judge in Israel.
 - a. In 4:4, the author stated that Deborah, a married woman, was Judge in Israel.
 - (1). What kind of problems would this create for her?
 - (2). What kind of problems would this create for Israel?
 - b. In 4:5, the author spoke of "the palm tree of Deborah."
 - (1). Why would this be unusual?

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- (2). What does this tell us?
- c. In 4:6, 7, Deborah took active control over all Israel.
 - (1). What did she do?
 - (2). How did she demonstrate her authority?
 - (3). Along with her instruction, Deborah's prophecy added some vital information.
 - (a). What is that information?
 - (b). What does it tell us?
 - (4). Look at the size of the army God commanded through Deborah. What complications could this create?
- d. In 4:8, Barak answered Deborah's command.
 - (1). What did he say? Why?
 - (2). What does this say about him?
- e. In 4:9, Deborah answered Barak's response.
 - (1). What was her answer?
 - (2). How would you describe her words which prophesied that God would sell Sisera into the hands of a woman?
 - (3). If you were Barak, how would you feel when she said this?
- f. In 4:10, the author described Barak's carrying out of his commission.
 - (1). What is there in this that seems strange?
 - (2). If you were Deborah in this verse, how would you feel?
- 4. In 4:11, a problem seems to have developed.
 - a. What is the problem?
 - b. How did they solve the problem?
- 5. In 4:12-16, the author reported the battle between Barak and Sisera.
 - a. In 4:12, 13, Sisera responded to the news that Barak moved his army from Kedesh to Mt. Tabor.
 - (1). How did Sisera respond?
 - (2). From the way these verses are written, what appears to be Sisera's attitude to this move by Barak?
 - b. In 4:14, Deborah spoke to Barak.
 - (1). What is her role as she accompanied Barak to the place of battle?
 - (2). What was the basis of Deborah's message to Barak?
 - (3). What does this tell us about God?
 - (4). Look at Barak's response. What does this tell us about him?
 - c. In 4:15, the author gives a specific description of the outcome of the battle.
 - (1). What did he say?
 - (2). How do you explain the fact that the author said that "the Lord routed Sisera, with the edge of the sword"?

God Responded to Israel's Rebellion

- d. Read 4:16 again.
 - (1). Notice the way the author reported the killing of the entire army. Why would the author do this?
 - (2). Why would Barak pursue the army rather than Sisera himself?
- 5. In 4:17-22, the author described the death of Sisera.
 - a. In 4:17, the author described the flight of Sisera.
 - (1). On a map look to see how far it is from Mt. Tabor to the Tent of Heber, which is located near Kedesh.
 - (a). Approximately how far is it?
 - (b). What additional information does this give us?
 - (2). What problem can you foresee when Sisera fled to the tent of Jael?
 - b. In 4:18, Jael invited Sisera into her tent.
 - (1). If you were Sisera, how would you understand this invitation by Jael?
 - (2). There is a problem in this verse.
 - (a). What is the problem?
 - (b). How would you explain the problem?
 - c. In 4:19, there is a picture of near eastern hospitality.
 - (1). Sisera asked for water, but Jael gave him milk. Why would she do this?
 - (2). If you were Sisera, how would you interpret Jael's actions in this verse?
 - d. In 4:20, Sisera made a request of Jael.
 - (1). What is the request?
 - (2). If you were Jael, how would you respond to such a request?
 - (3). What moral implications are involved in his request?
 - e. In 4:21, the author reported the death of Sisera.
 - (1). How do you feel when you read this?
 - (2). Put yourself in Jael's position. What would it take for you to do this?
 - (3). What does this tell us about Jael?
 - f. In 4:22, the author described Barak's approach to Jael's tent.
 - (1). Read the verse carefully. What does it tell us about Jael?
 - (2). Put yourself in Barak's position. What would run through your mind as you viewed the body of Sisera?
- 6. In 4:23, 24, the author summarized the defeat of Jabin.
 - a. In 4:23, the author said that God subdued Jabin.
 - (1). In chapter four, Barak killed the army and Jael killed Sisera. How do you explain this seeming contradiction?
 - (2). What does this tell us about God.
 - b. In 4:24, the author emphasized again how thoroughly Israel defeated Jabin.
 - (1). What does verse 24 add to verse 23?

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- (2).How does this verse fit with God's command to Israel as they entered the land of Canaan?
7. Reflect upon this chapter again. What does it tell us about the nature of God?

LESSON 4: JUDGES 4:1 - 24

DEBORAH JUDGED ISRAEL

There are six paragraphs in Judges chapter four. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

4:1-3	Ehud Died: Israel Sinned: Jabin Conquered Israel
4:4-10	Deborah Judged Israel; Barak a Reluctant General
4:11	Heber Separated Himself From the Kenites
4:12-16	Barak Defeated Sisera
4:17-22	Sisera Killed by Jael
4:23, 24	Summary of Defeat by Jabin

Judges 4:1-3 - Ehud died: Israel Sinned: Jabin Conquered Israel

*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.
Judges 4:1*

The theme is all too familiar. God did something absolutely astounding for Israel. They might be true and faithful for a while but sooner than later, they would return to their rebellious ways. That is exactly what Israel did. One must wonder, if Ehud was such a good leader, why did Israel revert to their sinful ways just as soon as he died? The honest answer is that we do not know. We do know that his leadership was not the only one that fell prey to this kind of response. We will see this scene repeated time and again throughout the book of Judges.

Notice how the author said it, "the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord." This was not just a way to say they sinned. It was a way of saying just how that happened. All of life takes place in the presence of the Lord. This is what David meant, in Psalm 51 when he said,

*Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that
Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge.
Psalm 51:4*

There is no doubt that David sinned against Bathsheba, her husband and against his own wife. Yet, he said he had sinned only against God. Every act in life takes place in the presence of God. Every sin is a direct rebellion against our God. This is what the author of Judges was saying about Israel. They were involved in any number of sins which offended innumerable people, but their sin was in the sight of God.

*And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in
Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-
hagoyim. Judges 4:2*

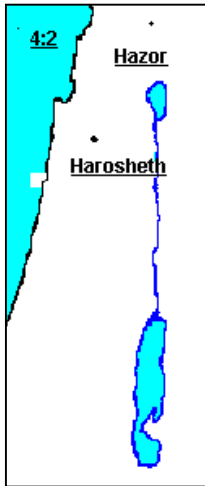
There is a cause and effect relationship between 4:1 and 4:2.

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- a. Cause - Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.
- b. Effect - The Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin.

The Lord (Jehovah) responded to their sin by selling them into the hands of a Gentile ruler. This was one of the worst things a Jew could imagine. Nevertheless, that is what God did. This creates a problem for people who believe that God is capable of only loving responses. By this, they mean nice, pleasant responses. If God did this in the Old Testament and God does not change, then we must be prepared to accept the fact that He will still respond to our sin in the same fashion.

Notice, the author said, "The Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin..." The word "sold" was used to describe the selling of a daughter in marriage. It is to make a deal; to make an agreement in the legal sense. It is a way of saying God made a deal with the pagan. The text does not say that God allowed Jabin to conquer the Israelites. It clearly says that God sold Israel; God initiated the action.



Observe that the author reported that Jabin lived in Hazor. This was a Canaanite stronghold and the strongest fortification in northern Israel. It was located on top of a high hill, but was surrounded by a large plain. You can see the location of the city on this map.

The text also says that Sisera lived in "Harosheth-hagoyim." The fact that the general lived at some distance from the king indicates that they were not too fearful of being attacked or overthrown. Had this been the case, the general and his massive army would have been headquartered near the palace. The location of this city is also shown on the map. As you may know, the word "hagoyim" means "the gentiles." In English we would say, "Harosheth of the Gentiles." It was a way of saying that the chosen people of God were clearly to be in the total control of pagan gentiles. As you can see, both these cities are located in the far north of Israel. Nevertheless, they were in control of all Israel.

This would be almost impossible for them to accomplish unless they had a huge, powerful army or the Israelites were of no will to shed this pagan control.

And the sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. Judges 4:3

In characteristic fashion, as we pointed out in the previous chapter, Israel quickly cried to the Lord whenever their sin led them into pain and problem. This says something about the patience and mercy of God. Israel had cried out for help before. When their pain subsided, they returned to their rebellious ways. Still God came to their rescue.

Sisera had at his disposal the equivalent of the atomic bomb of that era - nine hundred iron chariots. As mentioned earlier, the part of northern Israel where Sisera and Jabin lived was, for the most part, a flat plain. On such terrain, a chariot was unstoppable by foot soldiers.

Notice, also, that Israel had been under the abuse of Sisera for twenty years. That is a long time to suffer. The author emphasized this condition by saying that "he oppressed the sons of Israel **severely** for twenty years." The author was trying to say that this was far worse than the worst possible enslavement.

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Judges 4:4-10 - Deborah Judged Israel; Barak a Reluctant General

We are back in the cycle again. Israel sinned and God punished. We have previously suggested that God's punishment was an expression of mercy. We must again attempt to describe how that is true in this situation. Up to this point, each expression of mercy through judgment involved God's attempt to draw Israel back to Himself through the difficult situation. We will find that true in this instance as well.

*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.
Judges 4:4*

This statement is shocking for a couple of reasons:

- a. Deborah, a woman, was a prophetess. This was usually not the case. God most often chose men for this position.
- b. Deborah, a woman and a prophetess, was also the Judge. She ruled Israel. Again, this was not usually the way God acted.

The text does not explain why God chose a woman to be a judge. It only states that she was and reports what happened under her leadership.

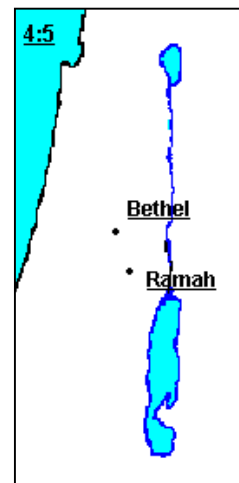
Observe that the text also reports that Deborah was the wife of Lappidoth. This is an awkward situation. In that culture, a woman would do what her husband said without question. One wonders how she could be the ruler of Israel when she would be required to do her husband's will without question. How could she command the respect and obedience of the men of the land when she was required to do everything her husband told her to do?

Observe also that the text says that, "Deborah,...was judging Israel *at that time*." We must ask ourselves what does the author mean by the words "at that time." It sounds as though she was the judge when God delivered Israel into the hands of Jabin. On the other hand it could be that she became judge after that captivity. The text is not clear. On the basis of the flow of the text, it would seem that she became judge while Israel was returning to their sin and was already the judge when Jabin conquered Israel.

And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. Judges 4:5

The text says that she sat "under the palm tree of Deborah." It was a little bit unusual to see palm trees in this area, though there are some even today. Palm trees are usually seen in the lowlands or by a river. This area, however, is part of the hill country of Ephraim. On the map, you can see that this was between Ramah and Bethel. Deborah was quite centrally located in Israel. This was not always true of the judges.

Notice that the tree was called "the palm tree of Deborah." This, too, was unusual. Women did not hold property. It would be more likely for the tree to be called the palm tree of Lappidoth, her husband. Still it was known as her tree. This suggests that this scenario was well known throughout Israel. This probably suggests that people from all over the land had come there frequently to receive her judgment on their problems.

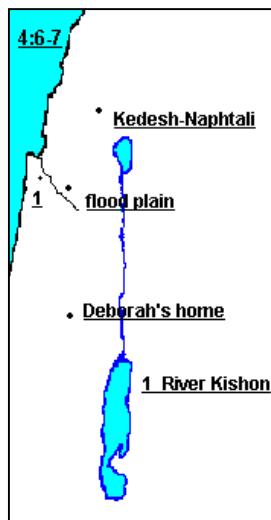


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We should remember that the system of judges was the closest to God's intent for the rulership of Israel since the patriarchs. Deborah was not only the ruler of the land, she was also the one who settled disputes between Jews who were having a disagreement. Because she was a woman, it is amazing that the men of Israel would go to her to have a problem settled.

This had to be an awkward system. Very small issues could cause major disagreements among the Jews. Still, these men would have to travel all the way to Ephraim in order to have Deborah pass judgment upon their problem and then do as she commanded.

Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. And I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon; and I will give him into your hand.' " Judges 4:6, 7



These verses contain some information which is very important for our understanding. They tell us that she was not just the ruler of the land. God told Deborah what to do as He had told Abraham of old. In her role as judge, Deborah also fulfilled the function of priest. She stood between the people and God and presented the word of the Lord to Israel.

Deborah received the message from the Lord and immediately sent to Barak to carry out the will of God. As you can see on the map, it was quite some distance from Deborah's home to Kedesh-naphtali. In order to get to that place, the messenger would have to go through an area that was largely populated by Canaanites who were under the rule of Jabin the king who had conquered the land. Just the trip to get to Barak would be extremely dangerous.

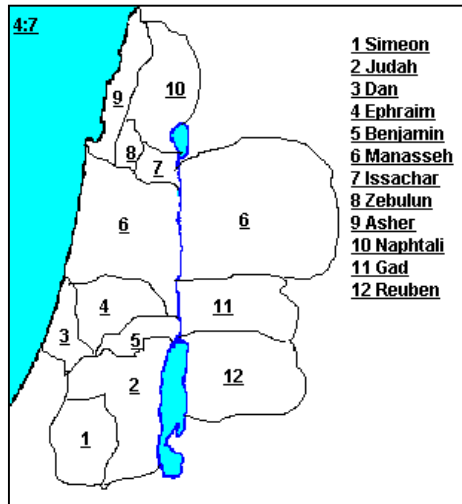
It appears that she did not send a message to Barak, but rather called him to come to the area where she lived. The text says, "She sent and **summoned Barak...**" There is good reason to believe that Barak came to Ephraim in order to receive the message Deborah had received for him. This was a trip of about 50 miles and had to be made without drawing the attention of the Canaanites - a difficult and dangerous task to say the least.

The message Deborah shared with Barak gives us some understanding of the relationship she maintained with God. She said, "Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded..." If God was her Lord, then she was His servant. If God commanded, then she must act, and she did.

The message Deborah shared with Barak was a frightening one - "Go and march to Mount Tabor and take with you 10,000 men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun." If you look at the map of the tribes, you will see that Naphtali and Zebulun are in the very area where Jabin lived. God has commanded that Barak enlist 10,000 men in the area where the enemy king lived in order to fight with him. The possibility of this

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happening without the knowledge of Jabin was extremely small. He would have to find out.



Barak would only have to march about 30 miles to engage the troops of Jabin, but there were more than 10,000 men making the trip. This would hardly be a surprise to Jabin.

There was another major consideration for Barak. Both Naphtali and Zebulun were small tribes. If he were to take 10,000 men from these two tribes, there would be almost no room for anyone to refuse to serve. It would take nearly every able-bodied man in the tribes to make up this force. As we have said before, Jabin, with his chariots, was a major threat with which to contend. The men of these tribes would not be eager to fight against him. Calming the fears of the men of Naphtali and Zebulun and trying to gather the 10,000 men without the notice of Jabin were two major problems that Barak would find it hard to solve.

There is no reason to believe that Deborah reasoned this situation out for herself. God commanded it and she merely passed on the command she had received.

Notice that God had indicated to Deborah the manner in which the battle would be carried out. God said,

"I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon." Judges 4:7

This would be enough to scare any general. God was telling Barak that God would draw Sisera, his chariots and his army to Barak and his 10,000 men. That was probably the last news that Barak would want to hear. There is some information in these words. First, God was telling Barak that He was going to bring the fiercest, most dangerous part of Jabin's forces to fight with Barak. Knowing in advance can be half the battle.

Second, God said, "...his many troops." The hint here is that there would be far more Canaanites in this battle than there would be men from Naphtali and Zebulun.

Third, God said that He would draw this vast, powerful army out to the river Kishon. The area in question was a broad plain which would make an excellent place in which to do battle. It would be most advantageous for an army that had chariots, 900 to be exact. The thing that does not come to mind is that God was giving them a hint in advance. This area was broad and flat because it was a flood plain. When it rained in the area, the water from the mountains rushed across this area and flooded it quickly. This would be a great danger for the forces of Sisera, and an advantage for Barak. In bad weather, a chariot was totally useless. It offered absolutely no advantage at all.

Then Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." Judges 4:8

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Barak's answer has created for him a reputation of infamy. This reputation is highlighted, in part, because the one who called him was a woman and she was more prepared to face these dangers than he appeared to be. What can one say to these charges:

- a. His fears were quite realistic. The Canaanites were fierce fighters. They also possessed 900 iron chariots which were nearly invincible in battle.
- b. God had spoken directly to Deborah. There is a measure of confidence created by this fact. God had not spoken directly to Barak and this opens even the message of God to some question. When thinking of 900 chariots, one might want to be very certain about the message God sent. One might ask, "are you sure that you got the message straight?"

One must add, however, that Barak being fully aware of the military considerations was not fully prepared to place his trust in what God could do for them. We must keep the issue straight. It is not, as some have said, that the man was afraid and the woman was not. It was a matter of faith and not of fear. It is interesting that we have rather strong sympathy for the man who said to Jesus, "*I believe, help my unbelief.*" Mark 9:24. On the other hand, Barak dealt with the same problem and we regard it in very negative terms.

Again, Barak's infamous reputation has some inaccurate points to it. People look at this scene and think that Barak needed to have a woman hold his hand in order to go into battle. That was not the case. Throughout the history of Israel, there was a measure of respect for people to whom God spoke directly. That is as it should be. It is very possible that Barak wanted Deborah with him for that reason. In response to this, however, one must add that his trust in God was not substantial enough to accept the word of God without anything to support it at all. The verse which follows certainly indicates that God was not pleased with Barak's response.

And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh. Judges 4:9

The verse does not say that God spoke directly to Deborah concerning the statement that Barak made. The implication is certainly present that God did, in fact, speak to her. The message was not a hopeful one. Therefore, Deborah promised that she would go with them into battle.

The second part of the message she gave Barak was disheartening to say the least. There was a certain honor that went with a general being victorious over his enemy. That was to be denied Barak. As if that was not enough, insult was added to injury when Deborah told him that this honor would be given to a woman. Barak probably had never heard of a woman being honored in battle. Warfare and its accompanying honor or dishonor was reserved for men. Nevertheless, the message from God was that this honor would be given to a woman.

Notice the way the author reported this announcement. "for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." This "selling" was an action God would take. It is the same word that describes what a father does when it is time for his daughter to be given in mar-

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riage. God will choose to give this honor to a woman. In so doing, God would be choosing not to allow this honor to be given to Barak.

There is a surprise at the end of the verse. With this shocking, disappointing news, Deborah went with Barak to prepare for the attack. There was no statement by Barak to say that if that would be the case, he would not lead the army into battle. It is as though the disappointing announcement was not made.

And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him. Judges 4:10

Again, the tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali were not large. Both of these lands were rugged, mountainous areas. Despite the prophetic announcement by Deborah, Barak went back to Naphtali and set about gathering the 10,000 troops from Naphtali and Zebulun as though nothing had happened. When the troops were gathered, Barak, with Deborah, set out to engage in battle with the forces of Sisera. One must understand the reason God dealt with Barak the way He did, but it is also necessary to observe that a lesser man would have abandoned this risky engagement altogether.

Notice that as Barak accumulated the soldiers for this campaign, he took them to Kedesh. This is in the opposite direction from the place where the battle was to take place. Normally this would suggest the need for security. A general who was confident of his position would not need to retreat to safe territory before the battle had been engaged. That, however, is exactly what Barak did.

Judges 4:11 - Heber Separated Himself From the Kenites

Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. Judges 4:11

Observe that Heber left his tribe and went to "the oak of Zaanannim." It appears that they called this place "the oak of Zaanannim" because there was no other oak tree in that area. This sounds like a superfluous piece of information at this point in the report. The text provides no information at all concerning the reason for the apparent fracture in the relationships within the Kenite clan. We know that the Kenites were asked to serve as guides through the desert on the trip from Egypt. However, when they reached the land of Canaan, they tended to stay by themselves in the northern reaches of Israel. For whatever reason, Heber solved the disruption in relationships in good desert fashion. He moved away from the rest of his clan and established his territory in the area near Kedesh. Nothing of this nature would take place unless there was a broken relationship within the clan. You will remember that when Abraham and Lot were having difficulty, Abraham invited Lot to choose the direction to which he wanted to move. He did not ask whether or not he wanted to move. Again, when Abraham's other sons began to cause trouble, he gave them presents and sent them off to the east.

As long as Heber was with the rest of the Kenites, they were a tribe or nation existing in the land as did other nations or tribes. Each of them would see themselves as having loyalty only to their own tribe. Now that Heber was separated from his tribe, he became an unknown quantity. Each tribe or nation would want to know whether he would be fa-

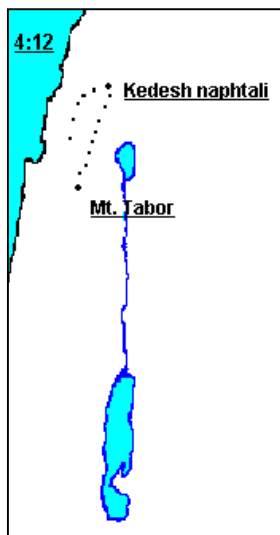
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avorable to them or to their enemies. This information seems to be unimportant at this point, but the author has just set the stage for what is about to happen. We will deal with this again very shortly.

Judges 4:12-16 - Barak Defeated Sisera

Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor.
Judges 4:12

The timing of this verse is awkward at best. It is possible that it chronologically follows the previous verse, where Heber left his clan. On the other hand, it is possible that it does not follow chronologically at all. It could be that Sisera was told of the movement of Barak just as soon as it was discovered, which would be almost immediately after it started. This certainly seems to be the most plausible understanding.



On the map, you can see the route that Barak would have taken. Having gathered the 10,000 men and taken them to Kedesh, Barak now took them south to Mount Tabor as God commanded. We should be reminded that mountains were safe hiding places for an army. However, that was not the reason that they were commanded to go to Mount Tabor.

The text says, "they told Sisera." Though their communications systems were not high tech, still they could know anything that happened in Palestine within the day. News traveled by caravan. Lookout posts kept generals posted. These communications posts could also send messages by smoke signals and they did. We can be very sure that just as soon as Barak moved, Sisera knew about it.

Look at this verse again. There is an interesting phenomenon here. The author said that Barak "had gone up to Mount Tabor." As we saw on the earlier map, Barak went south from Kedesh to Tabor. When we speak of going South, we say "down." There are two reasons why the author said "up." First, Mount Tabor was at a higher altitude than Kedesh.

The second reason is less obvious. In almost every instance, when a biblical author wrote of something good happening, he wrote of them "going up." When they wrote of something unfortunate happening, they would write of "going down," no matter what direction they went.

And Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. Judges 4:13

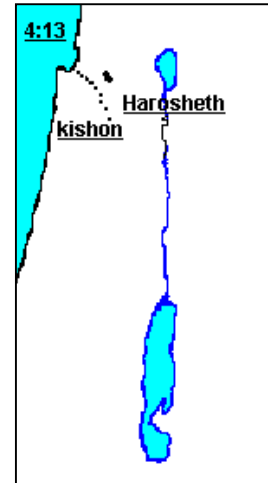
Having 900 iron chariots, Sisera was not dealing with much risk when he considered going into battle with any army in Israel. Certainly people would die, but victory was a foregone conclusion. As soon as Sisera heard that Barak had moved toward the best battlefield in the area, he gathered his army for battle.

Observe how the author reported this information. He said "Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron,.." This unusual repetition was their way of

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adding strong emphasis to a statement. It was big news when 900 iron chariots moved. It would be like moving the entire nuclear capability from one place to another.

The author reported that Sisera gathered the chariots and people "from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. The distance from Harosheth to the river Kishon is about five miles. This statement, however, presents us with a bit of a problem. It is not real clear what the author said, specifically. Did he mean that Sisera moved the whole group from Harosheth south to the River Kishon? It could be. Did he mean that some of the troops were headquartered in Harosheth and some were quartered at the river Kishon? That is also possible. We can't be sure what his intent was. We do know that Sisera assembled his troops in this northwestern location in preparation for a march to Mount Tabor to the east.



Look at the strategy here. Barak is already in place in a mountain location. He is prepared for defense. Sisera, on the other hand, is on the attack. There is a bit of an advantage for Barak at this point.

Sisera had 900 iron chariots. Barak had no chariots at all. There is an obvious advantage for Sisera here. In the mountains, however, a foot soldier could move in areas a chariot could not reach. Climbing in the mountains, the chariots were slow and thus dangerous. For all intents and purposes, the chariots were a liability in the mountains. Because chariots were considered such a lethal weapon, Sisera tended to be a bit complacent about the whole matter. This is the situation as battle was about to be engaged.

And Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. Judges 4:14

This verse adds information to our discussion about why Barak wanted Deborah to go with him. As you can see from this verse, Deborah was more than present with Barak. She was giving him the message from God as it came to her. She was serving as a prophet to the army.

Observe the message Deborah gave Barak. The word "Arise" does not necessarily mean that he was lying down. It is a bit like saying "get ready." She also told Barak that this was "the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands..." Notice that this is stated in the past tense. She was saying that the Lord had already done this while the battle had not yet begun. There are two things about this statement that we should keep in mind:

- a. This military action was something that the Lord was doing, not Barak.
- b. Because God is not time-bound, when He has spoken a specific action, it is already accomplished despite the fact that no one has moved to cause such to be the case.

The next thing to observe about this verse is that Deborah told Barak, "the Lord has gone out before you." Swords will cut and men will fall, but God has already gone into battle on your behalf. It was a way of reminding Barak that God was indeed the victor in this battle, not his army.

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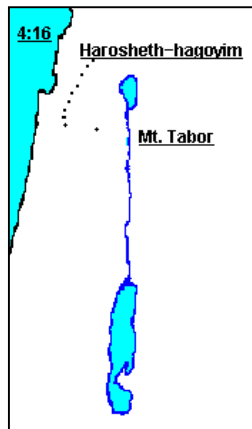
The verse concludes with a shocking report. The author told us that Barak, on the announcement of a woman, left the relative security of the mountain and led 10,000 men down into the valley where a superior army and 900 iron chariots awaited them. A general would take great pause before leading 10,000 men against a greater army. He would take even more consideration before leading them against 900 of the most devastating weapons known to mankind at that time. Add to this the fact that Barak was doing this on the advice of a woman, and you can see what he had to deal with before giving the order to attack. We assume that the 10,000 soldiers knew that Deborah was present and that she was giving advice to their commander. It is just as great a shock that they were willing to take commands under such conditions.

And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.
Judges 4:15

The author was very specific when he wrote, "The Lord routed Sisera and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak." He was saying that this was an act of God. Now, Barak was present. His army wielded the swords. Nevertheless, this was an act of God working through His people.

Observe how thoroughly the author spoke, "The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots, and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak..." This was a way of adding strong emphasis to a surprising statement. No one would have expected Sisera to be routed. Now the author reported that every part of his army was fleeing for their lives. The irresistible weapons, called chariots, were so completely resisted that they were in full retreat.

We cannot account for the statement about Sisera. The author said "Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. Certainly, the chariot was faster than running on foot. It could be that they were in terrain that was difficult for the chariot to traverse. It could have been that Sisera was so shocked with this turn of events that he was not thinking carefully and acted rather than thinking about what he was doing. Whatever the reason, it was a fatal mistake.



But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left. Judges 4:16

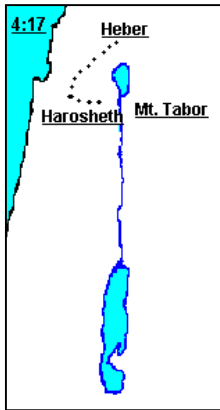
It is as though Barak was oblivious to the whereabouts of the enemy general. That would not be the case. Everyone would know where the general was and everyone watched to see what he was doing. This was one way they gained information about how he was going to carry out his strategy of battle.

Whatever the case, Barak was not pursuing Sisera, but went after his army. Notice the report of the author. "Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim." This tells us that the army did not just flee. They were in full retreat just as fast as they could go. As you can see on the map this is more than a days' journey on the chariot and much more than that on foot. This tells us something of Barak's great determination to get rid of this army. We must remind ourselves that God did it,

but Barak's soldiers chased the retreating army and then wielded the swords that killed every last soldier. We do not know just how large Sisera's army was, but we know that every man died. Again, observe the emphasis the author used to tell us about Sisera's army. First he told us that they all fell by the edge of the sword. Then he told us that not even one was left.

Judges 4:17-22 - Sisera Killed by Jael

Now Sisera fled away on foot 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. Judges 4:17



The word "now" signals a turn in the direction of the story. As abruptly as the author left the story of Sisera to tell us about the army being destroyed, he now returned to the story of Sisera. In 4:15, the author only told us that Sisera fled on foot, but did not tell us where he was going. He will now fill us in with this information.

As you read this verse, it sounds as though Sisera left his chariot and ran a short distance to the tent of Jael. That was not the case. You can trace his journey on the adjoining map. The trip covered about 35 miles from Harosheth to Hazor. He had to flee to the north for more than a days' journey on foot. He would have been exhausted from the battle and even more exhausted from fleeing on foot in full armor. He certainly would not be taking a leisurely pace. This man would have been totally exhausted after fleeing for his life. This gives you some idea of the desperation Sisera felt when the battle shockingly turned against him and his army.

Our first question would naturally be, why would he do a thing like this? The author anticipated this question. Notice what he said, "*for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.*" This statement may account for the fact that there were troubles between Heber and the rest of his clan. We do not know that for sure. We know that there was peace between Heber and Jabin, but we do not know the nature of that peace. It could be an honest peaceful arrangement between the two camps. Subsequent events give us good reason to ask what the nature of this peace was. We will speak to this issue shortly.

And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid." And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. Judges 4:18

As you read this verse, it is clear that Jael, the wife of Heber, knew Sisera. There is no information about how she knew him or whether or not it was a friendly relationship. There is a problem created by the content of this verse. In that culture, a man was never to speak to a woman who was not his wife, much less enter her tent. In this verse, Jael spoke to him and invited him into her tent. Normally, no man would ever respond to this because it would cost him his life.

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Jael went out to meet Sisera. This would indicate that he was welcomed there. You will remember that in the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus had the father run out to meet his son. It was for this reason.

Jael referred to Sisera as "master." The word for master is "adonai" which means "master of a servant." This, however, can have at least two connotations.

- a. It can be used to describe a term of respect.
- b. It can be used to describe a servant-master relationship.

This is the name for God that is used very often by Jewish people rather than to use the unspeakable name, "Yahweh." There is nothing in the text to indicate which meaning Jael intended. In view of the context, we can be reasonably certain she did not mean that he was the master she served.

We should note what Jael said to Sisera. She said, "Turn aside to me! do not be afraid." On the surface, this sounds like a very safe thing to do. Sisera, however, knew that he had no business going into a woman's tent and that the penalty was death. We must also understand that he was running for his life and the conventions of culture were of no concern to him at this point. We must deal with the fact that there is a deception in the statement of Jael. She told him not to be afraid. In view of what ultimately happened, one must interpret this as a way to keep him off balance. His life was still in danger, but she did not want him to think so. The question naturally arises, does God participate in such procedures? God does not. As you look through the Old Testament, however, it is clear that God will allow evil forces to function in their own way as He punishes the guilty. From Jael's vantage point, we do not know why she said what she did, but she was evidently willing to deceive in order to do Sisera harm.

The text says that she "covered him with a rug." This can be confusing. When we think of a rug, we might think of a floor covering which may be two feet by four feet. That is not what is involved in this instance. The "rug" of a tent would cover the entire floor of the tent. This rug was made up of numerous pieces of woven camel hair. Each section might be three by five feet. These were then sewn together to cover the sand on the inside of the tent. As the women in the family found enough camel hair to weave a section, they would weave it and save it until a rug or tent section was needed.

As indicated previously, this rug would be made of camel hair. It would be stiff, picky and very warm. If her intent was to make him warm enough to go to sleep, she chose the right material.

And he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. Judges 4:19

In the Palestinian climate, the request for water was not at all unusual. Even in the north, it is very warm at that time of year. Water was and is a valuable commodity in Palestine. They seldom drank water. Usually, they drank goat's milk. Though the text does not specify the kind of milk she gave him, it is safe to assume that this is what she gave him.

The text says that she covered him with the rug. This could have been for more than one reason. Sisera must have thought that her reason was to protect him from the view of

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soldiers who might be looking for him. Another reason would be so that he could not see what she was about to do.

And he said to her, "Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.'" Judges 4:20

Sisera was asking Jael to be dishonest on his behalf. He asked Jael to stand in the doorway. If she did that, no one would dare to enter the tent. They could only ask her if there was anyone in the tent. That is exactly the reason he asked her to respond dishonestly to an inquiry concerning his presence.

But Jael, Hebrew's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. Judges 4:21

This is a shocking verse. It is difficult to imagine anything this gross. When we think of a tent peg, we think of a thin piece of metal less than 12 inches long. Their tent pegs were different. First, tents were permanent dwellings. They were not often set up for just a day or two. This required that the tent pegs be substantial. Think of a piece of hard wood about two feet long. It would be about three inches in diameter. This piece of wood would weigh at least three pounds. The mallet with which they drove the tent peg was also made of hard wood. The head of the mallet was about eight inches in diameter and weighed at least five pounds.

The text tells us that she drove the peg through the "temple." This would be the easiest place to penetrate the skull. She needed to find the easiest place in order to do this quickly without him discovering what she was doing.

Jael would have to hold the peg with one hand and drive the sharp point through his head with one blow. One might wonder how she would be able to do this. We should remember that the setting up and striking a tent was the job of the women and girls. She had wielded one of these mallets since she was a very young girl. Her arms would be very strong and she could easily drive the tent peg in this manner. thus the prophecy of Deborah was fulfilled.

And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple. Judges 4:22

When reading verse 16, it appears that Barak pursued the chariots as they fled to the west toward Harosheth-hagoyim. In this verse, however, Barak has returned from chasing the chariots and is in search of Sisera. He has now turned north to the place where Heber and his family were living. You can trace this trip on the map.

The text tells us that Jael went out to meet Barak just as she had gone out to meet Sisera. This would tell Barak that he was welcomed at the tent of Heber. Previous relationships may have given him this knowledge without Jael coming out to meet him.

Jael invited Barak to come into the tent to see Sisera, "the man whom you are seeking." This would set Barak's heart at ease concerning the risky thing he was about to do.

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As you read this verse, it may sound as though all of this took place in a matter of minutes. That, of course, was not the case. It would take hours for Barak to get from Tabor to the place where the tent of Heber was located. Sisera had been dead for many hours before Barak came to Heber's tent. See the map at 4:16 on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

This is a gory scene, to say the least. One wonders, why was this necessary? We must remember that this was more than a military exercise. Jabin had taken a stand against both Israel and their God. It was a declaration that Baal was the god of all the earth in defiance of the God of all creation. The battle made a statement. The greatest weapons on the face of the earth were no match for the almighty power of Jehovah.

Judges 4:23, 24 - Summary of Defeat by Jabin

This brief paragraph is a summary statement following the detailed description of the battle and ensuing death of Sisera.

*So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel.
Judges 4:23*

One must be impressed with the number of times the author emphasized the fact that it was God who subdued the enemies of Israel. It is also noteworthy that though God subdued the enemies, Israel was the one on the scene. It was a cooperative effort. There is no doubt that God could have done this all by Himself. Still, God chose to join hands with His people Israel in the destruction of their enemies. This was important for Israel. Because they had participated in this deliverance, they took greater ownership of the events and understood what God had done just that much more clearly.

It is also clear in this chapter that when God's will is carried out, He enables His people to accomplish the task He had promised would be accomplished. That is a great joy of discovery. It was God who subdued Jabin, the powerful king, before Israel, the nearly helpless nation.

And the hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan. Judges 4:24

You will remember that in the beginning of this drive to take over the land, God had commanded Israel to drive out the people of the land. In the accomplishment of that commission, there is a serious repetition in verses 23 and 24 that we have seen throughout the chapter. At the end of verse 23, the author said that God subdued Jabin before the sons of Israel. In verse 24, the author said that the hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier on Jabin the king of Canaan. He concluded verse 24 by saying that the sons of Israel destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan. By restating the facts time and again, the author attempted to express just how startling it was that this little band of Israelites were able to defeat the strong, well equipped army of Jabin.

Conclusion

In the telling of the story of Israel as they went into the promised land, the author has also told us many things about God. That is true in this chapter as well. Here are some of the things the author has told us about God in chapter four.

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- 4:1 God is the silent observer of every experience in life.
- 4:2 God will use the pagan to punish His people in order to bring them back to Himself.
- 4:3 When trouble comes, even when it is our own doing, we can cry to the Lord for Help. This is mercy.
- 4:6, 7 God speaks to His servants.
- 4:6, 7 God is omniscient. He knew what would happen and told Deborah before hand.
- 4:9 The limitations of our faith have an effect upon the way God deals with us.
- 4:14 God revealed His timing to His servant Deborah.
- 4:14 God delivered Israel's enemies into their hands, even though they had been un-faithful in the recent past.
- 4:15 God does miracles. He routed Sisera, with all his chariots, before Barak who didn't have a trained army and his personal faith was weak.
- 4:22 God is all knowing – he knew a woman would defeat Sisera.
- 4:23 God is all powerful. He subdued powerful kings before His people.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

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JUDGES 5:1 - 31

1. There are six paragraphs in the fifth chapter of Judges. On the table which follows, record a summary of seven words or less for each of the paragraphs.

5:1-5	
5:6-11	
5:12-18	
5:19-23	
5:24-27	
5:28-31	

2. In Judges 5:1-5, Deborah and Barak sang praise to God because of His power.
 - a. In 5:1, 2, they begin their song of praise. For what do they give God praise?
 - b. In 5:3, they appear to be calling kings and rulers to notice their praise to God. The text does not explain this invitation. What appears to you to be the reason for their invitation to kings and rulers?
 - c. In 5:4,5, Deborah and Barak made reference to several places outside Palestine in their song of praise.
 - (1). For what was each place noted in Israel's history?
 - (2). Why would they sing about these places?
3. In 5:6-11, Deborah and Barak sing about the failure of Israel.
 - a. In 5:6, they sang about a particular time in Israel's history.
 - (1). Reread 3:31 and compare it with 5:6. What did you learn?
 - (2). Why was it important for Deborah and Barak to include this information in their song?
 - b. Read 5:7 carefully.
 - (1). It sounds as if Deborah was blowing her own horn. Is that true?
 - (2). What claims are made in this verse?
 - (3). What did they mean when they called Deborah a "mother in Israel"?
 - c. In 5:8, 9, there is a cause and effect relationship.
 - (1). What cause do they identify?
 - (2). What effect do they claim is the result?
 - (3). There is some new information in these verses. What is it? Why would this be true?
 - (4). There is a note of sadness in their song in these verses. Why is that?

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- d. In 5:10, they sang about three groups of people.
 - (1). Who are these people?
 - (2). Why would they instruct these people to sing?
- e. In 5:11, they sang about a different group.
 - (1). Who are they?
 - (2). What do they call upon this group to do? Why?
 - (3). They sang that "the people went down to the gates. What does this mean?"
- 4. In 5:12-18, the song turns to the battle in the North.
 - a. In 5:12, read carefully to see who is doing the singing.
 - (1). What instructions are being given?
 - (2). Read this instruction very carefully. What did you learn?
 - b. In 5:13, the song talks about survivors.
 - (1). About whom were they singing?
 - (2). What is the importance of this report?
 - c. On a map, look up the location of the places mentioned in 5:14, 15.
 - (1). Where are these places located?
 - (2). What information does this provide for our understanding?
 - d. In 5:16, Deborah turned her attention again to Reuben.
 - (1). Reread 4:14 and then read 5:16 again. What do you gather from this situation?
 - (2). In this verse you find the words, "among the divisions of Reuben there was great searching's of heart." What does this mean?
 - e. In 5:17, 18, there is a strong contrast.
 - (1). What is the contrast?
 - (2). What were Deborah and Barak trying to say in this contrast?
 - (3). Why was it necessary to include this message in the song?
- 5. In 5:19-23, the song includes information about the affect of nature on the battle.
 - a. In 5:19, they sang about the Canaanite kings.
 - (1). How does this fit into the story in view of 5:12-18?
 - (2). Why was it important to sing about the Canaanite kings who took no silver in plunder?
 - b. In 5:20, 21, they sang about the involvement of nature in the battle.
 - (1). What does it mean, "the stars fought from heaven...against Sisera"?
 - (2). It also mentions "the torrents of Kishon".
 - (a). What are these torrents?
 - (b). What, if anything, does chapter four say about these torrents?
 - c. In 5:22, the song takes a different turn. What does this mean? What does this have to do with the previous two verses?
 - d. In 5:23, the song takes another turn.

Questions for Lesson 5

- (1). What did the song pronounce against the people of Meroz?
- (2). Why?
6. In 5:24-27, the song takes still another turn as they described the death of Sisera.
 - a. Look carefully at 5:24. There is a surprising emphasis in the verse. What is it? Why is this important?
 - b. In 5:25, the song described the encounter between Sisera and Jael.
 - (1). It says he asked for water and she gave him milk. Why would that be important?
 - (2). It also says that she brought him curds of cheese in a magnificent bowl. What does this tell us?
 - c. In 5:26 the song described, in grim detail, how Jael killed Sisera.
 - (1). Read this verse several times. Put yourself in Jael's position. What do you feel as you re-enact this scenario?
 - (2). What does this tell us about Jael?
 - (3). What, if anything, can you see in this verse that is difficult to understand?
 - d. In 5:27 the song gives a detailed picture of the death of Sisera.
 - (1). Read the verse carefully and put yourself in Sisera's place. How would you describe what happened?
 - (2). Why was it important to give each traumatic detail?
 - (3). Compare 4:17-22 with 5:24-27. What do you learn from this comparison?
7. Again in 5:28-31 the song takes a very different turn. The song deals with Sisera's mother.
 - a. In 5:28, they sang about how Sisera's mother would feel at this point.
 - (1). Put yourself in the place of Deborah. What kind of emotions would you feel in singing these words?
 - (2). Deborah imagined how Sisera's mother would feel. What feelings did Deborah describe?
 - (3). Read the verse again. What does the verse tell us about the conditions in which Sisera's mother lived?
 - b. In 5:29, 30, the song described the dividing of the spoil from the perspective of Sisera's mother.
 - (1). What is the underlying assumption that Sisera's mother is portrayed as making?
 - (2). What feeling is hinted at concerning Sisera's mother?
 - (3). Why would Deborah indulge in this kind of fantasy?
 - c. In 5:31, they conclude the song.
 - (1). There is a contrast in this verse.
 - (a). What is the contrast?
 - (b). Why would they sing this as the closing of the song of praise?

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- (2). Read the last sentence in this verse.
 - (a). What does this tell us?
 - (b). Compare this last sentence with 4:1-4.
 - [1]. What did you learn from this comparison?
 - [2]. Why would they include this at this point?
- 8. Review the chapter again. What does it tell you about God?

LESSON 5: JUDGES 5:1 - 31

DEBORAH'S SONG

Introduction

If you look carefully at the content of both chapters four and five, you will notice that they deal with essentially the same material. There is one major difference. Chapter four is written in prose. Chapter five, on the other hand, is written in poetry. This is not accidental. Prose can give us a depth of literary accuracy, but it is incapable of conveying the emotional fervor that was present in that situation. The poetic version, however, is quite adept in conveying the precise depth of emotion that pervaded that traumatic scene.

We should be very clear. The two chapters are not identical. Chapter five adds information not found in chapter four. Basically, chapter four gives an historical perspective while chapter five identifies God's part in this struggle.

We must be reminded that our poetry is celebrated for its ability to rhyme. Hebrew poetry makes no effort to rhyme the words. In spite of this, it is most delicate, passionate and conveys a depth of emotion for which prose is totally incapable. Chapter five is one of most beautiful examples of these qualities.

There are six paragraphs in Judges chapter five. A summary of each paragraph is recorded on the table which follows.

5:1-5	Sing Praise to the Power of God
5:6-11	Israel Sinned; Israel Had Trouble
5:12-18	The Northern Tribes Came to Battle
5:19-23	Nature Affected the Battle
5:24-27	Jael Killed Sisera
5:28-31`	The Mother of Sisera Wept

Judges 5:1-5 - Sing Praise to the Power of God

Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, that the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD! Judges 5:1, 2

It is immediately evident that this is a duet, not a solo. Both Deborah and Barak are doing the singing. There is an interesting thing in these verses. First, women seldom sang in public. Nevertheless, Deborah sang this song of praise. Second, people are almost always mentioned in the order of their importance. You will notice here that Deborah is mentioned before Barak. This is a most unusual situation to say the least. Granted, Deborah is the Judge and Barak her general. Still, Deborah was a woman and they were seldom mentioned ahead of a man.

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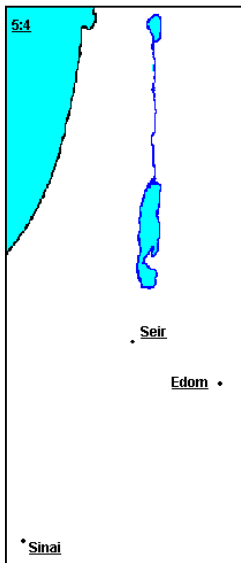
The beginning of their song of praise celebrates the fact that leaders led the people of Israel and the people volunteered to do what was needed. They were praising God that everyone was doing their part. The two of them were able to see the relationship between leaders and people in clear perspective.

"Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I-- to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel." Judges 5:3

It is clear that the object of their praise is the Lord. They call upon kings and rulers to hear their praise of God. They specifically identify the God of Israel in a land where the idols were more often thought of as the lord of the people.

This is also a way of saying that God is greater than any king or ruler. Deborah and Barak were celebrating God as the Lord, the controller of life.

"LORD, when Thou didst go out from Seir, When Thou didst march from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel." Judges 5:4, 5



As you look at these two verses, they are filled with visual images. These verses mention places that are well known to the people of Israel. They mention places like Seir, Edom and Sinai, all of which were a vital part of their memory.

Take a moment to savor the beauty of the poetry which Deborah and Barak sang. "The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord, this Sinai at the presence of the Lord..." We know that earthquakes were well known in the region.

Sinai is the place where God gave Israel the law, but these ragged mountains quaked at the very presence of God. Because God was near, the heavens gave forth rain, a wonderful blessing to the people in this very arid area.

First and foremost, we must remember that this song is addressed to the Lord. It is about God that they are singing.

Judges 5:6-11 - Israel Sinned; Israel Had Trouble

"In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways." Judges 5:6

You may remember that Shamgar was the judge about whom no information was given in 3:31. In the singing of this verse, they gave a picture of conditions that had not been shared previously. At that time, the local conditions were so bad that people refused to travel because of fear. If they were forced to travel, they would go by a different, a safer way. The word "roundabout" is literally the word "twisted." They would take any circuitous route to avoid the dangers of travel in that area. It is the same feeling that we might get traveling in an inner city at night. We would do everything possible to avoid it. They did the same.

DEBORAH'S SONG

"The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel." Judges 5:7

This verse gives a picture of just how terrible conditions had become during their occupation by the foreigners among whom they were living. The "peasantry" is the lowest economic and social level in any community. They were saying that things had gotten so bad that the peasants were dying off. They ceased to exist.

It may sound as though Deborah was blowing her own horn. This is too early to make such a judgment. We will watch this and refer to it later.

This verse also tells us that Deborah was not just a judge; she was also a "mother in Israel." This does not refer to her maternal situation. It rather refers to women who had a sacrificial commitment to a holy life and to the service of God.

"New gods were chosen; Then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel. My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!" Judges 5:8, 9

There is a cause and effect relationship described in these verses.

- a. Cause - They chose new gods. God had told them not to do this.
- b. Effect - War was at the gate.

It was a way of strongly asserting that their troubles came because of their disobedience in worshipping other gods. There is a shocking statement in these verses. When Deborah and Barak sang that "not a shield or a spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel," they were describing Israel's preparation for the war that was upon them. They literally had no weapons with which to defend themselves. They were forced to use kitchen utensils for weapons. This was not new for Israel. They had used knives as weapons of war on numerous occasions during the Exodus. The difference was that on these occasions God defended them, but now they stood alone.

Deborah and Barak sang that their hearts went out to the commanders in Israel. They faced an impossible situation and yet were expected to bring victory to their people. It would have been nearly an impossible situation if they had been well armed. They were always outnumbered. They had no trained army and now they had no weapons at all. The reason they had no weapons was that when an army conquered a nation, they would remove all the weapons so that the people would be much less likely to participate in an uprising.

They also were saying that their hearts also went out to the volunteers among the people. They were more at risk than most any other soldier. Their survival options were few.

"You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who travel on the road-- sing!" Judges 5:10

At this point in the song, they change the direction of their thought. They address their remarks to three distinct groups of people whom they singled out as their audience..

- a. **You who ride on white donkeys** - These were rulers who came in victory. Some would ride the white donkey even when they were not coming in victory. Politics has not changed that much.

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- b. **"You who sit on rich carpets"** - Everyone sat on carpets. It was a way of keeping them out of the sand. To speak of those who "sit on rich carpets" was to identify the unbelievably rich. There is a hint here that the culture had divided itself into the very rich and the extremely poor. There was no middle class. In times of extremity, the middle class seems to disappear and the gulf between the very rich and extremely poor becomes much wider.
- c. **"You who travel the roads"** - This could apply to two groups:
 - (1). Those who didn't pay any attention to the danger of road travel.
 - (2). Those who had connections that made it safe for them to travel when others must do so at their peril.

Deborah and Barak commanded these people to sing, literally "to declare it." This is because people in these categories tend to be less aware of their place of privilege and take it for granted. The singers are warning them against this error.

"At the sound of those who divide flocks among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates." Judges 5:11

The singers now turn their attention from the very rich to the very poor, those who tend the flocks of sheep. They were to recount the righteous deeds of the Lord. There is a subtle point made in the parallels of this verse. Notice the singers mention "the righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel." They had just sung of the demise of the peasantry and now they mention that God has a peasant class. They have not been wiped out by the ravages of the rich. It is a way of focusing praise upon God because he cared for the ones who could not care for themselves and for whom no one else cared.

Deborah and Barak concluded the verse with a subtle hint. They sang, "then the people of the Lord went down to the gates." The gates were the place where officials met and where governmental decisions were made. In far too many cases, only the rich had access to these people and decisions. The poor would be forced to stay away from such deliberations. Here they describe a situation in which even the poorest of the poor have access to the decision making process and the people who were involved in it.

Judges 5:12-18 - The Northern Tribes Came to Battle

"Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam." Judges 5:12

This is known as conversational poetry. It is intended to sound like one is listening in on a conversation between two people or groups. The text gives us additional information. The conversational style was simply a tool they used to convey this information. The verse is a call for celebration. Though Deborah and Barak are doing the singing, this verse is a call by the listeners for Deborah and Barak to celebrate the victory of God. Notice the verse calls upon Barak to "take away your captives." This is a part of the war picture that occurs only when victory has been realized. It was the listeners' way of saying celebrate the victory over the army that had enslaved them for twenty years.

"Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors." Judges 5:13

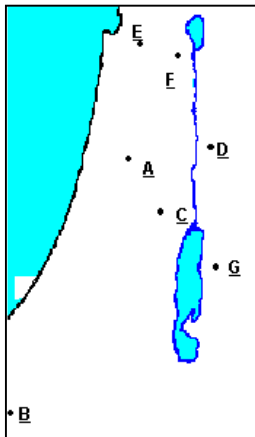
DEBORAH'S SONG

This is a verbal picture. They spoke of "survivors" who came down. When battle was about to be waged, people fled to the hills and mountains for safety. Otherwise they would almost certainly be taken as slaves. On many occasions, this was true even when their army won the battle. Deborah is singing here. She said that these survivors came back to the city with courage; they came as a warrior would come.

You can see the picture of what Deborah described. The people had fled to the mountains for safety. When the battle was over, the survivors came down with confidence and the leaders of the people were there to meet them.

We should note that Deborah is indulging in a bit of diplomacy at this point. In Israel there was always the problem of those who were unwilling to fight or would come just as the battle was about over. This invariably caused great troubles between the tribes. You will remember that God commanded Barak, through Deborah, to take 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun. Nothing was mentioned about any other tribe. When the whole process began, however, it was commanded that each tribe would come to the aid of their neighbor and the neighbor would do the same for them. That did not seem to apply in this situation. We will see this unfold in the next verses.

"From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels; Among the divisions of Reuben There were great resolves of heart." Judges 5:14, 15



The singers mentioned several places in these verses. Look carefully at the location of these places on the map. They mention:

- a. Ephraim
- b. Amalek
- c. Benjamin
- d. Machir
- e. Zebulun
- f. Issachar
- g. Reuben

We mention this because most of these people come from areas unaffected by this battle. Their closest affiliation with this struggle would be that if Sisera won, then the burden on them might be more intense, if that were possible. Nevertheless, these people came ready to fight. We should be aware that there was a choice sarcasm and reprimand that these people loved to use. By praising one group of people, they could heap abuse and punishment upon another group who failed to do what those listed had done. Again, remember that God only commanded Barak to go to Naphtali and Zebulun. We are not sure of the reason, but Zebulun is on this list, but Naphtali is not. Did Naphtali refuse to send men to fight? If that is true, the author did not give us that information earlier. Later information will cancel this possibility.

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The list includes Reuben, whose land was on the east side of the Jordan and farther from the scene of battle than any other tribe. Noticeably absent from the list are tribes like Judah, Simeon, Dan, Gad, Manasseh and Asher. Half of the tribes are not mentioned at all. One suspects that in the praise of those who are represented there is a bit of retribution for those who expressed no concern for the conflict. We should remember that when they went into the land of Canaan they were to come to the aid of each other in the battle for their territories.

"Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben There were great searchings of heart." Judges 5:16

In this verse, the issue comes out into the open. Deborah was dealing with ancient draft-dodgers. There were some from Reuben who came ready for battle, but there were others who were content to sit among the sheepfolds to hear the bleating of the sheep while their fellow Jews were being killed on the battlefield. This was a slashing remark and it would not be wasted on them.

Observe, also, that Deborah sang, "Among the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." In 5:14, 15, they sang of Reuben that "among the divisions of Reuben, there were great resolves of heart." Obviously there is a great change between 5:15 and 5:16. The word "searchings" is "khawkar" (חַקַּר) and means "to penetrate," "to examine intimately." It was difficult for those who had gone zealously to defend their brothers to understand why their fellow tribesmen were willing to stay comfortably at home and look after their own family wealth.

It was as if she were saying, "was it because you had to sit in the sheepfolds to make sure you heard the sheep bleating that you could not come to defend your brothers?"

"Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings." Judges 5:17

Deborah was not finished with her attack. She singled out "Gilead." This is part of the portion of land given to Manasseh. Everyone knew that Manasseh received help when it came to freeing their portion of the land. Now they were not to be found to help others. She let them know that she was aware of the fact that they had stayed safely on the east side of the Jordan and did not come to offer their assistance to those who were really fighting for Manasseh's freedom as well as their own.

A brief question cut to the heart of the people of Dan. "Why did Dan stay in ships?" We know that Jewish people hated to be on the water. Though the people of Dan lived on the coast, they were farmers and herdsman. She was saying that though these people were terrible sailors, they preferred to stay there rather than to risk their lives coming to the aid of their brothers to the north. It was a brutal attack. It is as though she was saying, "did you stay home to make sure that your little streams did not go away?"

Asher also did not escape her scathing remarks. She said, "Asher sat at the seashore and remained by its landings." It would be like saying, "Asher, was it because you had to stay by your loading docks to assure their safety that you were just unable to come to take part in the battle for your own freedom?"

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"Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death, And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field. " Judges 5:18

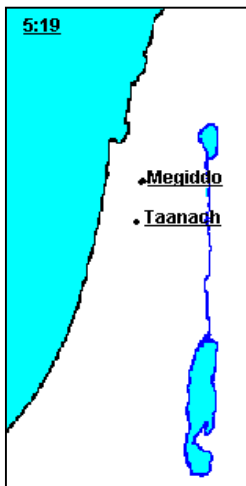
Having turned her scathing remarks against those who opted not to take part in the battle, Deborah increased the painful attack by lauding those who did fight. She began with Zebulun. The highest praise for any soldier is that he placed the battle ahead of his own welfare. This is exactly what she said, "Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to the death." This was one more way to attack those who were so concerned for their own safety that they did not even come to the battle.

Deborah continued by speaking of Naphtali. Notice that though Naphtali is not mentioned in the previous list, they are highly praised in this verse. She attributed this self-sacrificing attitude to Naphtali as well as Zebulun. There is even a hint of great self-sacrifice on the part of Naphtali. Notice that she mentions, "on the high places of the field." This was the place of battle that made every soldier a bit nervous. Their lives were more at risk when they had high visibility than when they were on the flat land with all the other soldiers. This location made them particularly vulnerable to soldiers who had bows and arrows.

Ultimately, Deborah gave honest praise to the men of Zebulun and Naphtali and harshly condemned the cowards from the southern tribes.

Judges 5:19-23 - Nature Affected the Battle

"The kings came and fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver." Judges 5:19



There is an emphatic statement in this verse. First the author said, "The kings came and fought." He emphasized the statement by adding, "then fought the kings of Canaan at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo..." As you can see on the map, Taanach is located about five miles southeast of Megiddo. The important thing to notice is that it is located in the same valley adjacent to the mighty plain of Megiddo. Deborah has turned her venom away from the tribes of Israel and looks at the enemy that has come for the battle. She was saying that the Canaanite kings, though usually motivated by financial gain, came for the battle and did not bother their minds with plundering silver from the towns they conquered.

This is a way of saying the pagan kings came to fight and were not preoccupied with financial gain while the tribes of Israel would not even come to the battle though commanded to do so by God. We must remember that it was a shameful thing for a Jew to be compared, in a negative light, with pagan kings. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Deborah did.

*"The stars fought from heaven, From their courses they fought against Sisera.
"The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength." Judges 5:20, 21*

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Observe that Deborah told what the northern tribes did and what the southern tribes did not do. We must remember, however, that none of this won the battle against Sisera. In these verses, Deborah now tells what God did through the forces of nature.

She began with the stars. She said of them, "The stars fought from heaven." People in that time, especially pagans, thought that the stars had personality and power. They thought that the stars had a particularly important part to play in the ordering of their daily lives. This, however, faithful Jews did not believe. It appears that what Deborah referred to was in fact a display of the stars which was clouded and diminished. This would greatly cut down the amount of light that was available for them to prepare for battle under the cover of darkness.

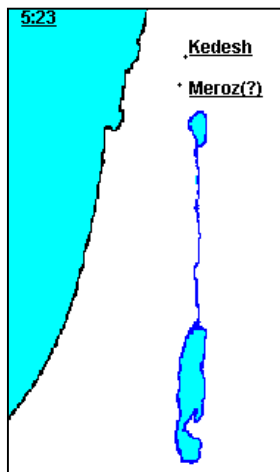
She also described a flood. It appears that there was a terrible rain. The swollen Kishon river overflowed and made it a terrible battlefield for anyone but foot soldiers. Interestingly enough, only Israel had foot soldiers to depend upon. Sisera depended upon the strength of his chariots and horsemen. This proved to be fatal.

Observe that in the same story, in chapter four, this part of the story is not told or alluded to in any way. It is as though it had not happened. This is one more reason why we need both the prose account of chapter and the poetic report in chapter five.

"Then the horses' hoofs beat From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds."
Judges 5:22

All of the hopes of Sisera were pinned on the ability of his horsemen and chariots to totally destroy the 10,000 troops of Israel. The coming of inclement weather and the accompanying floods made a disaster of his plans. Deborah described the fury of the coming of the horses. It was a frightening display. Nevertheless, the real danger in this condition was that the horses would be rendered useless. Soldiers could traverse a slippery battlefield with difficulty, but horses could not traverse it at all. This is what really gave Israel the advantage. Deborah knew this and wanted to give praise for it.

"'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants; Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, To the help of the LORD against the warriors.'" Judges 5:23



Now, the exact location of Meroz is unknown. It has been obliterated. It is clear that they were quite close to the battle area. As you can see on the map, we are reasonably certain that it is a small village about seven miles south of Kedesh of Naphtali. The importance of this village, in this context, appears to be that they could have and should have come to the aid of Barak and his men, but they refused to do so. The interesting thing about this is that they were in the area that was most directly affected by the outcome of this struggle. Most of the tribes which Deborah scathed for their failure to participate were located in the south of Palestine.

DEBORAH'S SONG

Judges 5:24-27 - Jael Killed Sisera

"Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent." Judges 5:24

This entire paragraph is a salute to Jael, the woman who killed Sisera. This sounds strange to us. We think of the woman most blessed among other women as the one who does the best job with her family. That may be in other cases, but certainly not here.

There is an emphasis here on the fact that Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite. The idea here is that these people were not Jews. They had no personal stake in the outcome of hostilities between Jews and Canaanites. Still, as the story unravels, it is clear that Jael was as involved in the struggle as any Jewish person could possibly be. She risked her life more than most Jews. Certainly more than any Jewish woman other than Deborah.

"He asked for water and she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds. Judges 5:25

In this verse, Deborah got right to the point. Sisera asked Jael for a drink of water. In that culture, the wish of a guest in the tent is the command of the family. Despite this, she offered him not water, but milk. In some parts of Palestine milk would be offered because there was no water or very little that was potable. That was not the case in the north of Palestine. There had to be another reason. We hope to be able to shed some light on this issue very shortly.

Deborah sang, "in a magnificent bowl she brought him curds." For most nomadic peoples, to have a bowl of any kind was a great achievement. To have one that would be described as "magnificent" would be unthinkable. This tells us that this family was wealthy beyond what most any other family in the area could hope to be.

Jael brought Sisera curds. This was one of the mainstays of their diet. These were displaced herdsmen. They had, for centuries, tended sheep and goats. This is the way they provided their daily food. Jael brought Sisera the best of what she had.

Remember, Sisera asked for water and Jael gave him milk. Cool water tends to revive. Milk and curds or a form of cottage cheese have just the opposite effect. It appears that this was Jael's motive in the switch from water to milk. Notice what happens in the very next verse.

"She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple." Judges 5:26

This is shocking! You will remember, from 4:21, that the tent peg is not as small as the ones we use today. It was rather a piece of gnarly hard wood about two feet long and three inches in diameter. It would weigh about three pounds. This was no task for weaklings. The text speaks of "the workmen's hammer." This is a huge wooden sledge that would weigh at least five to eight pounds. She handled these, one in each hand. Still she was able to drive the peg through the skull of the general. This is one verse of the Bible that no one would like to visualize in detail. Beyond the physical strength this would take, think of the personal courage and stamina this would require.

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Remember that Sisera's head was probably covered with a thick carpet. This meant that she would have to drive the peg through the very heavy carpet and then through the skull of Sisera.

One might wonder how a woman could exhibit such strength, much less kill a person in such a vicious manner. We should remember that the setting up of the tents was the work that women in that culture were required to perform. They were strong and worked hard. That was at least part of the reason that they died so young.

"Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead." Judges 5:27

The precision of the wording is very helpful here. Notice that Deborah said, "Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay." This tells us just how close to him she had to get in order to strike this death dealing blow. It was at this point that she took her life in her hands, and she was not even Jewish.

Deborah described a man who was lying down. Describing his death, three times she said, "he bowed, he fell." This is strong, strategic emphasis. Using the words "bowed" and "fell" to describe a man who was already lying down gives us a hint of how the scene transpired. It sounds, initially, as though she struck him in the temple and he died. The fact that he was already lying down and still he bowed and fell suggests that he struggled intensely before he finally died. There had to be a struggle with death that must have seemed an eternity for Jael. It is not difficult to see why Deborah spoke of Jael as most blessed among women.

Judges 5:28-31 - The Mother of Sisera Wept

The scene changes abruptly. It moved from the battlefield to the home of the most powerful general in that part of the world. It moved from traumatic, violent death to the longings of a mother for her belated son.

"Out of the window she looked and lamented, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?'" Judges 5:28

There is a woman's gentle irony in these words. Deborah reveals how torn she was. She was a woman and knew the feelings a mother has for her child, no matter how old that child might be. Deborah also knew the terror, the horrifying pain and death this woman's son had wreaked upon her people for many years. It is in this dramatic tension that Deborah wrote these beautiful, but painful words.

Deborah sang of "latticed windows." There are no latticed windows in tents. In fact, there were no latticed windows in the homes that you would find in the cities of that part of the world. This kind of finery was reserved for those who held special rank and held great stores of wealth. Sisera's mother was, indeed, a woman who had become accustomed to all of the finer things in life.

Deborah described a scene that the women of most every generation of history can understand and have experienced. They have waited impatiently and nervously for their husbands and sons to return from the scene of battle. As the time of battle dragged on, they became more impatient even though the time the battle was not unduly long, as battles

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go. It is the fear that their loved one will not return, the certainty that there will be many who will not come home and the anxiety of wondering if their loved one will be one of those.

"Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed she repeats her words to herself, 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed work, A spoil of dyed work embroidered, Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?" Judges 5:29, 30

Deborah allowed herself a bit of dramatic speculation. She could imagine that the princesses, the daughters of the king, but more probably her own daughters and the wives of her sons who were involved in this military operation would respond in a way that would make Sisera's mother feel better, even if it did not make sense to do so.

As time went on, Sisera's mother repeated her nervous, frightened question to herself again and again. The princesses knew only too well that when things are as traumatic as they were, it is not healthy to risk angering or adding to the fear of people who hold great power. The only safe words to say to them are the words and ideas that they themselves have used. That is exactly what the princesses did.

Notice that they talked about giving maidens to the soldiers, but embroidered work to Sisera. That may not seem too realistic, but remember, Deborah is envisioning what Sisera's mother would think. There would be no probable way that this would be realistic. Observe, the only possibility that his mother considered was that he had been victorious. That could be simply because she was his mother. It would also be because there was no doubt in the minds of any of the Canaanites that there would be victory in this small encounter called a battle.

Deborah gave an accurate depiction of how the spoils of battle were divided. The people, especially the women, were either sold as slaves or kept for the soldiers' own use. The belongings of the conquered people were divided among the troops and these were sold and in this way the soldier realized financial gain from the battle.

The embroidered work was very expensive. One wonders, how could she think this of the Jews who had been so heavily taxed by the Canaanites? There are a few possibilities:

- a. It could be that the Jews actually had expensive embroidery work in their tents.
- b. It could be that this was what soldiers usually found in their mopping up operations following the destruction of an army.

We cannot be sure, but it seems more likely that this may have been what they usually found, but not what they would have found in the homes of the overtaxed Jews.

The song mentions double embroidery. These people had developed great skill in embroidery work over many centuries. They had gone beyond that, however. They also developed a way of doing embroidery work so that you would have one design on one side of the cloth and a different design on the reverse side. We know that even in the early years of this century, there were women in China who were masters of this skill which had been practiced and taught for thousands of years in that part of the world.

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"Thus let all Thine enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was undisturbed for forty years."
Judges 5:31

Again, Deborah shifted the scene and the tone of her song as she had before. It moved abruptly from gentle irony to a brusque call for the destruction of the enemies of God. Deborah said, "Thus let all thine enemies perish." Clearly, Deborah knew that every soldier in the army of Sisera had been killed. She implored God, in her song of victory, to allow such a tragedy to befall every enemy of the Jewish people. This woman, who had been so understanding of the problems of her people, suddenly became as hard and tough as any man returned from battle.

Observe that she spoke of God as "Lord." This is the name Jehovah. It is the name most commonly used when the context is one that involves justice. That is exactly what she had in mind. There is a strong contrast in this verse.

- a. Let all the enemies of God perish as Sisera and his army perished.
- b. The word "Thus" tells us there is a very strong contrast following.
- c. Let those who love Jehovah be like the rising of the sun in all its strength.

It is a plea to God to bless His people with great strength that is as dependable as the rising of the sun. It is a beautiful plea for the blessing of God upon a people who had for 20 years known only devastation.

Almost as a closing thought, Deborah added, "And the land was undisturbed for forty years." You may remember that we said earlier that repeatedly the time of peace following troubled times was much longer than the times of loss and abuse which they had endured prior to the rebellion. In this particular case it was double the time. The way Deborah worded this statement is interesting. Notice how she proceeded:

- a. She gave a gently ironic representation of how Sisera's mother would wait in vain.
- b. She then pleaded with God to destroy Israel's enemies and sustain His people.
- c. She concluded by stating that the peace which followed was twice as long as the trauma which preceded the fight for freedom.

Conclusion

We need to review what we have studied in this chapter. In 4:4-7, God promised to deliver Sisera into the hands of Barak. That is exactly what happened in chapter five. On the other hand, when Barak was reluctant to take God at His word, God prophesied, through Deborah, that it would still come to pass, but that Sisera would be taken by a woman and not by himself. That, too, is exactly what happened.

God delivered the army of Sisera into the hands of Israel, but He did it through the efforts of the people of Israel. God did not just strike all of them dead. God works to accomplish His will in the world, but He works through the lives and efforts of His people. This is the picture of God that you see repeatedly throughout the book of Judges. Even though Israel sinned, God still promised to deliver the land into their hands and protected them while they were bringing that to pass. God is faithful and powerful, but He works in fellowship with His people to accomplish His will.

DEBORAH'S SONG

- 5:4,5 God is omnipotent. He causes the earth to tremble and all nature to function nervously at His presence.
- 5:11 God's deeds are righteous.
- 5:11 God claimed Israel as His people. He is a personal God as opposed to idols who were considered impersonal.
- 5:20, 21 God used the forces of nature to defeat Sisera. God controls nature. He rules over nature as He rules over all kings.
- 5:31 God's enemies perish. Those who love God become strong.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

GIDEON JUDGED ISRAEL

JUDGES 6:1 – 40

1. There are eight paragraphs in the sixth chapter of Judges. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

6:1-6	
6:7-10	
6:11-18	
6:19-24	
6:25-27	
6:28-32	
6:33-35	
6:34-40	

2. In Judges 6:1-6, the author described Israel's sin which lead to their defeat by Midian.
 - a. Compare the author's statement in 6:1 with his statement in 4:1, 2. What did you learn from this comparison?
 - b. Read 6:2 very carefully.
 - (1). What does this verse tell you about the plight of the people of Israel?
 - (2). What does it tell you when God delivered Israel into the hands of the idolatrous Midianites?
 - c. Read 6:3, 4.
 - (1). Why would the Midianites deal with Israel in this way?
 - (2). How would you describe the logic of the Midianites devastating Israel in this way?
 - d. As you read 6:5, how would you explain the reason the Midianites would deal with Israel in this way?
 - e. In 6:6, the author summarized Israel's condition. In simple terms, what did the author say about this situation?
3. In Judges 6:7-10, the author dealt with Israel's repentance.
 - a. If you were one of the people of Israel, how would you feel if you cried to the Lord for help and He sent you a prophet?
 - b. Look at the things the prophet said about how God had dealt with the people of Israel in the past. What does this tell you? Why would the prophet give such a message?

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- c. Read the paragraph again. What does the author say about God in this paragraph?
- 4. In Judges 6:11-18, the author described the visit of the angel of the LORD with Gideon.
 - a. In 6:11, it says Gideon “was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites.”
 - (1). What does tell us about conditions in Israel at this time?
 - (2). What does this tell us about Gideon?
 - b. In 6:12, the angel of the LORD spoke to Gideon.
 - (1). What did the angel say?
 - (2). If you were Gideon and the angel said to you, “The LORD is with you,” how would you feel?
 - (3). Again, if you were Gideon and the angel called you “valiant warrior,” how would you feel?
 - c. In 6:13, Gideon responded to the angel’s words.
 - (1). Read this verse several times. How would you describe Gideon’s emotional state at this point?
 - (2). Gideon asked two questions in this verse.
 - (a). What are the questions?
 - (b). What was Gideon really asking in these questions?
 - (3). How did Gideon evaluate God’s dealings with them concerning the Midianites?
 - (4). What was Gideon saying about God?
 - (5). Was this evaluation appropriate?
 - d. In 6:14 records the response to Gideon’s evaluation.
 - (1). Identify the speaker in this verse.
 - (a). Compare the speaker in 6:14 with the speaker in 6:12.
 - (b). How would you account for this change?
 - (2). How did “the LORD” deal with Gideon’s evaluation?
 - (3). What is the significance of the words of “the LORD” “Have I not sent you?”
 - e. In 6:15, Gideon responded to the LORD.
 - (1). Read this verse carefully. How would you describe Gideon’s feelings?
 - (2). What difference does it make that Gideon’s family was “least in Manasseh”?
 - (3). Why was it important that Gideon was the youngest of his father’s house?
 - f. In 6:16, the LORD responded to Gideon.
 - (1). In this verse, the LORD made two promises. What are they?
 - (2). Think carefully about the LORD’S statement.
 - (a). What pieces of information does this statement convey?
 - (b). What picture is conveyed when the LORD said “as one man”?
 - (3). If you were Gideon, how would this make you feel?
 - g. In 6:17, Gideon, again, responded to the LORD.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

- (1). This is an “IF...THEN” (conditional) statement.
 - (a). What is the “IF” part?
 - (b). What is the “THEN” part?
 - (c). Identify the areas of Gideon’s disbelief.
- (2). In view of this verse, read Hebrews 11:32.
 - (a). What does this verse say about Gideon?
 - (b). How can we understand this evaluation in lieu of the conversation in Judges 6:17?
- h. There seems to be a shift in Gideon’s thinking in 6:18.
 - (1). Identify the change?
 - (2). How can we explain this offering when their food supply was so short; when life was so threatening because of the Midianites?
5. In Judges 6:19-24, Gideon entertained the angel of the LORD.
 - a. In 6:19, the author described Gideon’s presentation of the sacrifice.
 - (1). What does this sacrifice tell you about Gideon?
 - (2). What would this sacrifice mean to Gideon?
 - b. In 6:20, the angel of the LORD gave Gideon some strange instructions.
 - (1). What were the instructions?
 - (2). Can you see any reason why the angel of the LORD would give such instructions?
 - (3). If you were in Gideon’s position, what would you have done?
 - (4). How would you have felt?
 - c. In 6:21, the angel of the LORD consummated the sacrifice.
 - (1). What was accomplished by this sacrifice?
 - (2). If you were in Gideon’s position, what would you have thought?
 - d. In 6:22, the angel of the LORD vanished.
 - (1). What was Gideon’s reaction?
 - (2). Why would he react that way?
 - e. In 6:23, there is a response to Gideon.
 - (1). How do you account for the fact that in 6:22 the angel of the LORD vanished, but in 6:23 it was the LORD Himself who responded?
 - (2). There are three parts to this response. What is the essential message the LORD gave Gideon?
 - f. In 6:24, Gideon responded to the message of 6:23.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). Look at the name Gideon gave the altar. What does this suggest to you?
6. In 6:25-27, God commanded Gideon to destroy his father’s altar to Baal and Asherah.
 - a. Read 6:14 and then 6:25.

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- (1). God commanded Gideon to destroy the Midianites. In 6:25, when it was time to start, God commanded him to destroy his father's altars. What does tearing down the altar to Baal have to do with delivering Israel from the Midianites?
- (2). Read the verse again. What pieces of information do you find there?
- (3). In 6:25, God commanded Gideon to tear down his father's altar to Baal and Asherah. What is the significance of the fact that he was to do this at night?
- b. In 6:26, God commanded Gideon to build an altar to God.
 - (1). Where was this altar to be built?
 - (2). What was the significance of using the Asherah statue as fuel for the sacrifice to Jehovah?
 - (3). Why would God insist that this sacrifice be a bull?
- c. In 6:27, the author identified Gideon's real feelings about destroying his father's altar to Baal.
 - (1). What feelings did Gideon have?
 - (2). What does this tell you about Gideon?
 - (3). What does this tell you about God?
 - (4). Read verse 27 again. What new pieces of information do you find here?
 - (5). Think carefully again about this verse.
 - (a). What dangers would Gideon face from the family? From the community?
 - (b). If Gideon took ten servants to help with this task, what does this say about the size of the task? About the ability to maintain secrecy about who did it?
7. In Judges 6:28-32, the author described the reaction of the people to Gideon's actions.
 - a. In 6:28, the author described the scene which greeted the people the next morning.
 - (1). Compare verse 28 with what God previously told Gideon to do. What did you discover?
 - (2). What is suggested by the fact that they discovered this in the morning?
 - b. In 6:29, the people assessed blame for this tragic action.
 - (1). How would they know this?
 - (2). Read the verse again in an attempt to discover the emotional tone the author sought to convey.
 - (a). What is the emotional tone?
 - (b). How do you know this?
 - c. In 6:30, the men of the community took action.
 - (1). Read the verse again to gather any pieces of cultural information you can find. What did you find?
 - (2). The announcement of punishment tells us something of how serious this crime was in that community.
 - (a). How serious was it?
 - (b). Why was it so serious?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

- (3). What does this verse tell us about their legal system?
- (4). What does this verse tell us about their collection of evidence?
- d. In 6:31, there appears to be some confusing information.
 - (1). We know that Joash had an idol to Baal and Asherah on his property, but here he made what appears to be disparaging remarks about Baal. How can we explain this seeming contradiction?>
 - (2). On what grounds can Joash put someone to death for defending Baal?
 - (3). Notice that Joash said, “if he is a god...” What is the significance of this carefully worded statement?
 - (4). Notice that Joash said, “because SOMEONE has torn down his altar...” What is the significance of his wording?
 - (5). What was Joash trying to say by the way he worded this statement?
- e. In 6:32, Joash changed Gideon’s name.
 - (1). In a Bible dictionary, look up the meaning of Gideon’s new name – Jerubbaal.
 - (a). What does the name mean?
 - (b). Why would Joash give him that name?
 - (c). What does this say about Joash?
 - (2). What does this verse tell us about the real feelings of Joash concerning the power of Baal?
 - (3). What could account for this apparent change in the thinking of Joash?
- 8. In Judges 6:33-35, Gideon collected men to form the army with which he was to defeat the Midianites.
 - a. In 6:33, the Midianites, Amalekites and “sons of the east” met and camped in the valley of Jezareel.
 - (1). Why did the three groups have to go when Israel was already a subdued nation?
 - (2). Why would they go up to Jezreel instead of the place where Gideon lived?
 - b. In 6:34, Gideon made his first aggressive act as a commander.
 - (1). What was the action?
 - (b). What did it mean?
 - (3). Who were the Abiezrites who came to follow him? Could some of them be the same ones who opposed his destruction of the Baal and Asherah?
 - c. In 6:35, Gideon sent messengers to enlist men from different tribes to join him in the fight.
 - (1). On a map of Palestine, find the location of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, as well as Manasseh, where Gideon lived.
 - (2). As you study this map, what did you learn?
 - (3). Why would Gideon choose these places?
- 9. In Judges 6:34-40, the author told the story of the fleece.
 - a. In 6:36, 37, Gideon approached God with a conditional (IF...THEN) request.

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- (1). What condition was bothering Gideon?
 - (2). What request did Gideon make?
 - (3). What promise did Gideon make?
 - (4). What does this tell us about Gideon's frame of mind?
 - (5). How could this request for a miracle convince Gideon when God's word had not convinced him?
 - b. In 6:38, God responded to Gideon's request.
 - (1). What did God do?
 - (2). What does this tell us about God?
 - (3). The text says that Gideon rose early in the morning and squeezed the fleece. What does this tell us about Gideon?
 - c. In 6:39, Gideon responded to God's miracle.
 - (1). How did Gideon respond?
 - (2). Did Gideon keep his promise?
 - (3). Why would Gideon fail to believe when his own criteria were met?
 - (4). Why would Gideon begin his response with, "Do not let thine anger burn against me..."?
 - d. In 6:40, God responded to Gideon's inappropriate request.
 - (1). How did God respond?
 - (2). What does this say about God?
10. Review your study of Judges chapter six.
- a. What did you discover About God?
 - b. What did you discover about Gideon?
 - c. How does all of this apply to your life?

LESSON 6: JUDGES 6:1 – 40

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There are eight paragraphs in the forty verses of Judges chapter six. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

6:1-6	Israel sinned; Midian Conquered Israel
6:7-10	Israel Cried to God' God Sent a Prophet
6:11-18	An Angel Appeared to Gideon
6:19-24	Gideon Entertained the Angel
6:25-27	The Lord Commanded Gideon: Tear down Altar; Build One
6:28-32	People Angry Over Altar Destruction
6:33-35	Gideon Collects Army
6:36-40	The Fleece

Judges 6:1-6 - Israel Sinned: Midian Conquered Israel

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. Judges 6:1

Notice the way the author used repetition to add emphasis to his statements. Compare this verse with one written previously:

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabim king of Canaan...Judges 4:1, 2a

The scenario is exactly the same. The judge died and the people returned to their sin. There is one change. In chapter four, God sold Israel into the hands of the Canaanites. In chapter six, God gave them into the hands of Midian. God gave them into the hands of two different nations. In both cases, God gave them into the hands of a pagan idolatrous people. In chapter four the people were foreigners. In chapter six, however, the people were alienated relatives who had done them wrong in their own lifetime. In this process God had cursed these nations. Nevertheless, God gave Israel into their hands in order to bring them back to Himself.

There is an incident here that bears our observation. Notice that each of the Judges comes from a different tribe. Notice also that each time Israel sinned, God gave them into the hands of a different pagan nation. We will attempt to keep this in mind as we study the book to see if it proves to be true in each case. If so, it has a definite impact upon the message of the book.

And the power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. Judges 6:2

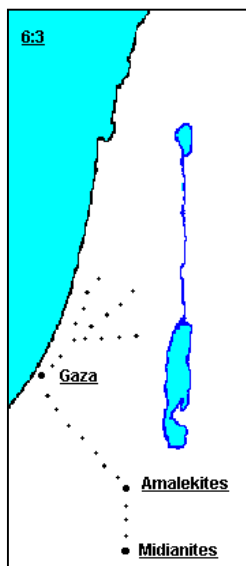
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The Midianites were distant relatives of Israel. The tribe began with Midian, the fourth son of Abraham by Keturah. Midian was one of the sons who was given gifts and sent off into the eastern desert. His mother, Keturah, was the daughter of a Canaanite trader. In the time of Joseph, the Midianites were intermarried with the Ishmaelites and later with most of the descendants of Esau and Ishmael. The Midianites, like their relatives the Canaanites, were pagan people like most of the desert people.

It is not just that Midian conquered Israel. They were strong enough to maintain that control. Because of previous unfortunate relationships, the Midianites were brutal in their treatment of Israel.

The text speaks of the "dens." These dens tell us just how terribly the Midianites treated Israel. The conquered people would resort to caves to hide both themselves and their belongings so that the conquerors would not take everything they had. The mountains and the caves were the conquered people's best friend. Many captive people lived in these dens during the entirety of the captivity of their people. This was especially true for the women and the children. Most every conqueror would humiliate the women and children in an effort to greatly increase the humiliation of the men who served in the conquered army.

For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. Judges 6:3, 4



There is obviously some plundering here, but there is much more. The Midianites were destroying all the food in Israel. Heavy taxation was only the beginning of the abuse of Israel by the Midianites. As you study this chapter, it becomes evident that Midian did not want to just take things away from Israel. They wanted to destroy Israel altogether. As seen in this verse, Midian came with the help of the Amalekites. Amalek was one of the sons of Esau, a natural enemy of the rest of Israel. The Midianites and Amalekites came not to take booty from Israel, but to make sure that the food that Israel had sown did not mature.

On the map you can see just how determined these eastern relatives were to destroy Israel. They had come from east and south of the Dead Sea. They destroyed the crops and took the animals from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean shore at Gaza. What food there would be in the southern part of the Israel would come from this area. The Midianites and Amalekites made sure that there would be

nothing to grow.

The Midianites not only destroyed the food Israel planted; they also took what food-producing animals the Israelites had. Conquest was, for them, a way to get rid of Israel permanently. This is a scorched earth policy without fire and they had no qualms about it.

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For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. Judges 6:5

Again, the author described the way these bitter enemies planned to wipe Israel from the map. They essentially moved into Israel with their flocks. Now, there was already insufficient pasture in this barren part of Israel for the use of the people of Israel. The Midianites were excellent herdsman and they had large flocks. They decided to give their own pastureland a rest and moved their huge flocks into the barren part of Israel. There they would consume what little there was in Israel. This left nothing for the people of Israel.

The author used a vivid image to describe how this looked. He said that they would "come in like locusts for number." The people of that area were familiar with locusts. These creatures had been the scourge of the land on many occasions. It was as though they would blot out the sun. In huge swarms the cloud of locusts moved across the scanty clad hillsides of Israel destroying everything in sight. In the same way the Midianites and Amalekites swarmed across the only pasturage Israel had and left nothing behind.

The author mentioned specifically the coming of hordes of camels. These animals ate much more than any of the other animals that were kept by the desert people. Thus was the lot of Israel under the heavy hand of their distant relatives. As a final description, the author gave an enlightening close to the sentence. He said, "They came into the land to devastate it." Their purpose was clear. Leave nothing for Israel. Make it impossible for Israel to survive. They wanted to kill off the Israelites by starvation.

When the camels had eaten all the food that there was, the Midianites could go home and have plenty for their animals to eat. Israel, however, was already home and there was nowhere else to go.

So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD. Judges 6:6

Does this statement sound familiar? When people do us wrong the first time, it is considered a mistake. It is forgivable. The second time it is considered intentional and not as easily forgiven. When the wrong is repeated again and again, it is usually considered beyond forgiveness. Nevertheless, that is exactly what Israel had done many times over.

The author was master of the understatement. To say, "Israel was brought very low," was to border on the edges of dishonesty. They were brought to what would otherwise have been extinction.

The people of Israel had repeatedly sinned and just as often had been abused by the pagan neighbors they refused to drive out. Now, Israel did as they had done each time life became more than they could possibly bear, they cried to the Lord. Notice that the author used the name "Lord" for God. This is the name that is used most often in situations of justice.

Judges 6:7-10 - Israel Cried to God; God Sent Prophet

Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, "Thus

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says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'It was I who brought you up from Egypt, and brought you out from the house of slavery. Judges 6:7, 8

Israel cried to the Lord about Midian and God sent them a prophet. I suspect that they would rather that God had sent them a great general with a magnificent army. Still, God sent the prophet. This prophet, whose name has not been given to us, brought a message to them from God. By sending a prophet, God indicated to Israel the nature of their problem. It was not military, but spiritual.

Observe the way God identified Himself. There are three different identifications:

- a. **"The LORD"** – The word is "'yahweh" (יהוה). This word stresses the eternality of God and is usually found in situations where the justice of God is being pronounced. That, of course, is what happened in the context. This name is used again when the text says that the LORD sent a prophet.
- b. **"The LORD the God of Israel"** – In verse eight, the author spoke of God as "the LORD the God of Israel." The word "LORD," again, is "Yahweh." The word "God," however, is "elohim" (אלהים). This name for God stresses the omnipotence of God. It is used, most often, in situations where the mercy of God is being highlighted. When used in conjunction with "Yahweh," as in this verse, it usually signifies the merciful judge. Add to this understanding that the author added the words "of Israel." Jehovah was the God who uniquely identified with the people of Israel as their God. Baal was the deity who identified with the Philistines and the Mediates, but "Elohim" is the God who selected Israel as His people.
- c. **"The LORD your God"** – Again, the word "LORD" is "Yahweh" and the word "God" is "Elohim." Whenever the two names are used together, usually it attempts to stress the fact that God is the merciful judge. There is a distinct change in the way these names are used in verse ten. There is a progression in these four verses. The author first spoke of "Jehovah." There is no personal identification in this name whatsoever. In the next usage, however, God is referred to as "the LORD the God of Israel." There is a measure of limitation here. God limited Himself to being the God of His people Israel. He is personally identified with Israel rather than any of the other nations in the Near East. In verse ten, however, the identification is far more personal. "Jehovah" is "your God" as opposed to the gods of the nations.

The message the prophet brought might have surprised Israel. Speaking for God, he said, "It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery." This would have been a surprise because they did not feel a need for a history lesson, but for a way to survive. God did not identify Himself as a loving God. He rather identified Himself as the one who had brought them out of Egypt. This stressed the fact that God was faithful and powerful. He was the God who delivered them from slavery. This stressed His compassion for the people He claimed as His own. This was part of what they had forgotten about God.

And I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, Judges 6:9

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God continued His message through the unnamed prophet. They would smile to hear God remind them that He had delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians. They did not remember this personally, but certainly the elders of their family had told them this.

They were equally happy to hear of God delivering them from the many peoples who wanted to oppress them on the road from Egypt to Canaan. God even reminded them that He had not only given them victory over the people who oppressed them, but gave Israel the lands of the people who wanted to destroy them. This is a powerful God and that was the message that the Prophet was to convey to Israel on this occasion.

and I said to you, "I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me." "' Judges 6:10

The next part of the message from the prophet would not be quite as welcomed news. He reminded them what God had said to them, "I am the Lord your God." Jehovah may have been the God of Israel as they left Egypt, but they had long since failed to revere Him as their God. They had, rather, taken to worshipping the Baals of the people among whom the lived.

They would not want to be reminded that God had forbidden them to "fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live." That is exactly what they had done. Thus the prophet closed this part of his message with the words, "but you have not obeyed me." Looking for a message of hope from the prophet, Israel was soundly disappointed to only receive a rebuke for their disobedience. They saw nothing in the message of the prophet that gave them hope that God would deliver them, in spite of their repeated disobedience, as He had done repeatedly in the past. This had to be a very sad day in Israel.

There is a contrast in verses seven through ten. The author listed several things that the prophet told them that God had done on Israel's behalf:

1. God brought them out of Egypt.
2. God terminated their slavery.
3. God delivered Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, even when they had fled the country.
4. God dispossessed the people living in the land of Israel.
5. God gave the land to the people of Israel.
6.]God claimed them as His people.
7. God enabled them to live without fear of the gods of the Amorites.

On the other side of the ledger, the prophet described a severe contrast. He said, "BUT you have not obeyed me." In spite of all that God had done on behalf of Israel, still, they did not obey the commands of the Lord.

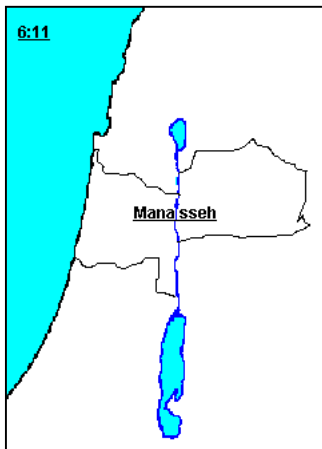
This statement highlights just how terrible it was that the people of Israel rebelled against the commands of the Lord. In spite of all that God had done for them, still they did not obey His commands. The emphasis here is ingratitude.

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Judges 6:11-18 - An Angel Appeared to Gideon

Then the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. Judges 6:11

The fact that the author spoke of the angel of the Lord sitting "under the oak that was in Ophrah," suggests that this was probably the only oak or terribinth tree in the area. It suggests that it was an area that was rather barren.



This tree, according to the text, belonged to Joash who was the father of Gideon. The exact location of Ophrah is uncertain. We are certain, however, that it was located in Manasseh. The map will give some idea of its location.

The text tells us that Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress. The Israelites built a round tower from which they could keep an eye on their grape harvest. In the lower level of this structure was the place where they would normally press the grapes into juice in order to make wine. This was a secluded area. Gideon was hiding in this enclosure attempting to remove the wheat from the hulls and straw. Had he done this in the open, he would have lost all of it to the Midianites. This is the motivation of fear. This, usually, is not a great recommendation for the leader of a besieged people. That is, nevertheless, where the angel of the Lord found Gideon.

And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." Judges 6:12

The message of the angel would both shock and anger Gideon. If God was with them, then why did Gideon have to hide to thresh out a little grain for the family to eat? If God was with him, then why was Israel being destroyed by the Midianites who refused to worship Jehovah?

The angel of the Lord also referred to Gideon as "O valiant warrior." Certainly, there are many ways Gideon would have identified himself, but "valiant warrior" was not one of them. If he was a valiant warrior, then why was he hiding to beat out a little wheat to eat? If he was a valiant warrior, then why was Israel still in bondage and he was doing nothing to change that problem?

Put yourself in Gideon's shoes. You are hiding in fear and the angel calls you "O valiant warrior." This would be confusing at best. It would be easy to think that the angel was mocking you. Those would not be words one would want to hear at such a time.

The thing that this suggests is that God can see the potential in us when we are failing. Football announcers see a great plan and can only say glowing things about the player who made the outstanding play. Let that player make a horrible error, and they will forget his great plays and could only say unfortunate things about his ability and commitment to the game. God is different.

The angel said, "The Lord is with you." It appears they had the same problem we have. When we think of God being with us, we think of everything going well. We think

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of prosperity and everyone saying nice things about us. God is with us whether or not the conditions seem favorable.

Tucked away within this statement is a key to Gideon's victory. The LORD was with him. This meant that Gideon did not need thousands of soldiers. God was with him. He did not need the weaponry that his adversaries had. God was with him and that was all he needed.

You may have heard it many times. A football announcer describes an outstanding play and can only speak of the player in glowing terms. The very next play the same great player makes a mistake and the announcer sounds as though the player never made a decent play in his life. God is not like that. Even in our weakest moments, God can see the potential for good that lies within us.

Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." Judges 6:13

The name "LORD" appears four times in this verse. It is important to deal with each statement in a careful fashion:

1. **"O my lord"** – The word "lord" is "adonai." This word usually identifies "owner" or "master." It is a term that a slave would use to address his owner. When used as a name for God, this term identifies one with limitless power. In the Ugaritic, a northwestern Semitic language, the term means "lord" and is sometimes used to identify "father." Gideon used the term in this way in this instance.
2. **"If the LORD"** – the word "LORD" is "Jehovah" (יהוה). This unspeakable name for God stresses the fact that God is eternal and just.
3. **"Did not the LORD"** – Here, again, the name "LORD" is "Jehovah." The fact that God is eternal strongly suggests that God is not only eternal, but also changeless. That is the stress of Gideon's statement.
4. **"Now the LORD"** – Here, again, the name is "Jehovah." As will be shown, shortly, Gideon was dealing with the fact that God is eternal and changeless, but seems, at least, to be changing.

Gideon's response was much like one would expect under these circumstances. As you read this verse, you can detect confusion on the part of Gideon. He does not believe that the Lord is with them. He does not believe the Father's report of the way God helped them in the Exodus. He is convinced that God has abandoned them because of their former sins, and perhaps because of their present evils as well. He attributes the victory of the Midianites as an action that God initiated. This kind of thinking prevails when people become involved in idol worship because the idols are always thought of as doing things that would hurt the people who worship them. Their worship is a worship of fear, not love.

There is a series of conditional statements in this verse. Notice the "IF...THEN..." structure of the sentence. Observe that each one focuses on the doubt that the Lord is with them.

- a. "IF the Lord is with us..."

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- b. THEN - Why has all this happened to us?
 - a. IF the Lord is with us
- b. THEN where are all His miracles our fathers told us about? saying, "Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?"

Gideon then vented his spleen saying, "Now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." His statement is partially true. God had not abandoned them. God had delivered them into the hands of Midian. Gideon's understanding was based on the idea that if God was with them, everything would be fine and they would be free. That of course was not the case and never has been. There are times, such as that of Gideon and the people of Israel, when God has to allow us to suffer in order to get our attention; in order to help us see our need of His help.

The angel said that the LORD was with Gideon. In this verse, Gideon concluded that the LORD had abandoned them. Gideon's harsh words grow out of at least two understandings:

1. If God is with us, this would not happen. In Gideon's mind, the presence of God precludes any such humiliation and privation. If God is present, then only good can happen to His people.
2. If God delivered Gideon's forefathers from Egypt, but allowed him to suffer under the abuse of these pagan people, then he felt that God had changed.

It would be easy to judge Gideon harshly. It would be easy, that is, except for the fact that we can easily identify with his words and feelings. In the pressure of opposition and apparent costly defeat, we often wonder if God is with us. We feel very much alone. Like Elijah, we think we are the only ones who stand for God. We, then, wonder if God is doing anything about the tragedy that we feel.

And the LORD looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?" Judges 6:14

Notice that the author has changed the identity of the speaker. He said, "And the Lord looked at him and said..." It is the Lord that Gideon saw in the person of an angel. The Lord gave Gideon a command, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian." This was an awe-inspiring command. God commanded Gideon to use his strength, which he did not recognize, to deliver his people from Midian. God worked through the total investment of Gideon's strength and ability. This has always been the case. It appears that the strength, of which the LORD spoke, was the fact that God had sent him. This was enough to guarantee success.

God said to Gideon, "Have I not sent you?" The import here is the fact that God sent Gideon to this task was all that he needed. It was all the encouragement he needed. It was all the help that he needed. God commanded it and that was all that was necessary. The fact that Gideon had no experience had nothing to do with the outcome.

And he said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." Judges 6:15

We can sympathize with Gideon. We have all done the same thing repeatedly. He doubted that he had the background necessary for the task. "How shall I deliver Israel?" He

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was assuming that his own ability was all that he had to rely upon and knew that that would not be sufficient.

Notice the rest of Gideon's reply. "My family is the least in Manasseh." Manasseh was not one of the tribes that held great respect in Israel. They indeed were the center of much controversy. The fact that he came from Manasseh would be a hindrance to him rather than a help. He continued, "I am the youngest in my father's house." No one respected the youngest son in the household. He would have to give respect to all his older brothers, but they held him in total disrespect on all matters, all the time. Gideon's point is well taken. He came from a tribe no one held in respect. His place in his father's house was the one no one even in the family would respect. This is the worst possible scenario for leadership. That, of course, was just what God wanted. It would always be clear that if Gideon were successful it would be because of the help of God and not because of his own ability or position.

But the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." Judges 6:16

The Lord's response would be a surprising one to Gideon and perhaps not too encouraging. God did not promise to give him a huge army well trained. God promised to be with him. God had already been with them and they had a horrible servitude to show for it. Nevertheless, the promise of help God gave was His presence, "I will be with you."

The way that this verse is written suggests that the fact that God would be with him determined that Gideon would defeat the Midianites as though he were doing it all by himself.

So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou who speakest with me. Judges 6:17

Put yourself in Gideon's shoes. You have every reason to believe that God has abandoned you and yet God is saying He would be with you and that you would be victorious over your worst possible enemy. It is nothing short of amazing that Gideon was able to consider this possibility at all. Nevertheless, that is what he did.

We tend to castigate Gideon for asking for a sign. One wonders why he would not ask for a sign given the conditions in which this conversation was carried on. Gideon needed confirmation that what was being said was reality. The idea just did not seem reasonable to him at all.

If you look carefully at Gideon's response, it is clear that Gideon's doubt was not whether or not God could do what He had said. His doubt was whether or not it was really God who was speaking to him. He was saying, "If you show me a sign then I will know that it is really You who speaks with me now."

Some people have faulted Gideon for his lack of faith. It would be easy to do that. It puts things in perspective to be reminded that Gideon did, in fact, get included in faith's hall of fame, Hebrews 11. There are times when the pain of the moment makes it hard to remember just how powerful and present God really is for us.

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"Please do not depart from here, until I come back to Thee, and bring out my offering and lay it before Thee." And He said, "I will remain until you return." Judges 6:18

There seems to be a shift in Gideon's attitude in this verse. Previously, he asked for a sign so that he could be sure that this was God speaking with him. Now there appears to be an assumption that it is God, but no sign had yet been given. There is no hint in the text concerning why this change came about.

Gideon committed himself in advance. Before going into the tent, he said he was going to prepare an offering to lay before God. We must remember that this is the man who was hiding so as to prepare a little wheat so that they would have something to eat. This sacrifice, whatever it might be, will be a sacrifice of their diet for some time. This suggests just how important a statement this was to Gideon. He was giving what little food he had. Though the text does not say, it appears that though Gideon had been hiding to prepare the wheat, he now would serve the food out in the open. This suggests a heightened level of confidence.

God responded to Gideon's request. We might expect that God would be upset with Gideon because he had not been able to believe that God was with him. Nevertheless, Gideon asked God to wait and God agreed to wait. This gives us a picture of just how patient God is with His children who are less than trusting.

Judges 6:19-24 - Gideon Entertained the Angel

Then Gideon went in and prepared a kid and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak, and presented them. Judges 6:19

This is shocking! Just previously, Gideon was trying to beat out a little wheat so that they would have something to eat and now he has gone into the tent to prepare a young goat and some unleavened bread to give to God as a sacrifice. In most instances, we fail to comprehend just how great a sacrifice this was for Gideon and his family. The fact that the text says nothing of Gideon having to check this with his father may well suggest that Gideon has already taken over the care of the family as the heir of his father and was running the entire family clan. We do not know that for sure, but it is feasible.

Notice that the author told us how Gideon presented this sacrifice. The fact that he mentioned putting the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot suggests that many hours were consumed in the preparation of this meal. We must also remind ourselves that all of this had to be done secretly because he would not want this to be discovered by the Midianites. There is a problem. It would not be possible to cook a young goat so as to cook the meat and secure the broth and then bake the bread without there being some unusual odors that they would not have been supposed to have because of the theft of the Midianites. This tells us the extent of the great risk that Gideon took in preparing this sacrifice to give to God. It was absolutely important for Gideon to prepare this meal and give it to God. Nevertheless, Gideon took that risk; prepared the meal and now presented it to the Lord.

And the angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. Judges 6:20

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There is an interesting situation in this verse. Read verses 12-20 again. You will observe that there is a very careful use of the names for this person who is visiting Gideon:

6:12	Angel of the Lord - (Jehovah)
6:13	Lord - (Adonai)
6:14	Lord - (Jehovah)
6:15	Lord - (Adonai)
6:16	Lord - (Jehovah)
6:20	Angel of the Lord - (Elohim)

There are two very special pieces of information in this observation:

- a. In 6:12 the author spoke of "the angel of the Lord." In the following four verses, the author speaks of this person as the "Lord" Himself. The next time God is mentioned in the text, 6:20, the author returned to calling this visitor "the angel of the Lord." In all probability this suggests that the author is speaking of the fact that God came to speak to Gideon. It may also suggest that the physical appearance may have seemed like an angel to Gideon.
- b. There are three different names for God used in these six verses. The names are as follows:
 - (1). **Jehovah** - This is the unspeakable name for God. This name stresses God's eternity and is found in a majority of contexts where justice is being described. For instance, it is the name most often used in the writings of the different prophets as they pronounced the judgment of God upon His rebellious people.
 - (2). **Adonai** - This is the most popular name for God among the Jewish people. Whenever they encounter the name "Jehovah" in their text, they will see the name "Jehovah," but they will say the name "Adonai." The word means "owner," "master." It is an expression of devastating power against evil. It is the most personal name for God in the Old Testament. As you look at the table above, you will notice that the author used the names "Jehovah" and "Adonai" alternately.
 - (3). **"Elohim"** - This name for Deity is usually translated "God" in our English texts. This name focuses our attention on the almighty power of God. It is the name for God most often used in contexts that stress the mercy of God. It is used in Genesis 1:1 and also in the description of how God took Adam and Eve from the garden to protect them. Again, it was used to describe the saving of Noah and his family.

Observe that the author began with the name "Jehovah," which stressed the justice that Israel so desperately needed to remember at this time. The author then used this name alternately with the name "Adonai" which focused attention upon the fact that the owner/master of Israel was the God of devastating power. Gideon needed to be reminded of

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this great truth. The author concluded with the name "Elohim" which stressed, again, the fact that God is Almighty, but emphasized His mercy upon beleaguered people.

Think about this verse for a moment. Put yourself in the place of Gideon. You are hiding, risking your life, trying to beat out a little wheat to make bread. God comes to you and, convinced that this is God, you prepare a sacrifice that takes the very best provisions you have. God then tells you to pour out the meal on a rock. What would you think? It had to take all the control that Gideon could muster just to do what God commanded. Certainly, Gideon would wonder why would God waste this precious food when they have so little, since they could barely succeed in hiding this meat and other provisions from the Midianites.

We must remember that in verse 18, Gideon said that he was going to bring his offering to present to God. Offerings were placed on an altar made of unhewn stones to be burned. It would be difficult to see perfectly good food being burnt up, but that was part of what made the offering meaningful, it had come at great cost. You will remember the words of David,"

However, the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 2 Samuel 24:24

Though there would be ambivalent feelings in Gideon, he knew that to make a sacrifice to God would be costly. He had taken that into account before he requested that God wait until he had prepared the meal. He was not surprised that the sacrifice was consumed, not eaten. This gives us an insight into just how important it was to Gideon to make this offering.

One must marvel that Gideon was willing to follow these instructions when they seemed so strange and unreasonable. We should also remember that this was mild compared to what God was going to ask Gideon to do shortly. In this respect, God was preparing Gideon, little by little, for the tremendous challenge he was about to place before Gideon. This tells us something about how God deals with us in the growth process of our faith.

Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. Judges 6:21

Observe the different pieces of information about this offering.

- a. This offering was totally consumed. There were two specific offerings that were to be totally consumed. The sin offering and the burnt offering were totally consumed and none of the animal was left for the use of the priests.
- b. The fire came from the rock and not from the staff which the Lord held. This is what would have happened in the regular Jewish offerings to God. The sacrifice was placed upon the altar of God and the flames from within consumed every part of the animal.

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This is very difficult for us. We are called to be sacrifices for God. We want that sacrifice to be used in a reasonable way. Thus, we forget that our logic and God's will are two very different things. If the sacrifice has been given to God, then He is free to do whatever He may please to do with it in accordance with His will. Our logic has nothing to do with His use of our lives. It is not uncommon to hear people say, "I teach all week, I don't want to do that on Sunday also." The same kind statement can be heard by most other vocations. We too easily forget that the sacrifice belongs to God. He can do with it as He pleases. Gideon understood that fact and said nothing about the way the food was used.

The author then indicated that the angel vanished from the sight of Gideon. This would be as frustrating as it was trying in the effort to determine what the angel of the Lord wanted.

When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." Judges 6:22

There is a bit of confusion in this verse. It seemed clear, in the previous verse that Gideon knew that this was, in fact, Jehovah who stood before him. The text does not say how Gideon knew that this was the "angel of the Lord." It only states that Gideon now saw that this was "the angel of the Lord (Jehovah)."

Though the text does not say so, Gideon was frightened at this point. Observe that he called the one before both the Lord (Jehovah) and "the angel of the Lord" (Jehovah).

The thing that frightened Gideon also gives us an insight into the mind of Gideon. The Jewish people of that day thought that to see the face of God meant certain death. Joshua had this same fear as did Abraham. The fact that this frightened Gideon tells us that he knew this much about the worship of God. He was trained in the worship of Jehovah even if that had not been where the family participated in worship in recent times.

The way Gideon responded to the consumption of the offering tells us something of just how frightened he was. First, notice that he spoke to his guest as both "the angel of the Lord" and as "O Lord Jehovah." The two identifications are not synonyms for each other, even though it appears that Gideon used them this way.

Second, observe that Gideon called the visitor "O Lord God." The names translated "Lord God" are "Adonai Jehovah." These inflections suggest that Gideon was upset at a higher level.

And the LORD said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." Judges 6:23

Now the author spoke of the visitor as the "Lord." Despite Gideon's inability to believe as thoroughly as God would want him to, still the Lord showed great concern for him in his moment of frustration and great fear.

The Lord said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die." Here, again, the idea of dying when you see the face of God was prominent in the thinking of Gideon.

This verse tells us something about God. The idols of the Canaanites brought their worshippers fear, not peace. There is, however, no desire to intimidate or frighten in the plan of God. Thus, He could say to Gideon, "Do not fear, you shall not die." The wor-

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shippers of idols were usually sure that if things did not go just as their idol wished that they would die and there was really no place for peace in their thinking. They had to be on the alert at all times because the idols were considered to be deceptive and eager to punish, especially if you were not looking for it.

We should note that God's actions were unusual for an individual who has ultimate power. Persons in such a position usually want to maintain that fear as a means of control. God is different. Throughout the rest of this book, you will be able to observe that the author gives increasing glimpses of what God is like.

Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. Judges 6:24

An altar was more than a place to burn a sacrifice. It was a statement of belief as well. One doesn't build an altar unless there is a belief in the God to whom it is raised. This was Gideon's way of asserting that he believed in Jehovah. This was not a great work of art. An altar was usually just a group of stones piled one upon another creating a platform upon which sacrifices could be offered. They did not even cement these stones together. It was not necessary to give the altar a name. The people of that culture used names to express both belief and desire. Gideon, who lived in anything but a peaceful circumstance, believed that Jehovah was the peace that Israel needed so desperately. Thus he named the altar, "The Lord is peace." The author followed this statement with an aside that gives us insight. He said, "To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." This tells us that this passage was written a long time after the events that are described in it. This being the case, it also tells us that people also accepted this affirmation, else they might well have torn it down.

Judges 6:25-27 - The Lord Commanded Gideon: Tear Down Altar; Build One

Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; Judges 6:25

Observe, God did not ask Gideon to do a thing as long as his commitment to God was not firmly established. On the very same day, however, God called upon Gideon to act upon the faith he had affirmed.

God said to Gideon, "take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old." In many parts of the world, a farmer is personally attached to his work-animals. One might suspect that this is what the angel meant when he said, "take your father's bull..." The angel also mentioned another bull, one seven years old. This would indicate a fully mature animal, not one that was not yet fully grown.

Gideon's task was to "pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father." This informs us that Gideon's father was a participant in the worship of Baal. We now have a divided house. Joash, the head of the house worshipped Baal. Gideon, his son, who was to follow his example and do his bidding, worshipped Jehovah. This created an awkward situation both for Joash and his son Gideon. Nevertheless, Gideon had made his faith known and was committed to obey Jehovah. Pulling down the altar of Baal involved ei-

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ther throwing down the stones of the altar one by one or by placing a rope around the altar and using the bulls to pull apart the altar.

There is a bit of irony here. One of the images of the idol Baal was a bull. God instructed Gideon to take his father's beast of burden, a bull, and tear down the altar of the idol, which was symbolized by a bull.

The command to Gideon also included the instruction to "cut down the asherah that is beside it." An Asherah is a Canaanite goddess who was the consort of Baal. The Asherah was in fact an image of a woman carved from a tall tree. This Asherah was a symbol of devotion to the female goddess of fertility. Though it is sometimes overlooked, the worship of Baal and his consort the goddess of fertility was inevitably a sexual orgy. Gideon was asked to distance himself from his father's practices of worship. He had to first take his stand at home.

You will note that this was an instruction to render this place of worship useless for good. This was not a temporary setback for idolatry. They would have to start from scratch again if idol worship was to be continued. God was asking Gideon to demonstrate that no one, nothing was more important than God in his life. God still does this. The fact that it would take two oxen and one of them seven years old – prime condition – probably suggests the great size of this altar.

This was a most dangerous mission. Not only were the Canaanites very sensitive to this, but the Israelites had become involved in this worship as well. This was more than a territorial concern. These people believed that their god would be angry with them and punish them severely if anyone did not give them worship. Thus, they would be careful to worship their idol and demand that everyone in their area do the same. Gideon was taking a stand against everyone in the entire community. This would strike fear into the hearts of everyone in the area.

and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down. " Judges 6:26

On the rubble of the altar, Gideon was instructed to build an altar to "the Lord your God." The words "the Lord your God" involved two different names for God - "Jehovah" and "Elohim."

These names were not casually chosen. Each had a special meaning and emphasis that Gideon would know quite well.

- a. **Jehovah** - means the eternal one. When Moses told God the people might want to know who sent him and God said, "tell them I am has sent you." "I am" is the name "Jehovah." This name is used specifically in contexts where judgment is emphasized.
- b. **Elohim** - This name emphasizes the fact that God is omnipotent. It is used in contexts where the mercy of God is emphasized.

Gideon was to build an altar to the merciful God of justice. This would be foreign to those who worshipped Baal. This god was known for his fearful, abrasive dealings with those

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who worshipped him. They, therefore, worshipped not out of desire, but out of fear of reprisal.

Again there is irony in these instructions. He was to take the carving of Baal's consort and use it as fuel to burn a bull, the image of the idol Baal whom these people worshipped. All of this was designed to show that Jehovah was greater than Baal and his consort.

We should remember that though this was done at night, it was a noisy procedure. Their ability to carry this out and have no one hear it would be very tenuous at best. This was a very bold move to say the least. In the Canaanite community Baal worship was an integral part of nationalism. It was not just a difference in worship. If one worshipped Baal they were considered loyal to the country. If they refused to worship Baal, they were considered to be traitors and punished in keeping with this great crime. God wanted Gideon to demonstrate that He was more important to Gideon than were the other gods; that He held first place in Gideon's life.

Notice, the sacrifice was to be a bull. There is a visual, symbolic reason involved here. Repeatedly, the image of the idol, Baal, was a bull. It was a way of saying that Baal can be sacrificed to Jehovah; that Jehovah is greater than Baal is.

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had spoken to him; and it came about, because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night. Judges 6:27

This verse leaves us with some questions. We know that Gideon was prepared to do exactly as Jehovah had commanded him. He took ten servants. This was a lot of people, but this was not a small task. One wonders, were these ten servants those who worshipped Jehovah with Gideon?

A slave would do as the master commanded whether he liked the project or not. One suspects that they did worship Jehovah, but it cannot be verified. One can only wonder.

Because they had ten servants one can be sure that his was a very wealthy family. The fact that the servants took part does not mean that they were in favor of what they were doing. Gideon did this by night. The question naturally arises, Why did he do this at night? It could be that he did it because he was afraid to do it during the day. After all, the text does say "he was too afraid of the men of his father's house and the men of the city to do it by day." This affirms that the men of his father's house were as involved in Baal worship as the Canaanites in the community. This would certainly be a strong possibility. That he was afraid was clearly stated. The objects of that fear are also clearly stated - the men of his father's house and the men of the city. What is not clear is whether he was afraid that he would be killed for doing this or whether he feared that they would not allow him to complete the task God had assigned him to do. It may well have been a bit of both, but an emphasis was upon the latter. There would not be any doubt that whether by day or night, the people would surmise whom it was who had done this terrible thing to their idols. The important thing is that God commanded and despite the possible consequences, Gideon obeyed implicitly.

We need to look at the reason the people would be so angry. The pagans believed that if one were to anger Baal and his consort, one would endanger their crops and the yield of

their flocks. The only way to be certain of their prosperity and survival was to keep from angering Baal. These people also thought that if they angered Baal, their wives would have no children and this was threatening to their well being in their old age. It would be like having your Social Security threatened if you did something the government did not like.

Judges 6:28-32 - People Angry Over Altar Destruction

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, and the Asherah that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. Judges 6:28

The verse states that "when the men of the city arose in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was torn down..." They would have noticed this the first thing in the morning. It was their custom to pay homage to their god before they did anything else for the day. They would face the altar and the carved image of the Asherah when saying these prayers. As they turned toward their idol, they would certainly notice that both the altar and the carved pole were missing.

This verse indicates that Gideon did exactly as God commanded. God said, tear down the altar and cut down the Asherah, and offer the second bull on the altar that you build. That is exactly what the Canaanites found when they came to offer their prayers the next morning. If ever there was a case of desecration of the pagan altar, this was it.

This was more than the loss of some very valuable animals. It was an embarrassment to Baal and to his worship.

And they said to one another, "Who did this thing?" And when they searched about and inquired, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash did this thing." Judges 6:29

It is clear from this verse that the men of the city did not know whom it might be who had done this thing. Only after they had "searched about and inquired" did they discover that Gideon was the one who must have done this. This tells us something about Gideon's reputation in the Canaanite community. It was not immediately known that Gideon did not worship Baal, but worshipped Jehovah. They did not have to search very hard to find out that it had to be him. The way this sentence is worded suggests that they considered this a horrible thing to do.

Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it." Judges 6:30

This verse makes it clear just how terrible the men of the city considered this action to be. Gideon was to die for what he had done. Observe that the men of the city did not go and get Gideon, but rather went to his father's house and demanded of Joash that he be brought out. This did two things:

- a. It allowed Joash to be head of his house and bring his own son to justice.
- b. It allowed Joash to show that he was not in partnership with his son in this act. If he would allow his son to be brought out to die, he would in so doing show that he was against what Gideon had done. This whole scenario gave the men of the city information about whether just Gideon was involved or whether it was a family

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decision in which both Gideon and his father Joash were involved. Everything would hinge on how Joash answered their demand and complied or failed to comply with it.

The men of the city made a specific charge against Gideon, "He has torn down the altar of Baal and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it." There was no clear evidence that would indict Gideon for this act. They assumed that it had to be him. They were willing to take Gideon's life on the basis of this flimsy evidence.

This tells us something about the people of the community. They passed judgment upon Gideon before they even spoke to him. This is judgment without due process. They assumed that Gideon was guilty and for this they were going to kill him. They needed a warm, guilty body. Because they could not prove who had done it, Gideon was the most likely suspect and they were willing to let him do the suffering. Having a guilty party was more important than discovering the truth about what they considered to be a great crime.

By the way, one wonders what we would do in a similar situation.

But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar." Judges 6:31

The statement of Joash is a bit startling. It sounds as though Joash was defending the actions of his son. We are not certain that Joash really knew that Gideon had done this. It seems likely that Gideon could have done this and his father have been totally unaware of his actions.

We must remember that the altar and the Asherah were on the property of Joash. Certainly, he was involved in that worship at least to some extent. We are not aware of just how committed Joash was to this form of worship. He may not have affirmed this worship, but he did not feel strongly enough to confront the people who were taking part in violation of their covenant with Jehovah.

Joash spoke of "someone" who had cut down the Asherah and destroyed the altar. He probably knew as well as anyone else who had done this. We must remember that his seeming defense of Gideon was a defense of his own social security. Gideon was his only hope for old age. This defense may have been evidence of what Joash really believed, but was afraid to defend. Realize that Joash had not taken a stand before, but he appeared to be taking such a stand at this late date. He had allowed his property to be a place for the worship of Baal. Now he made an embarrassing statement about Baal. Certainly he was defending his son Gideon, but he was also ridiculing the Baal whom these people worshipped and loved. It certainly sounds as though he was questioning Baal's power. He was certainly making fun of the ability of Baal to defend his own reputation.

Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, "Let Baal contend against him," because he had torn down his altar. Judges 6:32

We must remember that in that day, names had great meaning. In giving Gideon the name "Jerubbaal, Joash was, in effect, throwing down the gauntlet. The name Jerubbaal means "Baal will contend." From this point on, whenever Gideon's name was mentioned, it

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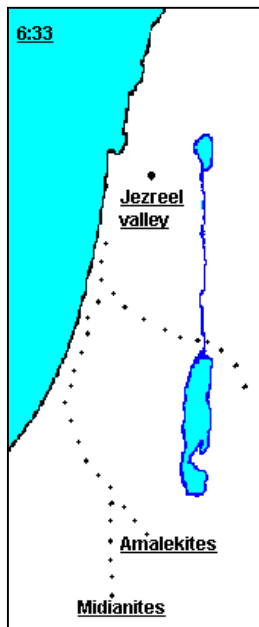
would become a reminder that Joash had challenged Baal to engage in combat with his son and it had not taken place. It was a way of insisting that Baal was not as strong as Gideon was with the help of God. This was an embarrassment to the worshippers of Baal. Joash had made it clear that he did not believe Baal could destroy Gideon. We do not know what happened to make Joash so confident now when he certainly was not that confident before.

It is clear, from this verse, that Joash was admitting that his son had, in fact, torn down the altar and burned the Asherah. It is also clear that Joash used satire to deal with the demands of the people. Notice how he said it, "Let Baal contend against him(Gideon)". Joash urged Baal to contend or engage in combat with his son, Gideon. If he believed Baal was powerful, he would never have urged Baal to engage in combat with his son. The satire indicates a degree of confidence that suggests that Joash was certain his son was safe even though this challenge was made.

Judges 6:33-35 - Gideon Collects an Army

Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. Judges 6:33

The people in that part of the world were loathe to hear a challenge without responding. It was a form of humiliation to allow this and they were not about to let that happen.



This verse gives several pieces of information:

- a. These armies were not in the land of Israel even though they had conquered it previously.
- b. These people came into Israel only to collect taxes and tribute.
- c. This kind of Baal worship was involved in all of the nations that surrounded Israel.

It is not surprising that these desert people were involved in fertility cult worship. Their very lives depended upon good crops, good flocks and the regular birth of children in the family.

These people came to the valley of Jezreel. We need to ask ourselves why these people, from east of the Jordan and Dead Sea, came to this place rather than to Mannish where Gideon was. One possible explanation is that Jezreel, which was located in western Issachar, was a good place to conduct a battle. The place where Gideon lived was mountainous. This meant there were many caves and hiding places and the invading army would have little chance to find and destroy them. Also, it would seem clear to them that Gideon would have sizable support in his home area. That would not be a good staging area for them when they first arrived from their homes east of the Jordan.

So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. Judges 6:34

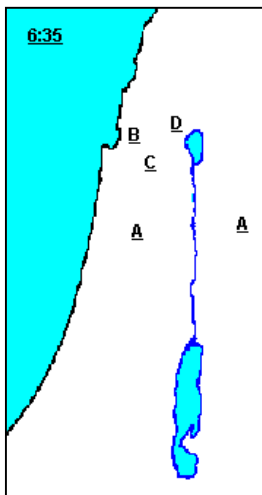
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We should be clear that the Spirit of God was directing this confrontation with idolatry. The Spirit of God directed Gideon as he prepared to do battle with the distant relatives from the east. The trumpet that Gideon blew was a ram's horn. This was the air raid siren in that culture. When they heard the ram's horn, they knew that something threatening had happened and everyone would hurry to see what they could do to help. The people would not only come together, but they would come prepared to do combat.

There is something in this verse that is not altogether clear. it says, "And the Abiezrites were called together to follow him." Who are these Abiezrites? Are they the ones from Gideon's hometown who did not agree with the worship of Baal? Were they the ones who had challenged him shortly before this time? The truth is that we really do not know. It appears that there were a large number of men from the Abiezrites. if this is true, then it would appear that it would certainly include some of the one who had stood with Gideon and some of those who had stood against him at the time the altar was destroyed.

And he sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them. Judges 6:35

As this paragraph progresses, it becomes clear that Gideon is changing. He had been a very reluctant person, now he was taken over the responsibility for the battle and is actively enlisting men to join with him in the battle against the armies from the east.



Gideon was, also, showing some careful insights. Look at the map to see where Gideon sent messengers to enlist soldiers to join in this struggle:

- a. Manasseh
- b. Asher
- c. Zebulun
- d. Naphtali

Notice that the armies from the east came to Jezreel. Observe, also, the places to which Gideon sent messengers to enlist soldiers for the battle. When you observe this map, you will note that the places to which Gideon sent messengers were places that were located near the armies from the east. When these men converged, they would be in a flanking position beside Gideon. This would

give the men of Israel an immediate advantage.

Judges 6:36-40 - The Fleece

Then Gideon said to God, "If Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken, Judges 6:36

As indicated earlier, this, too, is a conditional statement. it is identified by the "IF...THEN..." format. The nature of his conditional statement is concern over whether or not God would do as He had said. God had said that He would deliver Israel through Gideon. Now Gideon was challenging that statement. "If thou wilt deliver Israel through me..." Isn't this just like us? God had given Gideon many reasons to believe that it was Him indeed. who was calling him to deliver Israel. Gideon had even made strategic moves

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to bring pressure to bear upon the invading armies, but still there was that tiny haunting doubt that plagued him.

behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that Thou wilt deliver Israel through me, as Thou hast spoken. " Judges 6:37

This was a lack of trust in the statement that God made. This verse is a clear call for a miracle. In the natural chain of events, if any part of the fleece were to be wet, it would all be wet. Now, Gideon was asking for a miracle in order to enable him to believe that God would do as He said. Gideon said, in advance, that if God would do this, then he would be able to believe that God would, indeed, save Israel through him. The fact that God said it was obviously not sufficient for Gideon to believe it would be true.

And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. Judges 6:38

God could have demanded that Gideon accept His word as given. That is not the way God works. He continued to work with Gideon even though it should have been clear that Gideon could not trust the word God had given. The results were quite conclusive. It was not that there was a little bit of water in the fleece. There was a bowl full of water soaked into the fleece.

Again, note that Gideon rose early in the morning to check the results. He was eager to see what God had done because he apparently wanted it to be true, but could not bring himself to trust outright that God would do as He said.

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let Thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground." Judges 6:39

In the previous verses, Gideon said that if God did as he requested, he would be able to believe. This verse makes it clear that the miracle was not as convincing as Gideon had anticipated. Notice what Gideon said, "Do not let thine anger burn against me that I may speak once more." It was clear to him that he was walking a very thin line. It was clear that what Gideon said he would do (believe) did not happen and his new request might be seen as begging the issue.

Having failed to believe as he said he would, Gideon dared to ask God to perform just the reverse of the previous test. The logic Gideon employed was shaky at best. He said that if God made it wet on the fleece and dry around it, he would believe that God would use him. This, of course, he did not do. Now Gideon, who had failed to believe on the previous miracle, asked God to do just the reverse, another miracle, and this would enable him to believe. If one direction would not enable Gideon to believe, there is no reason to believe that the reverse of that process would be any more convincing.

And God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground. Judges 6:40

The miracle is a beautiful picture of the mercy and patience of God. God gave Gideon what he wanted and still Gideon would not believe. Now God did as Gideon requested again to bring Gideon to the place where he could trust God and be His servant. God

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wants us to overcome our difficulties and weakness of trust. His great patience bears witness to this desire.

Conclusion

The chapter gives a very convincing picture of what the grace of God is like. His patience has no boundaries. He wants us to come to the place where we can believe. He is willing to endure any number of embarrassing experiences of disbelief in order to bring us to the place so that we can relate to Him and become useful servants. What a marvelous God we serve.

There are a number of other messages about the nature of God in this chapter:

6:1 – God gave Israel into enemy hands when they disobeyed Him.

6:7 – Israel cried to the LORD and He heard their cry and delivered.

6:8 – God is faithful – He brought them out of Egypt

6:12 – God is with His servants.

6:13 – God allows His servants to contend with Him when they do not understand.

6:16 – God promised His presence to his servant Gideon.

6:23 – God is concerned about our fears.

6:24 – God challenges us to our very best.

6:26 – God desires our worship

6:27 – God makes allowances for our fears.

6:34 – The Spirit of the Lords enables His servants.

6:36 – God is patient with our fears – Gideon and the fleece.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7

GIDEON DEFEATED MIDIAN

JUDGES 7:1 - 25

1. There are seven paragraphs in the seventh chapter of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

7:1	
7:2, 3	
7:4-8	
7:9-14	
7:15-18	
7:19-23	
7:24, 25	

2. In Judges 7:1, Gideon moved his army to Harod.
 - a. In a Bible atlas trace their move from Manasseh to Harod. What do you observe about this move?
 - b. Reread 7:1 to observe the battle strategy of this move. What two strategic ingredients did Gideon provide for his troops by this move?
3. In 7:2, 3, God told Gideon his army was too large.
 - a. In 7:2, God explained why Gideon's army was too large for His purposes.
 - (1). What reason did God give?
 - (2). Study these reasons. What did God imply by these reasons?
 - b. Observe that God said, "...for me to give Midian into their hands." What is the inference in this statement?
 - c. What does this verse say about God?
 - d. What does this verse say about Israel?
4. In Judges 7:4-8, God sent 9,700 soldiers home.
 - a. In 7:4, God indicated that the army was still too large and described the criteria for selecting the warriors who would remain.
 - (1). What was that criteria?
 - (2). We know that Gideon could see the Midianite army while this army reduction was in process. If you were in Gideon's position, how would you feel?
 - (3). What explanation, if any, did God give for this further reduction?
 - (4). What would one expect this to do to the confidence of Gideon?

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- b. In 7:5, Gideon brought his soldiers to the spring called Harod.
 - (1). The men drank from the Harod Spring in two different ways:
 - (a). What were the two ways?
 - (b). What difference would this make?
 - (2). What does this obedience of Gideon tell us about his character?
- c. In 7:6, the author reported on the number of men who drank by bringing water to their mouths.
 - (1). How does it seem to you Gideon would react as he discovered the information in this verse?
 - (2). In view of the fact that the Midianite army could be plainly seen, what kind of picture of Gideon has the author presented up until now?
- d. In 7:7, God gave Gideon a promise concerning Midian.
 - (1). What was the promise?
 - (2). In this verse, God said, "I will deliver you with 300 men." He also said, "(I) will give the Midianites into your hands." What should Gideon have gathered from these statements?
 - (3). Think about the 9,700 men who God rejected for this battle.
 - (a). What might they be thinking?
 - (b). How would they explain their rejection to the family and community when they returned home?
- e. In 7:8, the 300 men prepared for battle.
 - (1). In 7:1, the army was camped by the Harod Spring. In 7:8, however, it speaks of going "down." How can we explain this situation?
 - (2). Reread 7:8 again. What armament does the author mention for these 300 soldiers who were about to battle the Midianites?
 - (3). Observe that the author spoke of "the people's provisions and their trumpets." Think about this for a minute. What does this information tell the 300 men?
 - (4). What does an out numbered army of 300 men need of 300 trumpets?
- 5. In Judges 7:9-14, God instructed Gideon to listen to the fears in the Midianite camp.
 - a. In 7:9, God instructed Gideon to go down to the Midianite camp.
 - (1). In 7:9, the author emphasized the fact that it was, "the same night." What is the significance of this emphasis?
 - (2). Observe that the LORD also said, "For I have given it into your hands."
 - (a). What is the significance of the fact that this is written in the past tense?
 - (b). How can we explain the statement, "I have given it into your hands" when the battle has not taken place as yet; when Gideon is preparing to attack the Midianite army?
 - b. In 7:10, 11, God dealt with the fact that Gideon might be frightened at what he had to do.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7

- (1). What would the presence of Purah, the servant, have to do with the quieting of Gideon's fears?
- (2). In this instruction, God gave a promise - "and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp."
 - (a). What is there about the presence of Purah that would quell the fears of Gideon?
 - (b). As you read these verses, what do you learn about God?
 - (c). In view of the precarious situation in which Gideon's small army found itself, what do these verses tell us about Gideon?
- c. In 7:12, the author described the enemy that was in the valley below Israel.
 - (1). In this verse, the author described the enemy of Israel as three distinct groups - Midianites, Amalekites and "all the sons of the east."
 - (a). This is not the first time this distinction has been identified. What is the meaning of this identification?
 - (b). Again, the author gave us an emphasis - The soldiers were "as numerous as locusts." Their camels were, "without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore." What is the purpose of this repeated emphasis?
 - (2). Observe the descriptive images the author used to describe the number of soldiers and their camels. What has the author accomplished by the use of these images?
- d. In 7:13, the author described a Midianite soldier relating his dream to a fellow soldier.
 - (1). What is the significance of the barley loaf?
 - (2). Read the verse again and write down the four things the verse tells us about barley loaf striking the tent.
 - (3). How would you explain the meaning of these four details of the dream?
- e. In 7:14, the soldier's friend explained the meaning of the dream.
 - (1). The friend displayed considerable knowledge about Gideon. How would he have gained this knowledge?
 - (2). The friend said, "God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand."
 - (a). How would he gain this information from the dream?
 - (b). How would this idolater ever credit God with giving Midian into the hands of Gideon?
 - (c). If you were the friend who had this dream, how would you feel?
6. In Judges 7:15-18, Gideon gave his forces a battle plan.
 - a. In 7:15, Gideon responded to the explanation of the dream.
 - (1). Read the verse again.
 - (2). What was the first thing Gideon did upon hearing this report?
 - (3). As you read this verse, what impression do you get about the emotional condition of Gideon?

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- (4). Notice the instruction Gideon gave his men - "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands."
 - (a). What understanding about God does Gideon demonstrate in these words?
 - (b). What does this say about his understanding of this battle?
- b. In 7:16, there is a new picture of Gideon.
 - (1). How does this differ from the way Gideon was portrayed in the past?
 - (2). How can we account for this change?
 - (3). Study this verse in relation to their preparation for battle.
 - (a). What weaponry did he give his men?
 - (b). If you were one of those men, how would you feel, in view of the fact that there were thousands of the enemy at the foot of the hill?
- c. In 7:17, 18, Gideon gave his men instructions about the beginning of the battle.
 - (1). Compare these verses with 6:1-15. What did you discover?
 - (2). We have talked about the reason for the trumpets. Gideon instructed them to say, "For the LORD and for Gideon." The text gives no reason for this. What can we say about the reason for this statement?
- 7. In Judges 7:19-23, the author reported the flight of the Midianites.
 - a. In 7:19, 20, the author described the way the 300 soldiers obeyed the instructions of Gideon concerning the beginning of the battle.
 - (1). What is the significance of the fact that this took place at the beginning of the middle watch?
 - (2). How does the author describe their armament for this engagement?
 - (3). What is the significance of this fact?
 - (4). If you were one of these soldiers, how would you feel about this armament situation?
 - b. In 7:21, the author described the reaction of the Midianite camp when the 300 soldiers blew their rams' horns and smashed their pitchers.
 - (1). What was the Midianite reaction?
 - (2). There is a contrast between the 300 Jewish soldiers and the Midianite soldiers in this verse.
 - (a). Identify the contrast.
 - (b). What information does this contrast provide for us?
 - (3). How would you describe conditions in the Midianite camp at this point?
 - c. In 7:22, the author reported the way the Midianites responded to the shock of this attack.
 - (1). Granted, the Midianites were shocked and surprised, but how can we account for the fact that they were killing each other rather than the Jews?
 - (2). In a Bible atlas, trace the way the Midianites went when they left Jezreel.
 - (a). Where did they go?
 - (b). What does this tell us about them?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 7

- d. In 7:23, though Israel was winning, still they had a problem.
 - (1). What was the problem?
 - (2). How did they solve that problem?
 - (3). In a Bible atlas, trace where Gideon sent for help? What does this tell us?
- 8. In Judges 7:24, 25, Gideon called on other tribes for assistance.
 - a. In 7:24, the author described the next step Gideon took in the pursuit of Midian.
 - (1). Look at 7:23 and 7:24 again.
 - (a). What is the difference between what Gideon did in these two verses.
 - (b). Why was it important to do as Gideon did in these verses?
 - (2). It is clear that God had given Israel victory over the Midianites and their neighbors. In view of this fact, why was it important for them to continue to chase the enemy army after the battle had been won?
 - b. In 7:25, the author described the capture and murder of the two leaders of the Midianites.
 - (1). Why did they have to be killed?
 - (2). Having killed the enemy generals, why was it necessary for the Jewish soldiers to decapitate these generals and take their heads back to Gideon?
 - (3). What is the message of this verse in view of what God had done throughout this battle?

LESSON 7: JUDGES 7:1 - 25

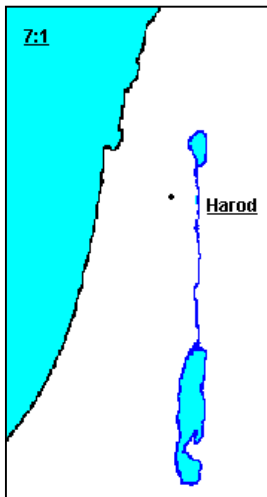
GIDEON DEFEATED MIDIAN

There are seven paragraphs in Judges chapter seven. There is a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph on the following table.

7:1	Gideon Moved His Army to Harod
7:2, 3	22,000 Fearful Soldiers Sent Home
7:4-8	9,700 Careless Soldiers Sent Home
7:9-14	Gideon Heard Fears in Midianite Camp
7:15-18	Gideon Gave Battle Plan to His Army
7:19-23	The Midianite Army Fled
7:24, 25	Gideon Called for Reserves

Judges 7:1 – Gideon Moved His Army to Harod

Then Jerubbaal that is, Gideon and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. Judges 7:1



Observe that Gideon had two names - Gideon and Jerubbaal. This was not accidental or simple preference. In that day, names had significant meaning. The name Jerubbaal meant "Baal will contend." The pagan nations gave their captives new names. These names were in the language of the conqueror and usually exalted a pagan idol. You will remember that Joseph was renamed Zaphenath-paneah (Genesis 41:45). In the same way, Daniel was renamed Beltshazzar (Daniel 1:7) which in Akkadian meant "Bel protect his life." The Akkadian was a Semitic language spoken by the people of Akkad in northern Babylon. The original name, Gideon, meant "warrior."

Some suggest that Gideon may have been renamed by his father prior to this time. On the basis of the context, it appears that Joash gave Gideon the new name Jerubbaal at this time. As we have seen, Gideon's father appears to have been deeply involved in the adulterous worship of Baal.

Gideon took all the men who were with him and went to the spring called Harod. As you can see on the map, this was a strategic move. An army must always be concerned about their supply of water. That is even more important in this part of the world. Gideon

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was located beside the best supply of water in that area. Now, there were wells in the area, but all of them were limited in supply. This is definitely an advantage for Gideon.

Observe, also, that the Midianites were in the valley by the hill of Moreh. Other than as a hiding place, a hill was a liability to an army. They never knew when they would have to retreat. In such a situation, a hill was a severe limitation.

Notice also on the map, that the Midianites were to the north of Gideon and his army. This means that Gideon and his army were between the Midianites and their homeland. This was dangerous if a battle turned sour. The army could not flee to their homeland. They also could not rush badly needed supplies and fresh troops to the front. Observe also, in verse one, that the Midianites were north of Gideon. This was strategic in terms of two things.

1. In terms of the sun - If the Midianites were north of Gideon, then for the bulk of the day's battle, they would be looking into the sun.
2. In terms of water. This was one of the most important things an army, in a hot climate, must provide. Gideon and his men were right beside the spring Harod.

Judges 7:2, 3, - 22,000 Fearful Soldiers Sent Home

And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'" Judges 7:2

God initiated this conversation, but not until Gideon brought his army to the place of battle; not until they knew and could see just how large the Midianite army was.

Put yourself in Gideon's place. You have seen the Midianites. You have fought with them before. You know how many they are. Now God said, "The people who are with you are too many." "Too many?!" Certainly Gideon would have countered, "You mean too few don't you?!" No army in history has ever been too large. Many armies have been defeated because they were too small, but none too large.

Observe the way God spoke of this. He said, "Too many for me to give Midian into their hands." Jehovah was not talking about the strategy of Israel's army defeating Midian's army. He was talking about God delivering Midian's army into Israel's hands. God is the conqueror here.

Observe also that God reasoned with Gideon. It was not an unavoidable royal decree. God explained why He had done this. He said, "Lest Israel become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'" God knew Israel only too well. They would come screaming for help in trouble, but otherwise focus on their own strength. The purpose of God's intervention was two fold:

1. He wanted to rescue Israel.
2. He also wanted it to be clear, both for Israel and for Midian, that it was Jehovah who had defeated the Midianites and not the thousands of Jewish soldiers. Remember that in that day nations believed that their gods really won the battles over other nations and their gods.

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"Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. Judges 7:3

As you read this verse, you suddenly realize that Gideon was more than just the general of Israel's army. He was God's spokesman to Israel as well. What God had to say to Israel, He said to Gideon. This gives us an idea of how highly God thought of His servant.

Look carefully at this verse again. Gideon's army is already greatly outnumbered. Imagine what he would think when God said this to him. Think of how hard it would be for him to say these words to his army. When soldiers are about to go into battle, most everyone is frightened to some extent. The only surprise in this verse is that out of 32,000 men, only 22,000 went home.

Nevertheless, Gideon did exactly as God commanded him. This gives us another piece of information about the character of Gideon. The text does not tell us how Gideon reacted to these events. At this juncture, one would suspect that his level of concern would rise higher than it already was. Still, God commanded and Gideon obeyed.

Judges 7:4-8 - 9,700 Careless Soldiers Sent Home

Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." Judges 7:4

God spoke to Gideon again. Imagine how Gideon must have felt when he heard the voice of God speaking to him again. The message God brought Gideon must have been more shocking. The small, outnumbered army of Israel was still too large. That would be enough to shake the confidence of even the most confident general in history. Nevertheless, that is the message God gave to His servant.

Observe the criteria that God used. It was not whether or not the soldier was in good physical condition. It was not even whether the soldier was the best trained or not. The criteria was dependent upon the way a soldier drank water. Think about that for a moment. How would you feel, as a general, if the way your contingent was chosen was on the basis of the way they drank water? Observe also, that this selection process was not on the basis of groups from different tribes. This was done one individual at a time. Gideon and his men were within sight of the Midianites and God was going to go one man at a time through the entire 10,000 men to choose the ones that He wanted to take part in the battle. This is one more thing to make Gideon more nervous than he was already.

So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." Judges 7:5

Nevertheless, Gideon did exactly as God commanded him. This gives us one more piece of confirming information about the character of Gideon. He brought his 10,000 men down to the edge of the Harod Spring. As you can see in the text, the men in the army drank from the spring in two different ways:

1. Some knelt down and drank from the spring.

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2. Others scooped up water in their hand and lapped it like a dog would drink.

Gideon was instructed to separate the two groups from each other. One might imagine that as Gideon observed how great was the number of those who got down on their knees to drink that he might hope that this group would be the ones that God decided to let him have as his army. Gideon is the general of this army, but he is not making the decisions for the size and makeup of the force. That, too, must have felt just a little uncomfortable for him.

Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. Judges 7:6

To the best of our knowledge, Gideon did not know at this point which of the two groups he was to have as his army. One might imagine that he would be hoping that the 300 men would not be the extent of his forces. Nevertheless, that number was firm and Gideon awaited word from God as to what he should do.

And the LORD said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home." Judges 7:7

Again, God did not make the cut in his army until the men had traveled all this distance and they had discovered just how outnumbered they were by the forces of the Midianites. The 9,700 soldiers might well have wondered, even aloud, if God was going to leave us out of the battle, why did He wait until we got clear over here to do so. Now we have lost all that time and have all that distance to go back home. One would conjecture that they might also be overjoyed in view of the fact that they could see the Midianites so close and so numerous.

As you read this verse, you are reminded that God, again, reassured Gideon that He was going to deliver the Midianites into their hands by this little band of men from Israel. It would seem appropriate to think that this was done because it was absolutely necessary to reassure Gideon that God was really in control of the situation.

God did not say that Israel would conquer the Midianites. He said that He, God, would deliver the mighty Midianite army into the hands of 300 men of Israel. This was a divine campaign, not a campaign of the Israelites, despite the fact that the Israelites were on the scene.

One might wonder if this was not one of the hardest things that Gideon ever did. He arrived with an army of 32,000 men and knew that this was already smaller than the Midianite army. Nevertheless, Gideon did exactly as God commanded. That is the evidence of the greatness of Gideon that God could see.

So the 300 men took the people's provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. Judges 7:8

Put yourself in the place of one of the 300 men. How would you feel? If they felt as we probably would, then this tells us something about the atmosphere in the camp. There is a good possibility that the 300 men, though they were obedient, were concerned about the situation God had created for them.

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Note that the 300 men kept the provisions that had been brought for the 32,000 men. They took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. This is interesting because there is no mention of any weapons. They were each armed with a ram's horn, but apparently not with a sword. Frankly, if I were one of the 300 men, I would be wondering why I was holding a ram's horn and not a sword. If the Midianite army heard 300 trumpets, they would assume that there were 30,000 soldiers somewhere in the area. In that day there were usually one trumpet for each 100 soldiers. This fact would surprise and mislead the Midianites.

There is another consideration that would be very apparent to them. If they had the provisions for the whole army, but only 300 men, they would not be able to move these provisions in the event they were routed. They had to know that this was an encounter that they must win or lose all their provisions.

Imagine the scene. There are ten thousand men standing on a hill overlooking the army of Midian in the valley. Now 9,700 of these men pick up their belongings and move away toward their homes in the south. At the same time, the 300 men would be very much aware of the fact that the huge Midianite army was right there in plain sight at the bottom of the hill.

Observe that there is no mention of weapons that these 300 men were to have and use. The text speaks of only "provisions and trumpets." This is not a very hopeful scenario for the 300 soldiers.

If you look at verse one, you will note that the army was camped by the spring Harod. This would probably be in the valley. If, however, you look at verse eight and nine, both speak of going "down." The suggestion is that Gideon and his little band of men are now located on top of a hill. This is not explained in the text in any way. We are certain that this would give Gideon and his men a distinct advantage in the battle. From all appearances, they would need all the advantage they could find.

Judges 7:9-14 - Gideon Heard Fears in Midianite Camp

Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands." Judges 7:9

It is interesting that God visited Gideon that same night to calm his fears. In one sense, this is an unusual command. In most instances, it was important to keep the general a safe distance from the enemy. In this instance, God instructed Gideon to go down and get very close to the enemy line.

There is a question about God's intent in this verse. God spoke to Gideon during the night. When God spoke, He said, "Arise, go down against the camp..." One wonders what God was saying. Was he saying that Gideon should, in the middle of the night, go against the Midianites? If so, that would be quite unusual. Armies would often position themselves for battle during the night, but they seldom went into battle in the darkness of night. On the other hand, could God have been giving Gideon instructions that he should go against the Midianites without being specific about the time? That would be more apt to be the case.

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The use of the word "for" suggests that a reason is about to be given. The reason God gave was this, "I have given It (the Midianite camp) into your hands." Notice that God did not say, "I will give it into your hands." It is a completed fact. In the mind of God, the Midianites were already a defeated foe. They were Gideon's for the taking.

"But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Judges 7:10, 11

There is an expression of divine concern in these verses. God was talking with the general, the one who should have been filled with courage and confidence. Nevertheless, God knew His man. He made allowances for the fact that Gideon would be frightened at the prospect of what he was expected to do with so few men. This gives us some information about God. This is evidence of the great compassion and understanding on the part of God. God knew that Gideon was the leader, but that he was not naturally brave.

God told Gideon in advance what would happen when he went down into the camp. He told him that the things he heard there would strengthen his hands to go against the camp of Midian.

The fact that Gideon took Purah with him was confirmation of the fact that he was afraid. This gives us a glimpse of just how honest Gideon really was. One might wonder how much help Purah could be if things had turned out badly. Still, Gideon took Purah and at great risk went very close to the outpost of the Midianite camp. This was frightening to Gideon, but it took great trust to be able to do as God had commanded in such circumstances. It reminds one of the New Testament statement, "I believe, help my unbelief." Mark 9:24.

Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Judges 7:12

This just sounds like a list of the forces of the Midianites, but it is more. Observe that the author compares the soldiers to locusts. They often had locusts spreading over the whole landscape destroying everything in sight. It was not uncommon for locusts to be piled up 15 or 18 inches deep as they ate their way across the land and left no food in their wake. To compare an army with locusts conjured up ideas of an innumerable army and total devastation left behind them.

It was equally frightening to speak of the camels that an army had. These were the swiftest animals any army had. To think that they had more camels than the guards could count and Israel had none would be to strike terror into the hearts of every one of the 300 men.

This whole scene would make the 300 soldiers wonder what God was doing. They would probably wonder if their leader had just been under the pressure a little too long. One could hardly blame them. He had 32,000 men and in two decisions reduced the size of his army to 300 men. How could they help but wonder about his fitness to be their leader?

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When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat." Judges 7:13

Though the text mentions nothing about it, the fact that God knew what awaited Gideon when he crept up close to the enemy line would have to have a bolstering effect upon Gideon. That was at least part of what God was doing in this verse.

The second part was that God wanted Gideon to hear the dream that the soldier shared with his buddy. Look carefully at this dream. In the dream, a barley loaf tumbled down into the camp of Midian. Though the text is silent about it, the Midianites must have known that the Israelites were on the hill above them. Almost anything that tumbled down into the Midianite camp would have to be Israel.

Observe also that the loaf that tumbled into the camp of Midian was a barley loaf. The barley loaf was the cheapest of grains and the coarsest of breads. It was sometimes used as a symbol of Israel in their poverty. In effect, it was a way of referring to Israel without using the name.

The man reported that in his dream this barley loaf tumbled down into the camp of Midian and struck "the tent." There would be only one tent in an army camp. It would be the residence of the general. The soldiers would simply sleep on the ground wrapped in their cloak. To say that the barley loaf struck the tent was to say that Israel came into the camp and struck at the place where the General lived.

Observe the things the dream said about the loaf striking the tent:

1. The barley loaf struck the tent.
2. The tent fell under the pressure of the loaf.
3. The tent turned upside down.
4. The tent finally lay flat.

If you look carefully at this list, you will notice that in each one the inference is that the tent and the general were devastated and destroyed. In any battle, the safety of the commanding General was the key to the hope and morale of the army. If the general was safe, they were safe. If the general was killed, they were in trouble, and the army would probably disband in flight. This dream painted a bleak picture of what was about to happen to the forces of Midian.

And his friend answered and said, "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand." Judges 7:14

In this verse, the Midianite soldier's friend responded to the report of the dream. He attempted to interpret the dream. We are surprised that the Midianite soldier could identify Gideon. The truth is that they knew a great deal about him. He knew that Gideon's father's name was Joash. Knowing this, he probably also knew that Gideon had torn down the altar to Baal which was on his father's land. This would tell them all that this man was most courageous.

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Observe that this Midianite soldier, who worshipped Baal and Asherah, affirmed that it was God who had given the Midianite army into the hands of Gideon and all Israel. In that part of the world, the people knew their family history quite well. They would have known that though they now worshipped Baal, their ancestor, Abraham, worshipped Jehovah, the God whom Gideon worshipped. They would have known the miraculous things that God had done on behalf of Abraham and their ancestors. Having heard this dream, the soldier understood that though the battle had not yet begun; though the Midianites had a tremendous advantage in terms of size and weaponry, still God was going to give them into the hands of the tiny army of Israel. The important thing about all this is that Gideon heard all of it for himself. He didn't have God simply say this to him. He did not have a soldier tell him that he had heard the Midianites talking this way. Gideon heard it for himself. It had to have a mind-changing effect upon him as the leader of this tiny band of men.

Judges 7:15-18 - Gideon Gave Battle Plan to His Army

And it came about when Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, that he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands." Judges 7:15

When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he immediately knew whence it came. He did not prepare a celebration for the valor of his men. He bowed his head in worship. It is a way of saying I know that only God has done this great thing for us.

When Gideon returned to the top of the hill, the soldiers saw a transformed general in their leader. Up to this time, there has been very little report of his acts of leadership. Now he is going to really take command.

Put yourself in the place of one of the 300 soldiers. Your leader has been less than a picture of confidence. He sent almost all of his army home. Now he returns in the middle of the night and gets everyone up to go to battle. You might wonder what has come over him.

With all his new confidence, however, Gideon did not forget what was happening. Notice how he spoke to his soldiers, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands." He did not forget to give the credit to God. It was the LORD who did this, not 300 soldiers. Gideon spoke with the same confidence he heard when God spoke with him.

And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. Judges 7:16

There is no hesitation in Gideon's leadership now. He divided his 300 men into three companies. To the best of our knowledge, Gideon had no military training at all. Every young man in Israel had to be as ready for a fight as he could be just because of their survival existence in the land, but now Gideon was acting like a well trained officer. We need to remember that it was God who had said that He would give the Midianites into the hands of this little band of 300 men. Though Gideon is the one speaking, God is the one who is giving leadership to the soldiers. The plan of dividing an army into three or

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more groups in order to spread the attack was not new. Plutarch had done this along with many others. This gave the divided army the advantage of diversity.

This verse would cause most any soldier to wonder about the condition of his officer. It mentions nothing about a weapon at all. He put a trumpet in the hands of each man. He also put an empty pitcher in the other hand of each soldier. The author continued by saying that Gideon placed a torch inside the pitcher that each man carried.

When there are only 300 soldiers standing against an army of thousands who were well trained and well armed, it would not be surprising if the soldiers wondered a little about Gideon's mental faculties.

Look carefully at this verse, again. The pitcher, of which the author spoke, was the type of vessel in which the people kept their supply of food. It was an earthenware vessel and would be quite large. Some have conjectured that this was the same kind of vessel of which Jesus spoke when He said you do not put a lamp under a bushel. Whatever the nature of this vessel, it would keep the torchlight hidden until everyone was in place and ready to surprise the Midianites. Granted there was surprise value to this plan, but against such a great army, this was most risky.

At the risk of redundancy, hear the question again, "If you were one of the 300 men, what would you think"? This had to be almost more than they could take in at once.

And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do." Judges 7:17

Gideon was the leader, but he never seemed to act like one. That image is now gone. Gideon took the helm of the band of soldiers and demanded that they follow his example. "Do as I do" is not the instruction of an insecure man. "Follow my example and we will win the day" was his motto. This was a tremendous change to say the least.

"When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp, and say, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'" Judges 7:18

Again, the trumpet (ram's horn) was the means of communication in the noise of battle. Every soldier would know what the commander was directing them to do without taking his mind off the battle at hand. Three hundred ram's horns all blowing at once would do at least two things:

1. It would deceive the Midianites. They would feel that there was a great host of Israelite soldiers that had been in hiding and had now come out for battle.
2. It would create a great deal of noise. Noise has a way of creating confusion. This was a favorite weapon in almost every army.

Not only would there be 300 ram's horns all blowing at once, but they would be coming from all directions. This would only increase the confusion and hesitation on the part of the Midianites. We must remember that when the Midianites went to sleep that night, the Israelites were all on top of the hill.

Observe what Gideon told the men to cry out as they blew their horns, "For the LORD and for Gideon." Even in the heat of battle and the tension of preparation, Gideon never forgot who was in command of the forces. He never forgot that God was doing this on

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their behalf. It was his way of saying that God had placed him in this spot, but he was well aware of the fact that God was battling for them.

Judges 7:19-23 - The Midianite Army Fled

So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. Judges 7:19

One of the things that one can see in this verse is that there is no hesitation on the part of Gideon. He may have been a hapless person and leader in the past, but not now. He told them to follow him and he immediately led his men.

The element of surprise was one of the few advantages that a small army could have over a greater force. The middle watch, beginning approximately at midnight, was the time when people were sleeping most soundly. There were fewer people on guard and it was not easy to see the enemy that has surprised you. They would never just fight a battle in the middle of the night, but they would always look for an opportunity to surprise their enemy by attacking under the cover of the deepest darkness of the night.

When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" Judges 7:20

Some Hebrew texts have the wording we have in this text. There are others, and for the most part, our best documents simply read, "For the LORD and for Gideon!"

Get a visual image of what you find in this text. The 300 Jewish soldiers nearly surrounded the Midianite camp. It should be noted that this camp was very large and the circle of Jewish soldiers was not very tight as they spread out around the camp.

Notice, also, that they had the torches in their left hands. They had their ram's horn in their right hand. This leaves no place for a sword or spear. They were spread around the Midianite camp in such a stance that they could not use a sword if they had one. Their only defense was a deceptive one - their cry of "for the LORD and for Gideon!" This would add to the confusion and noise of battle and put their enemy even more at risk.

We should not be too surprised that God had them with both hands occupied so that they could not possibly use a sword. Israel had a reputation of taking credit for the things God did if at all possible. This is the reason that God had to limit the size of the army and the preparation for battle that each man had. This way, no Jewish soldier could claim that he had routed the Midianites. It would be abundantly clear that it was God who had done it all.

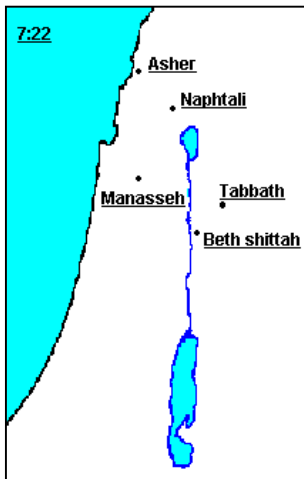
And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. Judges 7:21

This verse describes for us the kind of confusion and disarray that overtook the Midianite soldiers. They were totally without discipline. No one was in command and no one had control. The well disciplined army had become a mob.

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Notice the contrast that is portrayed in this verse. The 300 Israelite soldiers were disciplined and standing in their place around the camp. The thousands of Midianite soldiers were running and screaming as they ran. There was no plan and no control of anything. This is a perfect recipe for disaster and that is exactly what happened.

And when they blew 300 trumpets, the LORD set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. Judges 7:22



When the 300 Jewish soldiers blew their trumpets, it was the LORD who set the sword of one Midianite against another. There was total chaos. The only thing that the Midianite army could do was to flee. If you look at the map, you will notice that they fled down the valley corridor toward the Jordan River. This was the only natural way to go. It was in the general direction of home and it was a natural valley where it was easy to flee rather than to take to the mountains where the going was much more difficult. Observe, also, that the Midianite army was so confused that they used their swords on each other rather than on the Jewish soldiers. To a certain extent this is understandable. We must remember that this is in the middle of the night. As frightened as they were, the Midianites were killing anything that moved. You will also notice the directions in

which the Midianites fled. From this, it is clear that they were in total disarray.

And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian. Judges 7:23

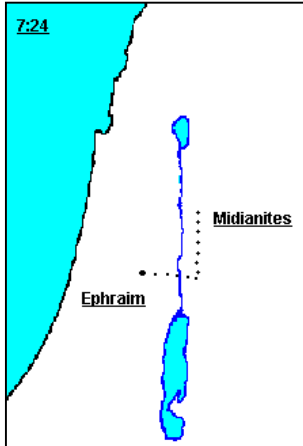
Having caused the flight of the Midianites, the Jewish soldiers now had a severe problem. The cover of darkness hid the fact that there were so few of them. Though the Midianites would spend no time trying to count the number of Jews who pursued them, it would soon be very clear that they far outnumbered their Jewish enemies.

Because of this, Gideon and his men had to get reinforcements in a hurry. They pursued the Midianites, in order to keep them off balance, but they also sent for reinforcements. Notice where the messengers were sent. These tribes are highlighted on the previous map. You will notice that these tribes are close neighbors to the battle area. This, of course, was done in the interest of time and urgency lest the Midianites decide to stop and re-group. Had they done this, they could easily have totally destroyed what few Jewish soldiers were chasing after them. However, the God who caused Israel to win the battle without the use of swords could also enable the Jews to maintain their secret about just how small their army was.

Judges 7:24, 25 - Gideon Called for Reserves

And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. Judges 7:24

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Gideon knew that all that had been won at the battle could be lost if they could not catch and contain the fleeing Midianites. This map shows the steps Gideon took to cut off the escape of the Midianites. The soldiers from the east were fleeing along the Jordan valley. Their only hope of stopping this fleeing army was to have someone from an advanced area cut them off at the Jordan. That is exactly what Gideon urged the men of Ephraim to do. This was done. In the process, the escape route was cut off and the army was trapped.

And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to

Gideon from across the Jordan. Judges 7:25

If you read this verse carefully, you will note that while the army fled south along the Jordan valley, the leaders, Oreb and Zeeb crossed the Jordan and tried to escape by themselves. They had abandoned their troops to save themselves. No one would respect a leader who would do such a cowardly deed. We know that if they had not fled in this way, they would have been the first to have been killed. As you note in the text, they were both killed anyway.

There is a gruesome tale told of the Jews cutting off the heads of both Oreb and Zeeb and returning these to Gideon. This was not an attempt to be crude. It was the way that soldiers proved that they had in fact caught the leaders and put them to death. A reporting of the death was not enough. Evidence was required. Here there was both the report and the evidence. Gideon had every reason to believe that the report was true. With these generals dead, the battle was really over and the army was both defeated and dispersed.

Conclusion

Review the chapter to see what the author has told us about God.

- a. 7:2 – God wants His people to be clear that victory was not by their power, but by His.
- b. 7:7 – God promised blessing to those who obeyed Him.
- c. 7:8 – God’s wisdom does not always seem reasonable to our logic.
- d. 7:9 – God initiates actions to quell our weakness and fear.
- e. 7:10 – God understands our fears.
- f. 7:11 – God is not offended by our weakness in faith.
- g. 7:11 – God is omniscient – He told Gideon the result of the battle before it took place.
- h. God is omnipotent – He was more powerful than the massive army gathered against His people.

In these statements, you can see that there is an emphasis on God’s compassion, power and wisdom.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

GIDEON CONQUERED EPHRAIMITES

JUDGES 8:1 - 35

- There are eight paragraphs in the eighth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

8:1-3	
8:4-9	
8:10-12	
8:13-17	
8:18-21	
8:22-28	
8:29-32	
8:33-35	

- In Judges 8:1-3, the men of Ephraim challenged Gideon.
 - In 8:1, the men of Ephraim contested vigorously with Gideon because he did not call them to take part in the battle.
 - Look back through chapters one through seven to see how Ephraim had participated in previous battles. What did you learn?
 - In view of your findings, if you were Gideon, how would you have felt?
 - In 8:2, Gideon used two images to respond to the men of Ephraim.
 - What images did he use?
 - What did he mean by these images?
 - Was Gideon being accurate or facetious? Why?
 - In 8:3, Gideon made some direct statements about Ephraim's part in the battle.
 - Was he telling the truth?
 - Why did he do this?
 - What does it mean when the author said, "Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that."?
- In Judges 8:4-9, Gideon was rebuffed by the cities of Succoth and Peniel.
 - In 8:4, the author described the condition of Gideon's men as they approached these cities. How did the author describe the men?
 - In 8:5, Gideon approached the men of Succoth requesting food for his men.
 - How did Gideon approach the men of Succoth?

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- (2).How would you evaluate Gideon's integrity and forthrightness as he spoke with the leaders of Succoth?
- c. In 8:6, the men of Succoth responded to Gideon's appeal for help.
 - (1).How would you describe the emotional quality of their response?
 - (2).What did the men of Succoth mean by their reply?
 - (3).Why would the men of Succoth take such a position toward fellow men of Israel?
 - (4).If you were with Gideon, how would you feel when you heard this reply?
- d. In Judges 8:7, Gideon responded to the reply of the leaders of Succoth.
 - (1).What was the emotional tone of Gideon's reply?
 - (2).How would you evaluate the confidence of Gideon's reply?
 - (3).What did Gideon really say?
 - (4).How would you evaluate the appropriateness of Gideon's reply?
- e. In 8:8, Gideon went from Succoth to Penuel with the same request for food.
 - (1).How did the men of Penuel respond?
 - (2).Why would they respond that way to fellow Israelites who had fought on their behalf?
- f. In 8:9, Gideon responded to the reply of the men of Penuel.
 - (1).How did Gideon Reply?
 - (2).How would you describe the emotional tone of Gideon's reply?
 - (3).How would you describe Gideon's confidence level as he spoke to these men?
- 4. In Judges 8:10-12, Gideon moved on and attacked the Midianites.
 - a. In 8:10, the author described the condition of the Midianite army.
 - (1).How did he describe that army?
 - (2).What surprises did you encounter in this information?
 - (3).In a Bible atlas, locate the cities of Succoth, Penuel and Karkor. What does this tell you about the strategy of Gideon's approach to this battle?
 - b. In 8:11, the author describes two strategic moves that Gideon used to give him an advantage over the more numerous Midianites.
 - (1).What are these moves?
 - (2).How would these decisions help the small army of Gideon?
 - (3).The author tells us how Gideon got to Karkor, but does not describe how the Midianites got there. What reason can you see for this fact?
 - c. In 8:12, the author described the flight and capture of two Midianite kings.
 - (1).Read the verse carefully. Notice that the names of the two kings appear twice in one sentence. In view of the content of the verse, what does this suggest to you?
 - (2).Write down the order of events listed in this verse. Study the list. What can we learn from such a study?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

5. In Judges 8:13-17, the author described Gideon's destruction of Succoth.
 - a. In 8:13, 14, the author described Gideon's return to Succoth.
 - (1). The author identified the route Gideon took to return to Succoth, but did not identify the route he took going to Karkor. What suggestion can we make concerning the reason for this fact?
 - (2). In 8:14, the author indicated that Gideon captured a young boy from Succoth.
 - (a). What did Gideon do with this boy?
 - (b). Why would he do that?
 - (3). The author indicated that there were 77 princes and elders of Succoth. What does this tell us about the city?
 - b. In 8:15, the author told of Gideon coming to Succoth.
 - (1). Describe the tone of voice that appears to have been used in his statement about Zebah and Zalmunna.
 - (2). If you were one of the leaders of Succoth at this point, how would you feel? What would you want to do?
 - c. In 8:16, the author described Gideon's dealings with the leaders of Succoth.
 - (1). What did he do?
 - (2). How do Gideon's actions compare with the promise that he made in 8:7?
 - d. The author, in 8:17, describes the destruction of Penuel in summary fashion.
 - (1). Why does he not deal with this experience as carefully as he did with that of Succoth?
 - (2). What effect would tearing down the tower have upon the city of Penuel?
 - (3). Compare what Gideon did in 8:16 and 8:17.
 - (a). Was the punishment of one city greater than that of the other?
 - (b). How can we deal with the fact that this was a Jew punishing Jews when he had just destroyed the army that was reaping great punishment upon Jews?
 - (4). Compare what Gideon promised in 8:9 with the punishment he meted out in 8:17. How do the two verses compare?
6. In Judges 8:18 - 21, the author described Gideon's dealings with Zebah and Zalmunna.
 - a. In 8:18, Gideon questioned the two kings about the men they killed at Tabor.
 - (1). What was Gideon's question?
 - (2). If you were one of the kings, what would you think when you heard this question?
 - (3). Look at the answer the two kings gave Gideon. What were they saying?
 - b. In 8:19, the author reported Gideon's response to their answer.
 - (1). How would you describe the emotional tone of Gideon's statement?
 - (2). Why would Gideon precede his statement with the words, "As the LORD lives"?
 - (3). What does this tell us about Gideon's faith?

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- c. In 8:20, the author described Gideon's instructions to his first-born son, Jether.
 - (1). What did he command his son?
 - (2). How did Jether respond to this command?
 - (3). Why?
 - (4). Why would Zebah and Zalmunna plead with Gideon to kill them?
 - (5). In this verse, it mentions the fact that Gideon took the "crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks." What were these for?
 - (6). There is a turning point in the story of Gideon in this verse. What is it? What does it mean?
- 7. In Judges 8:22-28, Gideon made an ephod of gold.
 - a. In 8:22, the "men of Israel" made a request of Gideon.
 - (1). What specifically did they request?
 - (2). What did this mean?
 - (3). What reason did they give for their request?
 - b. In 8:23, Gideon responded to the request of the men of Israel.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). What reason did he give for his response?
 - (3). What did his response mean?
 - c. In 8:24, there is a change in the response of Gideon.
 - (1). What was the change in Gideon's response?
 - (2). What was his request?
 - (3). Why would he make such a request?
 - (4). The author gave an explanation for the request Gideon made. What was this explanation?
 - d. In 8:25, the author described the response of the men of Israel to Gideon's request.
 - (1). How did they respond?
 - (2). What does this tell you about their feelings?
 - e. In 8:26, the author indicated that there were gifts given which were beyond the earrings that Gideon requested. What does this tell you about the soldiers?
 - f. In 8:27, Gideon took the gold back to Ophrah.
 - (1). For what did Gideon use the gold?
 - (2). Why would he make such a thing?
 - (3). What happened to the thing for which Gideon used the gold?
 - (4). The text does not evaluate what Gideon had done. On the basis of this verse, how would you evaluate it?
 - (5). This seems totally out of character for Gideon in view of the rest of his story. How can we understand this?
 - g. In 8:28, the author summarized this part of the story of Judges.
 - (1). How did he summarize it?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

- (2). The author said, "Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel and they did not lift up their heads anymore." What does this mean?
 - (3). In view of the unfortunate events in verse 27, what does it tell us about God that He would bless Israel in such a way when they did what they did?
8. In Judges 8:29-32, the author reported the death of Gideon.
 - a. In 8:29, the author spoke of Gideon as "Jerubbaal" and not as Gideon.
 - (1). What is the significance of this change?
 - (2). What does it tell us?
 - (3). The author told us that Gideon "went and lived in his own house." What could this mean?
 - b. In 8:30, there is a rather great surprise.
 - (1). What is that surprise?
 - (2). The text states that these sons were his direct descendants. What is the significance of this addition to the text?
 - (3). The author then told us that Gideon had many wives. What can we learn from this fact?
 - c. In 8:31, the author indicated that Gideon had a concubine.
 - (1). In view of the fact that Gideon had many wives and 70 other sons and an undisclosed number of daughters, why would he have a concubine as well?
 - (2). From the rest of Scripture, what do we know about this man Abimelech?
 - (3). Notice that the concubine lived in Shechem while he and the rest of his family lived in Ophrah.
 - (a). In a Bible atlas, locate the cities of Shechem and Ophrah.
 - (b). What can we learn from this information?
 - (c). Though the text does not give us the information, why would he have his concubine living in Shechem and his family in Ophrah?
 - d. In 8:32, the author told of the death of Gideon.
 - (1). Though the author did not reveal the age of Gideon, he stated that he died "at a ripe old age."
 - (a). This phrase "ripe old age" is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe a person's age at death. What is the significance of this?
 - (b). What does this say about Gideon?
 - (2). The author made two statements about the burial place of Gideon.
 - (a). What were these statements?
 - (b). What do they mean?
9. In Judges 8:33-35, the author described Israel's actions following the death of Gideon.
 - a. In 8:33, the author described the actions of Israel following the death of Gideon. He began by saying "as soon as..."
 - (1). What does this suggest?

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- (2). Why would they refrain from this while Gideon was alive, but turn to paganism as soon as he died?
 - (3). The author spoke of "Baals" and "Baal-berith". What is the difference between the two? A Bible dictionary may be helpful here.
 - (4). Notice that the author spoke of "Baals" rather than "Baal." How can we explain this fact?
 - b. In 8:34, 35, the author summarized the condition of Israel.
 - (1). What did he mean when he said, "Israel did not remember the LORD their God..."?
 - (2). What did he mean "they did not show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal..."?
10. Review your study of this chapter.
- a. How can you apply this to your own spiritual life?
 - b. What does it say about our situation when we serve well and then fail?
 - b. What does this tell us about the nature of God?

LESSON 8: JUDGES 8:1 - 35

GIDEON CONQUERED EPHRAIMITES

There are eight paragraphs in the eighth chapter of the book of Judges. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

81-3	Ephraim Challenged Gideon
8:4-9	Gideon Rebuffed by Succoth and Penuel
8:10-12	Gideon Attacked Midian
8:13-17	Gideon Destroyed Succoth
8:18-21	Gideon Killed Zebah and Zalmunna
8:22-28	Gideon Made Golden Ephod - Israel Worshipped Ephod
8:29-32	The Death of Gideon
8:33-35	Israel Returned to Worship Baal

Judges 8:1-3 - Ephraim Challenged Gideon

Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they contended with him vigorously. Judges 8:1

If you look at the maps in the previous chapter, you will notice that Ephraim was never far from the field of battle. They appeared to be very upset with Gideon because he did not call upon them to assist in the fight. The truth of the matter is that though there was a long history of battles to take and keep the land, Ephraim was never one of those who got involved. They studiously avoided participation in the assistance of other tribes and the defense of Israel against the pagan nations.

There was nothing to indicate to Gideon that Ephraim was now more eager to assist their brothers in Israel than they had been before. Now, however, the battle had moved away from their borders and it appeared to be well under control. That being the case, Ephraim complained loudly that they had been overlooked and their assistance ignored. They were boisterous in their protest, but as someone once said, "You complain too loudly." Gideon might well have told them that there had been nothing hindering them from coming to the aid of the rest of Israel. Gideon had sent for assistance in every direction that he thought helpful. Ephraim had not been cooperative in the past and there was nothing to indicate that they would be more concerned about people, other than themselves, at this point.

But he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? Judges 8:2

One must be impressed with the diplomacy of Gideon in this situation. He had every reason to lecture them in strong terms. He rather took the quiet and complimentary route. It

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was clear to everyone that Gideon had done a miraculous thing in defending Israel against the Midianites. Nevertheless, he acted as though he had done nothing in comparison with Ephraim.

Notice the way he put it, What have I done in comparison with you? Is not the glean- ing of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?" This was a word picture with which they were all quite familiar. Gleanings were the few grapes that were left on the vines when harvest was completed. Vintage, however, was the very best of the harvest. It was like saying, "the very best that I have done is really nothing in comparison with the left-overs of Ephraim.

If you look closely, Gideon did not really answer the question that they put to him in anger. Gideon's approach was diplomatic even if a bit of a free translation of the truth . Their protest was empty and everyone knew it. They had not been cooperative in the past. They had given no interest in cooperating with Gideon in the present struggle. If they real- ly wanted to participate, they could have done so ever since the fight began. The fight was not yet over; they could still send all they troops they wanted and their presence would have been quite welcomed. Now that the battle looked more secure for Israel, the people of Ephraim wanted to appear valiant.

Gideon humored the men of Ephraim and they knew it. In effect, he said that they had done much more than he had. It would be clear to everyone that this statement was not true. It was not so much that Gideon lied as it was that he did not take them seriously. This is an even greater affront than a lie.

"God has given the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb into your hands; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that. Judges 8:3

Gideon did not lie in this verse. God had delivered the two leaders into the hands of the Ephraimites, but when the battle was highly in question, Ephraim was nowhere to be found. Gideon's statement, in this verse, sounds a lot like the effusive praise of an adult for some small achievement of a little child. It sounds as if the little one had walked on water, but it was a very small accomplishment. That is the way Gideon dealt with Ephra- im. Gideon could not possibly have been serious in his praise of their efforts. Though they were soothed they were also humiliated, whether they knew it or not.

Judges 8:4-9 - Gideon Rebuffed by Succoth and Penuel

Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing. Judges 8:4

There is an exciting piece of information in this verse. Though Gideon's forces had been greatly outnumbered, not one of them was killed in the battle. Notice how the author re- ported this information, "Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over." This suggests that all 300 were still in action.

These 300 men had chased the Midianites for more than 50 miles and over most of that distance they were running. They had to be quite weary. They had had no time to cele- brate their victory. They were too busy chasing the defeated armies. This left them with a lot of frustration and disappointment and a very tired body.

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And he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." Judges 8:5

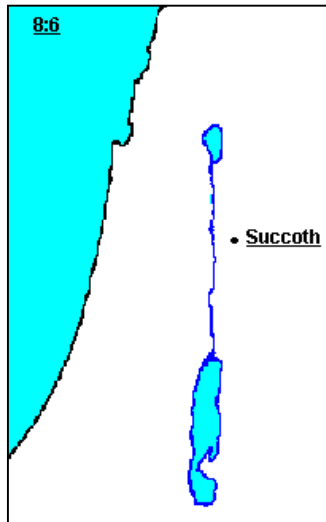
Observe the way that Gideon presented his request. Though he should have been able to command them, still he spoke discreetly and courteously. He could have said, "Give loaves of bread to the people who are following me." He said, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary."

Gideon was quite forthright with the men of Succoth. He told them that he was in the midst of a battle - chasing Zerbah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian.

If you read the verse again, carefully, you will note that every word Gideon said was good reason why the men of Succoth should have given him the help he requested and much more.

And the leaders of Succoth said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army?" Judges 8:6

Neutrality was an important choice for nations or cities that were not involved in a dispute or were unable to defend themselves against the combatants. In actuality, the men of Succoth should have been a part of what Gideon was doing on their behalf. Now that the pressure was off and he could use their help, they clung to their neutrality.



As you look at the map, Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan and located in the Jabbok valley. Many of the Midianites had come through this area, but Succoth had done nothing to slow them down, take them captive or help Gideon in any way.

Look at the way they responded to Gideon. There is a bit of cold, harshness in their words. The way they spoke to Gideon distanced them from what he was doing. Their words did not betray any hint of their benefit from what Gideon had done at great risk.

Their reply made it clear that they were ready to take no risk whatsoever on behalf of the other tribes of Israel. In effect, they were saying, that if he had already conquered these kings, they might help a little, but if the battle was not already safely decided, they did not even want to talk about it. This is about as selfish as it could possibly be stated.

And Gideon said, "All right, when the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." Judges 8:7

Observe that Gideon did not argue with them for one minute. He accepted their words as their final word. That was probably fortunate, because it would have done little good to try to reason with selfish people to encourage them to take even the smallest risk on behalf of the entire nation.

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Observe that Gideon's words were firm and direct. Observe also that he had not forgotten who it was who gave Midian into their hands. He said, "When the LORD has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands." This is a clear statement of the fact that God would win the battle just as He had promised Gideon before it all began.

Observe also, however, that Gideon continued with strong threatening words. God is going to give Midian into their hands, but Gideon is the one who is going to punish Succoth. Gideon spoke of "thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars." The thorns of the desert were at least six inches long. To be beaten with these would be life-threatening in the most painful manner. The question naturally arises, why would Gideon tell them that he was going to do this at a later date? This would give them plenty of time to get ready to defend themselves. There are at least three good reasons why Gideon would do this in advance:

1. Succoth was not that large a city. They could not really defend themselves against these soldiers.
2. God had given the massive Midianite army into their hands. There was no reason to believe that God would not also give Succoth into their hands.
3. The people of that area added fear to punishment by telling people in advance that it was coming. This is something that the people of the Near East still practice. They know that the anticipation of death is as bad as death itself.

We should also remember that these two forms of punishment - thorns and briars - were the two most painful forms of retribution known to the people of that day. No one would be able to sustain this and live. If these people took Gideon seriously, they would flee their city and never return.

And he went up from there to Penuel, and spoke similarly to them; and the men of Penuel answered him just as the men of Succoth had answered. Judges 8:8

Penuel was located about ten miles to the south east of Succoth. It was situated along the shores of the Jabbok valley. Even though Gideon's entreaty to the men of Succoth was fruitless, he spoke to the men of Penuel in exactly the same way. He did not allow his irritation to get the better of his courtesy.

The fact that Gideon and his men came to these two villages tells us something about the route that the fleeing Midianites took in their effort to get back to their homeland. It should be noted that by now, the men with Gideon were hungrier than they had been before. The men with Gideon were more tired and frustrated than they had been when they reached Succoth. The men of the city apparently thought that Gideon had no power at all and this gave them nothing to fear.

We should never forget that the Midianites probably threatened the people of Penuel lest they give food and comfort to the Jew who were pursuing them. The Midianites were fierce men and their hatred of Jews knew no equal. It is not hard to see why the people of Penuel were reluctant to cooperate with Gideon and his men.

There is yet another reason that the people of Penuel should have helped Gideon. The Midianites were the fiercest enemies of any part of the Jewish people. Because of their treatment of the Jews, God had condemned the Midianites and placed a curse on them.

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These reasons should have made it automatic that the people of Penuel would give Gideon and his men anything they needed. Frankly, for Penuel to take a stand against Gideon and his men as they did, was to take a stand against God Himself.

So he spoke also to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I return safely, I will tear down this tower." Judges 8:9

The words of Gideon were cold and penetrating. This was as severe a threat as Gideon had given the men of Succoth. To destroy a tower of a city in a valley was to remove their defenses altogether. This tower was their main source of defense. Otherwise, their soldiers were greatly exposed during an attack. The tower gave them an advantage to see trouble before it arrived. It also gave them height advantage when the battle started.

Notice that Gideon did not say, "IF I return safely." He said, "WHEN I return safely." There is a great deal of difference between the two statements. There was a confidence in Gideon that he was certainly going to return safely, and when he did Penuel was going to be devastated. One cannot help comparing Gideon's confidence at this point with that demonstrated when the angel of the LORD commanded him to destroy the Midianite army. This is what the angel of the LORD could see in Gideon when he could not see it in himself.

Gideon was in no hurry to mete out punishment. If he had been, he would have destroyed the city on the spot. There are at least two reasons for Gideon's patience at this point:

1. **He kept his focus** - His priority was to capture two Midianite kings and destroy their armies. Nothing could occupy his attention until that responsibility was accomplished.
2. **Punishment delayed was punishment enhanced** - the punishment was going to be very severe. Gideon wanted these men to suffer as much as possible. When you are going to kill the people involved, the only way to make it worse is to increase the pain of death or delay it so that they can think about it for a while. Unfortunately, this tactic is still practiced today in that part of the world. Their crime was unthinkable and Gideon wanted their punishment to match their evil deed.

Judges 8:10-12 - Gideon Attacked Midian

Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their armies with them, about 15,000 men, all who were left of the entire army of the sons of the east; for the fallen were 120,000 swordsmen. Judges 8:10

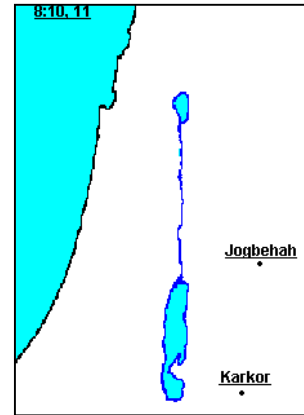
This is amazing! For the first time, the author has indicated just how large the Midianite army really was. Imagine 300 men had to face 135,000 men with superior armament and still defeated them! One hundred twenty thousand men had died either by killing each other or by being killed by the army of Gideon.

Now 300 men were chasing 15,000 and they did not have the conviction to believe that they could defend themselves against 300 men. This is fantastic! If Gideon started out with 300 men and after 120,000 of the enemy died there were 300 men chasing the remaining 15,000, then this tells us that not a man of the 300 had been killed.

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The author identified the place to which the Midianite army had fled. As you can see on the map, Karkor is located far to the east of the Dead Sea. It is located on a broad wadi - valley between two hills or mountain ranges. This is an area that was carved out of the rock by water draining off the tops of the hills or mountains. This map also shows just how far the Midianites had fled and Gideon had given hot pursuit. It is not surprising that all of them were weary. It is a wonder that they were able to function at all.

And Gideon went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and attacked the camp, when the camp was unsuspecting. Judges 8:11



The author gives us a glimpse into the way that Gideon tracked the Midianites. First, the route that Gideon took tells us something of his strategy. Observe on the map with 8:10, that the Midianites went down to Karkor. It does not tell us how they made that trip. The author does, however, tell us the route that Gideon took. This suggests the possibility that he took a slightly different route than the Midianites took.

The text states that Gideon, "went up by the way of those who lived in tents on the east..." People who lived in tents were shepherds. They moved from place to place with their animals. These nomadic people had to take routes that had a gradual climb and descent in the mountains. The animals were not able to take routes which were steep. Also, these people had to carry their tents and all their belongings. To go through steep climbs and descents would make a difficult task nearly impossible. Because he had only 300 men, Gideon had to conserve their strength as much as possible. This all suggests that Gideon had figured out where the Midianites were going and found an easier route to get his army to the location. It would also increase their speed of travel. You may well remember that when they were in Penuel, the author identified the fact that the 300 men were weary. This route would be a great advantage to them. Gideon had found a way to give his men a bit of rest while keeping up with the chase or perhaps gaining on their enemy.

Notice, again, that Gideon took his enemy by surprise. When 300 men are chasing 15,000, one must find every possible advantage. Surprise was one of their best advantages. The Midianites were not looking for Gideon's attack this soon nor from the side from which they came. The element of surprise has precluded the outcome of many battles as it did on this occasion.

When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army. Judges 8:12

Look carefully at the chain of events that the author described in this verse:

1. The kings fled.
2. Gideon pursued the kings.
3. Gideon captured the kings.
4. Gideon routed the whole army.

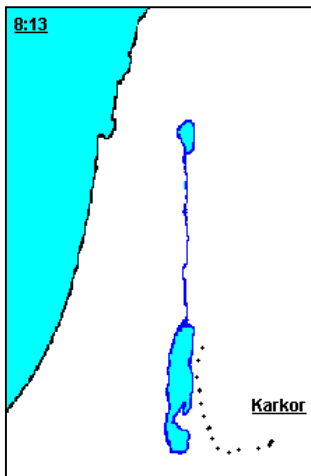
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In the natural order of things, the kings would not flee until the army was about to be routed. Only then would the leaders flee. This may be a way of adding emphasis to the importance of this situation. The king or general, in every army, was the key to morale. As long as the leader was present and doing well, there was hope for the army. The moment that this changed, the entire army was on edge and constantly concerned about their future.

Observe that the names of the two kings appear twice in the same sentence. This, too, is a way to add emphasis to the description. It was a great event when two kings were captured. We must remember that it was not just that two kings were captured. These were men who had mocked God and revolted against His rule. As in every battle, in that day, it was not just 300 men standing against 15,000; it was not just a king having victory over an enemy. It was Jehovah standing against the idols worshipped by the Midianites and their neighbors. This victory said to all who heard of it that the God of Israel defeated the many idols of the Midianites.

Judges 8:13-17 - Gideon Destroyed Succoth

*Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres.
Judges 8:13*



We cannot be certain of the location of "the ascent of Heres." The fact that the author mentions the way Gideon returned suggests that it was a different route than he had taken when he came south from Succoth and Penuel. Again, the fact that the author identified this as "the ascent" suggests that Gideon took a more mountainous route as he returned north from the victory. The map suggests a possible scenario, though we can not be certain. As you can see, it probably means that they came west and then traveled north along the hilly, mountainous route following the Jordan river valley. We do know that it was often considered a good tactic for an army to return home by a different route than they had used as they went to battle. That may well account for this situation. We do know that the decision to take this route made it necessary for them to travel additional miles. It was really out of their way to get back to Penuel and Succoth.

And he captured a youth from Succoth and questioned him. Then the youth wrote down for him the princes of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. Judges 8:14

The fact that this young boy was out where he could be captured suggests that the people of Succoth did not take Gideon's promise too seriously. It appears that they felt quite safe in spite of Gideon's promise. We must remember that Gideon was talking bravely, but he had only 300 men with him. We should also keep in mind that on the trip south, the 300 men were chasing 15,000 men. It could easily be that the people of Succoth felt that the 300 would be destroyed long before they decided to return home.

It was important to know the leaders of the city. This would include the princes, the people in line for positions of responsibility as they came of age. The elders would also be important to know. When a city was captured, the leaders would always try to blend in

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with the population so that they would not be singled out for special punishment. The fact that Gideon wanted to know who the leaders were tells us something about what he had in mind when the city was captured.

There were 77 men who were leaders in the city. This gives us an impression of just how large the city really was. It would take a very large community to sustain 77 leaders. It also gave Gideon a long list of people with whom he must contend and eventually put to death. That was certainly on his mind.

And he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom you taunted me, saying, 'Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are weary?'"

Judges 8:15

The fact that Gideon went to Succoth before going to Penuel gives us some information about the route that they took. It was hinted that they had taken the route through the Jordan Valley, now we have evidence. Both Succoth and Penuel were in the Jabbok valley. Having come up the Jordan valley as far as the Jabbok river, they turned east to Succoth and then followed the river to Penuel as well.

This had to be a tactical move. Gideon wanted to deal with Succoth first. Otherwise, he could have come straight north along the easier route, which he had previously taken, and dealt with Penuel first and then with Succoth as he came west to the Jordan. In order to deal with Succoth first, Gideon had to take his men at least 60 miles out of their way.

It may also have been that Succoth was the largest of the two cities and Gideon wanted to deal with them first. Again, it could be an emotional decision. He could have been more angry with them than he was with Penuel. Whatever the reason, it was deliberate.

Put yourself in the place of the rulers of Succoth as Gideon returned. You made some rash remarks earlier concerning whether or not Zebah and Zalmunna were already in Gideon's hand. Now Gideon stands before you with these two kings in hand. He is reminding you in devastating terms that the two kings are now in hand. You are listening to your own caustic words being repeated verbatim in Gideon's accusation. Without a doubt, it would be impossible to describe the horror that would grip your heart as he threatened you.

And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them. Judges 8:16

The thorns of the wilderness are a bit different from what we visualize. We tend to think of thorns on a rose bush. These would be painful, but the ones that were used were far worse. These thorns were so hard that they were sometimes used as carving wood. They are still used that way. Again, wilderness thorns are anywhere from two to four inches in length. These thorns are as stiff as nails and in emergency were used for that purpose. The damage that would be done when one is hit by one of these is tremendous. If the leaders of the city were threshed vigorously with these thorns these rulers would certainly die. Observe, however, that the text also says that the men of the city were punished as well. If you go back to Judges 8:7, you will note that this is exactly what Gideon said he would do to the men of Succoth. To the great shock and despair of the men of the city, Gideon did exactly what he said he would do.

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And he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city. Judges 8:17

Observe that there is no mention of the trip from Succoth to Penuel. It is as though they finished in Succoth and were immediately at Penuel to punish these people as well. That, of course, was not the case. The two cities are several miles apart.

Penuel was located in an area that was very difficult to defend. It was in the valley, but the best defenses were on top of hills. There were no real hills in the area. In such a situation, people would certainly build a wall around their community. Penuel went a step further. They also built a tower from which they could defend the city and extend the safety for their people. The height of the tower gave the defenders an additional advantage over their enemies.

Gideon and his men not only breached the walls, but tore down the tower of the city. The text also indicates that Gideon and his men killed the men of the city. This city was destroyed in two ways:

1. The defense of the tower was removed as it was completely destroyed.
2. The men of the city were killed. This meant that the city was rendered uninhabitable for the foreseeable future. In that hostile environment the women and children of the city, if not taken as slaves, would not be able to rebuild the city, defend themselves and provide their daily needs without the presence of the men who had been killed. This city would now be abandoned.

We should note, again, that Gideon did exactly as he had promised the rebellious leaders of the city - he destroyed the tower of the city.

Judges 8:18-21 - Gideon Killed Zebah and Zalmunna

Then he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men were they whom you killed at Tabor?" And they said, "They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king." Judges 8:18

Having punished Succoth and Penuel as he had promised, Gideon now turned his attention to the two kings - Zebah and Zalmunna. It is interesting that Gideon did not accuse them, but rather gave them the opportunity to accuse themselves. He asked them to identify the kinds of people they had put to death in Tabor. Not knowing the purpose of Gideon's question, the two kings described the ones that they had killed. In so doing, these kings indicted themselves and sentenced themselves to death. It is doubtful this came to them as a surprise because a captured king would expect to be put to death or worse yet, be continually and totally disgraced. Gideon was inquiring whether the people they put to death were his relatives or not. When the kings said, "They were like you, each one resembling the son of a king," Gideon knew that these kings had put his own brothers to death.

And he said, "They were my brothers, the sons of my mother. As the LORD Lives, if only you had let them live, I would not kill you." Judges 8:19

There is a bit of pathos in the words of Gideon. In these words, you gain another glimpse of the man, Gideon. He was prepared to spare the lives of these kings if only they had spared his brothers. It is as though Gideon wanted to let them live, but was now forced to punish them at the cost of their lives. It is doubtful if these kings expected him to say what he said.

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It may not seem like it, but Gideon took an oath when he said, "as the LORD lives..." This meant that had the proper conditions prevailed, sparing their lives would not be just so many words. It would be a vow that he would not be able to change.

We must remember that though Gideon was convinced that he had done the right thing, his family members were strongly against the spiritual direction he had taken. They were worshippers of Baal. Zebah and Zalmunna killed several members of Gideon's family because he had taken his stand in favor of the worship of Jehovah and not Baal. The rest of the family would now be even more incensed than they were before because of his religious choices.

This verse gives us another glimpse into the personality of Gideon. Gideon was totally committed to serving God. He would be disturbed by those who worshipped Baal and some who sought his life for this change. Nevertheless, he looked for a way to spare the lives of these kings in spite of the fact that they represented a force in the country that would have gladly taken his life. There is grace in such a life.

So he said to Jether his first-born, "Rise, kill them." But the youth did not draw his sword, for he was afraid, because he was still a youth. Judges 8:20

There is an insight into the family of Gideon. He was busy leading an army against the pagan Midianites. This brutal killing lifestyle was going to be characteristic of them for the foreseeable future. Gideon was the ruler of Israel at the time. If he continued to be successful, his son would follow him in that role. Being constantly engaged in battle, Gideon could be killed on almost any day. The eldest son would surely take control of the country if Gideon were killed. Nevertheless, this brutal, hazardous atmosphere did not touch the eldest son. When Gideon told his son to kill these two kings, his son was unable to do it. He had never killed anyone before and was not prepared to do so at this point.

Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks. Judges 8:21

This is a difficult verse to say the least. It is difficult to think of a person begging to be put to death, but that is what happened. There is one thing that helps us here. These kings have known that they were either going to be killed or severely humiliated as long as they lived. They had been told that they would be killed and the order was given. The only reason it was not carried out was that the boy was unable to kill. The tension of knowing you were going to die, but not knowing when, is devastating. It appears that this is the reason that the two kings begged Gideon to kill them and get it over with.

Notice what the kings said, "for as the man, so is his strength." In a sense, these kings were telling Gideon that this was a man's job and should not be given to a boy. They knew that Gideon was no stranger to killing for he had been involved in many battles and several men had felt the cold edge of his sword. Thus, they pleaded with him to take his sword and end their tense anticipation of dying.

There is a seemingly insignificant piece of information in this verse. Notice that the author wrote, "and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camels' necks." This statement introduces a totally new idea into this story. There is no previous report that

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Gideon took anything for himself in any of the battles. This fact was tied to the idea that it was God who had really won the battle and not the men of Israel. This is the first time that Gideon took anything. We will need to watch to see where this information leads us.

Judges 8:22-28 - Gideon Made Golden Ephod - Israel Worshipped Ephod

As we begin the study of this paragraph it is good to remember that there are cross-currents within it. It is sufficient, at this point, to be aware of this fact and to watch carefully to see where this information will take us in our understanding of the man and of the text.

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." Judges 8:22

The text says, "the men of Israel said to Gideon..." It is a true statement, but it can be misleading. The men who said this were men of Israel. We must remember, however, that not all of the men of Israel were represented in the battle. Indeed, there were several tribes who were not represented at all. Again, we know that Gideon came from Manasseh and the king of Israel was to come from the tribe of Judah. Further, a majority of the people of Manasseh were in favor of worshipping Baal and were furious with Gideon for tearing down the altar to Baal on his father's property. It appears that the author's intent was that the Israelites present, mostly from northwestern and north central tribes, invited Gideon to be their king.

We should also take note of the way the invitation was offered. They invited Gideon to be king, but they also said, "both you and your son, also your son's son..." They were not just asking Gideon to rule over them. They were asking him to establish a royal family in which succession would be recognized.

It appears that the invitation came from the fact that they were grateful that Gideon had led them out of an impossible situation and they were well aware of the plight from which he had saved them.

But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you." Judges 8:23

Without explanation, the author reports that Gideon refused an invitation that most men would have been thrilled to receive. It is clear that God called Gideon to be a judge and not a king. We have no information that tells us what this meant in Gideon's decision-making process as he responded to this invitation.

Part of the confusion in our understanding of the personality of Gideon grows out of this verse. Gideon refused to be their king and also refused to establish a royal family in which his sons after him would rule over Israel. He also insisted that "the LORD shall rule over you." The text makes no attempt to explain what Gideon was saying in this statement. It is clear that he had no intention of being their king. It is also clear that he understood that God was to be the ruler in Israel. As we shall see in the next verse, Gideon was not above receiving compensation for his efforts. This must continue to remain a point of confusion in our understanding of the man.

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Yet Gideon said to them, "I would request of you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. Judges 8:24

There is a contrast between 8:23 and 8:24. In the previous verse, Gideon rejected an invitation to be king and start a royal family. It is as though he was saying that he needed no compensation for what he did on behalf of God and His people. In the very next verse, however, he told them that he would like for them to each give him an earring, a part of the booty they confiscated from the Midianites.

There is a seemingly unimportant piece of information in this verse - "(for they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.)" Until recent years, we would have thought it strange to see a man with earrings. It was very common, however, for the male descendants of Ishmael to wear earrings. It should be kept in mind, however, that these earrings were not part of their local dress code, but part of their worship of Baal. These earrings were amulets intended to protect the wearer from death and destruction in battle. It was a practice that was shared by all the Canaanite people in Palestine as part of their worship of Baal.

Though the ancestors of Gideon and the Midianites were relatives, still there were many differences between Israel and the descendants of Ishmael. The Ishmaelites intentionally intermarried with the pagan nations. The people of Israel, however, were to maintain a pure genealogy because of the covenant. The Ishmaelites worshipped Baal as their neighbors did. Israel, on the other hand, was supposed to worship Jehovah alone.

When an army defeated another army, they would claim all the booty they could find. Part of that booty, in relation to the Midianites, was the earrings that each man wore. Gideon did not ask for all of them. He asked that each soldier give him one earring from the booty that he had claimed.

This is a crucial point in the service of Gideon. Up to this point, Gideon did exactly what God asked him to do without question or request. There is no inkling of Gideon seeing what he did as anything except obeying God and serving his country well.

Here, for the first time, there is a personal consideration that enters into the picture. When he made his request, he did not tell the soldiers what he had in mind for this gift which he requested. There was no hint, however, in the instructions of God that Gideon was to receive anything for what he did on behalf of God and the nation. It should be mentioned that it was common, in battle, for the people involved in the victory to share in the booty of war.

We bring this up, because the whole tenor of Gideon's life will change from this point forward. We will want to watch to see just how crucial and why it may be crucial in the whole experience of Gideon.

And they said, "We will surely give them." So they spread out a garment, and every one of them threw an earring there from his spoil. Judges 8:25

Observe that the reaction of the soldiers was not one of surprise. They were perfectly willing to give this to Gideon. When they said, "We will surely give them," there is a hint of eagerness to comply with the request. It did not seem like an unusual or unwarranted re-

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quest on Gideon's part. He asked for it and they were quite willing to meet his request. Notice that this was not a wholesale sharing of their booty. He asked for just one earring and that is what he received from each soldier. We must remember, however, that there were over 100,000 soldiers who had died and each one wore these amulets. If there is a surprise here, it is that the weight of the earrings was not more than it was.

And the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels' necks. Judges 8:26

The sheer number of the Midianites who died makes it easy to understand the tremendous size of this seemingly insignificant gift. The shekel weighed 11.4 grams or just under half an ounce. In our weight system, 1700 shekels would be approximately 53.3 pounds. If you think in modern terms of \$375.00 an ounce, for 850 ounces, the total value, today, would be \$318,750.00 That is a lot of gold in any era. Notice that there were several additions. He mentioned the neck bands for the camels. The people of the near east decorated their camels as they did their wives. It was not unusual for a woman to wear eight or ten earrings on each ear, many bracelets and several necklaces. Add to this the crescent ornaments, pendants and camel neck-bands and it should weigh approximately 150 pounds. The text does not tell us, but it would appear that this would add another \$300,000 to the value of what Gideon received.

Though he did not mention it in his request, this verse indicates that he also received the purple robes which were worn by the kings of the Midianites. These were probably the most expensive robes available in that part of the world. This would probably make him one of the richest men in that part of the world.

The fact that things were added that he did not request probably suggests just how willingly the soldiers gave the things that Gideon requested.

And Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household. Judges 8:27

We must add that God did not tell Gideon to request the earrings. Neither did God command Gideon to make an ephod out of the earrings that were given to him. This was something that he did on his own.

The author tells us that Gideon made an "ephod" out of these melted down earrings. An ephod was originally an over-garment worn by women. Much, much later, it became the over-garment of the High Priest among the Hebrew people. Some have claimed that Gideon's "ephod" was really a molten image. Still others claim that it was a high-priestly garment, much like the one worn by Israel's high priest when entering the Holy of Holies. If this choice were accurate, it would seem that Gideon was using this image to indicate that he was not only the military leader and Judge of Israel, but also their High Priest. It would seem that the idea of the outer garment of the High Priest was what Gideon had in mind when he used this huge amount of gold to make an ephod. What was the sin involved?

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1. Gideon could have used this ephod to guarantee that he was being given instructions as to how to lead Israel in battle.
2. All Israel could have been depending upon this ephod rather than depending upon God to be their guide and ruler. Whatever the situation, Gideon clearly made a mistake when he requested the gold. God called him to be the judge, not the High Priest.

Again, whether Gideon had it in mind to make an ephod such as the High Priest wore, or if he was making an idol, we must keep in mind that God did not tell him to do this. He made this decision on his own.

The author evaluated the results of Gideon's actions in vivid terms. He said, "all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household." Look at the scenario! Gideon reluctantly did what God wanted him to do when it seemed like a foolish venture. God honored that step of faith by doing, on Gideon's behalf, much more than anyone could have imagined. Now in the afterglow of the great victory, Gideon goes in a direction which is just the opposite of what God had commanded him to do in the first place. Whether Gideon fashioned an idol for the people to worship or if he made the vestment for himself that indicated that he was the High Priest of his people, in both instances, the focus was moved from the worship of God to centering on man or the image he made with his hands. In either case, the center of worship shifted from God to man and this always brought disaster. It did no less in this instance.

It is an understatement to say, "all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household." Gideon won the battle which delivered his people from the worship of idols only to then lead them into a more intense and debilitating form of idolatry involving himself rather than God.

So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore. And the land was undisturbed for forty years in the days of Gideon. Judges 8:28

This is a summary statement of the events of Gideon's life and ministry as a judge over Israel on behalf of God. The way it is written is very important. Notice what he said, "So Midian was subdued before the sons of Israel, and they did not lift up their heads anymore." The author was saying that Gideon not only defeated Midian, he did so in such a way that Midian was so humiliated that they were never again a force with which Israel had to reckon.

Again, the author indicated the length of time that Israel had peace - 40 years. As we have seen repeatedly, the time of peace was, in each instance, longer than the times of difficulty and punishment which Israel received because of their unfaithfulness and disobedience. This is a repeated picture of the kind of God Israel served.

Judges 8:29-32 - The Death of Gideon

Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. Judges 8:29

Repeatedly, Gideon is mentioned with two names - Gideon and Jerubbaal. In this instance, only the name Jerubbaal was used. It may well be because the previous verse tells

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of the tragic, unfortunate thing that Gideon had done in his disobedience of what he knew to be the will of God.

The author identified Gideon as "the son of Joash." This has two meanings in this situation:

1. It identifies the physical lineage of this judge in Israel.
2. It also indicates that even after embarrassing his father by destroying the images of Baal and Asherah and after defeating all the nations around Israel and making the tragic error of making the ephod, still he was not disowned by his family - he was still the son of Joash.

The text states that Gideon went to live in his own house. We need to remember that Gideon was the judge in Israel. It probably suggests that his service as the divine representative in Israel had come to an end, whether he was in favor of it or not. We should remember that by going to his own house, the author has suggested that Gideon went to be the head of his father's clan and that he was a man of great means to say the least.

Now Gideon had seventy sons who were his direct descendants, for he had many wives. Judges 8:30

This comes as a shock to us. Through the entire story of Gideon, we have heard nothing about his immediate family. Now at the conclusion of his career, which ended in sore tragedy, we learn that he had many wives and 70 sons by this large group of his wives.

The statement, "who were his direct descendants..." is emphatic. It is a way of making sure that the reader understands that this large number does not represent grandsons and/or great grand-sons. These are his sons.

As we have seen in past studies, Gideon was not the first to have more than one wife. There is no Old Testament law which specifically prohibits having more than one wife. In most instances, the reason that a man had more than one wife was the fact that his first wife was barren. It was culturally and economically tragic for a man to have no sons. The sons were his social security blanket for his old age. His daughters would marry and become part of their husbands' family. She would, from that point on, have nothing to do with her birth family at all. In the case of Gideon, however, there was no problem with his being without a son to rely upon in his old age. He had 70 of them. This is a single step in what turns out to be spiritual decline.

And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he named him Abimelech. Judges 8:31

It is a further trauma to realize that this man, who had 70 sons and many wives also had a concubine by whom he also had a son. In most instances, men in the Old Testament who had many wives and/or concubines were not men of spiritual greatness. Abraham came to have two wives at the same time because his wife, Sarah, was barren and she wanted to ease the pressure to bear a child. Esau had two wives because he could see that it hurt his parents and he wanted to hurt them. Jacob had two wives because he knowingly tried to beat the cultural system of marrying the second daughter before the first daughter was married. Solomon, in the time of his spiritual decline, had many wives and concubines. If you check his history, you will see that this very situation led to his sanctioning of idolatry

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and even participation in it. With his reign, the kingdom began its split and eventual demise.

Gideon was not different. He had many wives, 70 or 71 sons and Abimelech, the son of his concubine, was one of the most evil men described in the Old Testament.

And Gideon the son of Joash died at a ripe old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. Judges 8:32

The author's identification of Gideon is very important in this verse. He spoke of Gideon as "Gideon the son of Joash." Even though Gideon sinned and disgraced the family at the decline of his rule, still he was not disowned by the family. This idea is further reinforced by the next statement in the verse, "and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash." Had he been in a strained relationship with the family, they would never have allowed him to be buried in the family tomb with his father.

This verse also indicates something of the relationship between Gideon and the townspeople of Ophrah. The author write, "in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." There had been a time, at the beginning of Gideon's judgeship, when the people of the town wanted to kill Gideon. Whether it is because there was a change in the thinking of the people of the town or because Gideon came much closer to their idolatrous modes of worship at the close of his ministry, it is apparent that he was no longer anathema to them. Thus, they would allow him to be buried in their town area in the tomb of his father.

Judges 8:33-35 - Israel Returned to Worship Baal

Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god. Judges 8:33

There is a problem indicated in this verse. The author wrote, "...as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals and made Baal-berith their god." The way this verse is written, it hints that because Gideon was still alive, the people did not worship Baal. Just as soon as Gideon died, however, they reverted back to their old pagan forms of worship. The problem is that in 8:27, the author described a form of idol worship that was becoming prevalent in Israel. It had to do with Gideon rather than Baal, but it was idolatry just the same.

Notice that the author spoke of "Baals" not "Baal." This could be for one of two reasons:

1. In near eastern languages they often referred to their deity in the plural. It is called the plural of respect. In Genesis 1:1, it says in the beginning God..." The word God is in the plural form. That may be the intent of this plural form.
2. It might also be that it was an accurate reference because there were a number of different idols which were all called Baal. In some religious cultures they had more than one deity called Baal. In different national cultures they would have several idols all of which were called Baal. In some instances their Baal had an additional name as you see in this verse - "Baal-berith."

Baal-berith means the covenant Baal. They had entered into covenant with Baal in much the same way that they had entered into covenant with Jehovah. This was not just a

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casual bowing the head, out of courtesy, to the idol Baal. These people had officially rejected their covenant with Jehovah and entered into covenant with Baal.

Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaa (that is, Gideon,) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel. Judges 8:34, 35

The author said, "Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the LORD their God..." This did not mean that they forgot His name. The word "remember" has less to do with memory than with respect. This is the same idea Jesus expressed when he said, "this do in **remembrance** of me..." Luke 22:19 It is a way of holding in high regard. We use the same idea when we talk about being "remembered" in a will. A person honors a friend or family member by including them in their will.

There is a very strong contrast in this verse. The author spoke of God, who delivered Israel from all their enemies on every side. He then spoke of Israel who did not remember "the LORD their God." After all the great and wonderful things God had done for underserving Israel, still they did not honor Him in any way.

This is the conclusion the author wanted to drive home in the ending of the story of Gideon. Israel was in their dilemma because they had rebelled against God. While they were still rebelling, God sent them Gideon to be their deliverer. God, through Gideon, delivered Israel from their most hated enemies, the Midianites. In response to all the undeserved gifts God had bestowed upon them, Israel responded by giving no honor to God in any way, but rather forsook God and entered into covenant with Baal. This is part of the ongoing theme that you see throughout the entire book of Judges. Israel sinned and was delivered. Instead of realizing what God had done for them and worshipping Him with grateful hearts, they forsook Him and turned their affections to the idols of their neighbors and took part in the orgies of the worship experiences of the Baal and Asherah.

Conclusion

In this chapter, there is a serious contrast between God and people.

1. God is sovereign – He gave the enemy leaders into the hands of His people.
2. God acts through people. He gave the enemy into their hands, but they had to fight and kill the enemy.
3. God is faithful – He kept His word. He promised to deliver the enemy into Gideon's hands and He did.
4. God is alive as opposed to the inanimate idols of the nations.
5. Even a great servant of God can falter.
6. People who have experienced the power and mercy of God are still prone to waywardness without God's help and leaders He directs.
7. The human propensity to error is tremendous.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9

JOTHAM SPOKE AGAINST ABIMELECH'S CONSPIRACY

JUDGES 9:1 - 57

1. In our best manuscripts, there are nine paragraphs in the ninth chapter of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

9:1-6	
9:7-21	
9:22-25	
9:26-29	
9:30-33	
9:34-40	
9:41-45	
9:46-49	
9:50-57	

2. In Judges 9:1-6, the author described how Abimelech replaced Gideon as King
- a. In 9:1, 2, Abimelech appealed to his mother's family for political support.
 - (1). What was Abimelech's appeal?
 - (2). Read these verses carefully. What pressure did Abimelech place on the family members?
 - (3). There is an irony in these verses.
 - (a). What is that irony?
 - (b). Why would Abimelech use this with his mother's family?
 - (4). Why would Abimelech have to resort to these means to gain assistance?
 - b. In 9:3, Abimelech's mother's family spoke to the leaders of Shechem.
 - (1). On what basis did these relatives attempt to persuade the leaders of Shechem?
 - (2). Think carefully about this verse. On what basis did the leaders of Shechem respond favorably to the request?
 - (3). What would the leaders of Shechem tend to gain if they sided with Abimelech?
 - c. In 9:4, the leaders of Shechem also gave Abimelech money.
 - (1). Where did the leaders of Shechem get this money? What is the significance of this fact?
 - (2). How much money did they give Abimelech?
 - (3). There are a number of conflicts in this verse. Identify each conflict.

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- (4). What can be learned from the disclosure of what Abimelech did with the money that the leaders of Shechem gave him?
- d. In 9:5, the true character of Abimelech came to the surface.
 - (1). What was it that identified Abimelech's character?
 - (2). What did this incident identify about Abimelech?
 - (3). Why would Abimelech consider it necessary to kill the 70 sons of Gideon?
 - (4). The verse closes by disclosing the fact that Jotham hid himself. What, if anything, does this tell us?
- e. In 9:6, Abimelech became king.
 - (1). Who made him king?
 - (2). What is the significance of this fact?
 - (3). Over what body of land did Abimelech become king?
 - (4). Look at the way Abimelech became king..
 - (a). Compare the way Abimelech became ruler with the way Gideon became the ruler of Israel.
 - (b). In what ways are they the same?
 - (c). In what ways are they different?
 - (5). The author identified the place where this coronation took place. What is the significance of this information?
- 3. In Judges 9:7-21, Jotham chastised the men of Shechem for what they had done.
 - a. In 9:7, Jotham spoke to the men of Shechem.
 - (1). What did Jotham do?
 - (2). How would you describe this action?
 - (3). What could he hope to accomplish by this action?
 - (4). Study Jotham's message to the Shechemites.
 - (a). What did he say?
 - (b). What does this mean?
 - (c). Read, again, what Jotham said.
 - (d). What questions does it raise in your mind?
 - b. In 9:8, 9, Jotham used an allegory, a story of one thing told in the terms of another, to give his message to the men of Shechem.
 - (1). What was the allegory?
 - (2). What was this allegory really about?
 - (3). What did Jotham say to the men of Shechem?
 - c. In 9:10, 11, Jotham told a second allegory.
 - (1). What was this allegory?
 - (2). What did Jotham say to the men of Shechem?
 - (3). Compare this allegory with the first one, in 9:8, 9. What did you learn?
 - (4). What does this allegory add to the message of the first one?

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- d. In 9:12, 13, Jotham told the men of Shechem a third allegory.
 - (1). What was this allegory?
 - (2). What did Jotham say to the men of Shechem?
 - (3). What does this allegory add to the message of the first two?
- e. In 9:14, 15, Jotham told a fourth allegory.
 - (1). What was the allegory?
 - (2). What did Jotham say in this allegory to the men of Shechem?
 - (3). How is this allegory different from the other three?
 - (4). What does this allegory add to the message of the first three?
 - (5). There is humor in this allegory. Can you identify it?
- f. Jotham listed three conditional challenges as he began his conclusion in 9:16.
 - (1). What are the three conditional challenges?
 - (2). What did Jotham really say in this verse?
- g. In 9:17, 18, Jotham made three statements about his father, Gideon, and made three accusations against the men of Shechem.
 - (1). Identify the three statements about Gideon.
 - (2). List the three accusations Jotham made against the men of Shechem.
 - (3). What was Jotham really saying?
- h. In 9:19, 20, Jotham gave his final conclusion.
 - (1). Read these verses carefully. What is the emotional tone of these verses?
 - (2). These two verses present two conditional statements:
 - (a). What are the statements?
 - (b). What is the meaning of these statements?
 - (3). In 9:20, Jotham called for fire to consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo and Abimelech. What was he saying in this request for judgment?
- i. In 9:21, Jotham finished his message and fled.
 - (1). What is the significance of the fact that the author said, "Because of Abimelech his brother"?
 - (2). There is a caustic inference in this verse.
 - (a). What is that inference?
 - (b). What did the author mean by its use?
- 4. In Judges 9:22-25, the author described the fall-out between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.
 - a. In 9:22, there is a subtle contrast.
 - (1). What is the contrast?
 - (2). Why would the author include the length of Abimelech's reign?
 - b. In 9:23, the author described a serious change in events.
 - (1). What was that change?

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- (2). In this verse, the author told us that this is something that God did. What does this tell us about God?
- c. In 9:24, the author explained what God had done in the previous verse.
 - (1). By the use of the words, "in order that," the author described the purpose of God's actions.
 - (2). What does this tell us about what happened in that encounter?
 - (3). What does this verse tell us about how God deals with people?
 - (4). What does this verse tell us about God?
 - (5). What does this verse tell you about judgment?
- d. In 9:25, the author described how the men of Shechem set out to create a disturbance for Abimelech.
 - (1). What did they do?
 - (2). How would this be a disturbance for Abimelech?
- 5. In Judges 9:26-29, Gaal came to Shechem.
 - a. In 9:26, Gaal, with his relatives, came to Shechem .
 - (1). Why would the author include the information that he brought relatives with him.
 - (2). The author also mentioned that the men of Shechem put their trust in him. What does this suggest to you?
 - b. In 9:27, the author described an unfolding plan.
 - (1). Identify the parts of that plan.
 - (2). Identify the "they" in the author's statement, "They went out into the field and gathered the grapes..."
 - (3). What does the festival have to do with gathering and treading grapes?
 - (4). What does the cursing of Abimelech have to do with this festival held in the house of the god of Shechem?
 - c. In 9:28, Gaal made an attack on Abimelech.
 - (1). This attack came in the form of five questions.
 - (a). What are the questions?
 - (b). How would the men of Shechem answer these questions?
 - (c). What would Gaal accomplish by the use of these questions?
 - (2). How does Zebul figure in this attack?
 - d. In 9:29, Gaal made an appeal.
 - (1). What was his appeal?
 - (2). What was the purpose of this appeal?
 - (3). How would you describe the attitude of Gaal in this verse?
 - (4). How does Zebul figure in this picture?
- 6. In Judges 9:30 -33, Zebul warned Abimelech about Gaal.
 - a. In 9:30, the author described the response of Zebul.

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- (1). What was that response?
 - (2). Why would Zebul burn with anger?
 - b. In 9:31, Zebul responded to the attack by Gaal.
 - (1). How did Zebul respond?
 - (2). Why would he respond that way?
 - (3). What message did Zebul send to Abimelech?
 - (4). If you were Abimelech, how would you feel upon receiving this message?
 - c. In 9:32, 33, Zebul outlined some instructions for Abimelech.
 - (1). What were the instructions?
 - (2). What was the significance of coming at night?
 - (3). On the basis of verse 33, what would you say was Zebul's view of Abimelech's power?
7. In Judges 9:34-40, the author described Abimelech's routing of Gaal.
- a. In 9:34, Abimelech came, by night, to Shechem.
 - (1). What is the importance of the fact that Abimelech's army was divided into four companies?
 - (2). What is the advantage of coming by night?
 - b. In 9:35, 36, the confrontation between Gaal and Abimelech begins.
 - (1). What is the stance of Abimelech in these verses?
 - (2). What is the stance of Gaal in these verses?
 - (3). What was Gaal's response to this situation?
 - (4). What was Zebul's response to Gaal's misunderstanding?
 - c. In 9:37, Gaal began to discover the plot against him.
 - (1). What was his discovery?
 - (2). How would you describe Gaal's attitude at this point?
 - (3). When Gaal said, "one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak," what should this have told him?
 - (4). What does the presence of the "diviners oak" tell us about these people?
 - d. In 9:38, Zebul responded to Gaal's discovery.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). How would you describe Zebul's attitude at this point?
 - (3). How would you describe Zebul's treatment of Gaal in this verse?
 - e. In 9:39, 40, the author recorded the brief battle between Gaal and Abimelech.
 - (1). If you were Gaal, how would you feel?
 - (2). Think back to the boasting of Gaal. Compare the claims then with the experience recorded in these verses. What did you learn?
8. In Judges 9:41-45, the author described Abimelech's destruction of Shechem.
- a. In 9:41, the author described the events following the defeat of Gaal.

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- (1). Look carefully at Zebul's actions. What did you learn?
 - (2). What are the probable implications for Gaal?
 - b. In 9:42, 43, Abimelech dealt with the people of Shechem.
 - (1). What did he do?
 - (2). Why did he do that?
 - (3). In view of these verses, what can we say about the relationship between Abimelech and the people of Shechem?
 - c. In 9:44, 45, the author described Abimelech's step by step destruction of Shechem.
 - (1). In 9:44, the author described the military strategy Abimelech used in approaching Shechem.
 - (a). What was that strategy?
 - (b). Why was it so helpful and important to him?
 - (2). In 9:45, the author described Abimelech's systematic destruction of the city.
 - (a). List the steps the author reported.
 - (b). Why was each step so important?
9. Judges 9:46-49 describe Abimelech's killing of Shechem's leaders.
- a. In 9:46, the author described the actions of the leaders when the city fell.
 - (1). What did they do?
 - (2). Why would they do this?
 - (3). Notice that the name of their god, here, is "El-berith" and not "Baal berith." With the help of a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, attempt to find the difference between the two. Why would the different name be used here?
 - b. In 9:47-49, the author reported how Abimelech prepared for the burning of the city.
 - (1). What did he do? Why?
 - (2). As you read verse 49, what thoughts go through your mind?
 - (3). In view of the name for their god that was used here, what does this verse tell you about that god?
10. In Judges 9:50-57, the author described the death of Abimelech.
- a. In 9:50, 51, the author described the siege of Thebez.
 - (1). The reported capture of Thebez was written in quite matter-of-fact style.
 - (a). Why would it seem so simple?
 - (b). Ask yourself why there is no report of the battle for the city?
 - (2). The author said that the tower was in the center of the city. Why would this seem strange?
 - (3). In view of verse 51, how large does it seem that this tower was?
 - b. In 9:52, the author described a situation which seemed simple and easy. What problems could Abimelech have in finishing such a project?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 9

- c. In 9:53, there is a real problem involved in what the author said in the verse. What is that problem?
 - d. If Abimelech were going to die anyway, as recorded in 9:54, what difference would it make if his armor bearer killed him or the woman killed him?
 - e. In 9:55, the author said that the soldiers went home when they saw that Abimelech was dead. Why would they do that?
 - f. In 9:56, the author ascribed the death of Abimelech to a divine action.
 - (1). Why did God do this?
 - (2). What does this tell us about God.
 - g. In 9:57, the author ascribed the destruction of Shechem to divine action.
 - (1). What reason did the author offer?
 - (2). The author spoke of the "curse of Jotham." What was that?
 - (3). What does this tell us about God?
11. Review the chapter. What does this chapter tell us about God?

LESSON 9: JUDGES 9:1 - 57

JOTHAM SPOKE AGAINST ABIMELECH'S CONSPIRACY

9:1-6	Abimelech Made King In Gideon's Place
9:7-21	Jotham Chastised Shechem for Making Abimelech King
9:22-25	Shechem Turned Against Abimelech
9:26-29	Gaal Challenged Abimelech
9:30-33	Zebul Warned Abimelech About Gaal
9:34-40	Abimelech Routed Gaal
9:41-45	Abimelech Destroyed Shechem
9:46-49	Abimelech Killed Shechem's Leaders - Tower Fire
9:50-57	A Woman Killed Abimelech - millstone

Judges 9:1-6 - Abimelech Made King In Gideon's Place

And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying, "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh." Judges 9:1, 2

This undercutting of family was both a cultural and a moral violation. It was required, in that culture, that a person identify with and rely upon the father's family. There was virtually no contact with the mother's birth-family. There were almost no exceptions to this understanding throughout the entire near east.

On the other hand, we must remember that Abimelech was the son of the concubine, and not one of the legitimate wives. This means that he would be rejected by his half-brothers as well as any of the other relatives. Again, he would not be welcomed by his mother's family. He was, essentially, a man without a family.

He could have just accepted the fact that he would have no opportunity to be the king. There was a problem, however. This man had a burning desire to be king. It was probably fueled by the fact that he was rejected by the family on both sides. On this basis, he made a deliberate, intentional move to subvert the natural order and place himself in contention for the throne. In order to accomplish this, he turned to his mother's family. It should be noted that he presented it as something that was in their best interest, but the fact is that he was thinking only of his own aspirations.

This was a brazen display of raw selfishness. Though it is not uncommon, in any era, still the politician appealing to the benefit of the people in order to accomplish his own ends is disgusting to observe. Abimelech appealed to his mother's family from two directions.

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1. **He appealed to their political concerns** - His idea was that one king was better than 70, especially if that one king was Abimelech. As you can see, this served the family, but it served Abimelech's ambition even more. That is exactly what he was all about. He was perfectly willing to pretend to think of the family's welfare in order to accomplish his political goals.
2. **He appealed to their personal concerns** - In countries where there is a king or despot, the ruler places his relatives in every possible position of power. This is still the case in similar situations.

Abimelech took his case one step farther. He said, "remember, that I am your bone and your flesh." This statement was a two edged sword. It was a firm reminder that they were his family and they were obligated to help him in any way that they could. The other side of this is that they would be aware of the fact that this would open the door for them to be placed in lucrative, powerful positions that would offer them great gain and the ability to control the nation. The financial gain from this was astronomical, and they knew it.

And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative." Judges 9:3

This verse sounds as though the family of the concubine was very persuasive with the men of the city. We should remember, however, that the leaders of Shechem were probably relatives as well. The two-edged sword worked in their case just as it did with the family of the concubine. They, too, would be obligated to help Abimelech as a member of the family. They, too, would be aware of the fact that if they could help Abimelech become king, they would all be placed in positions of power and control from which they could realize great financial gain. Notice that the author described their response when he said, "they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, 'he is our relative.'"

The approach of Abimelech has two sides.

1. He can show them how it will serve them while he is really working on his own ambitions.
2. They can, at the same time, show him how they will work to help him gain his goals while all the time attempting to position themselves so that when he becomes king, they will be in position to take over power and reap great financial gains.

Observe that when the concubine's relatives went to the leaders of Shechem, they made the same appeal that Abimelech had made to them. They appealed to the fact that Abimelech was their brother. It was their responsibility to help him. In the process, he would place them in positions where great power, and wealth would be available to them.

And they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. Judges 9:4

The plot thickens. Not only did the leaders of Shechem agree to help Abimelech; they also gave him a large sum of money. Notice that they did not take this from their own pockets, but rather they took it "from the house of Baal-berith." This meant that now Abimelech was in league with Baal to take over the country. The meaning of this transaction was

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great. There was now a double confrontation. The concubine's family was officially in conflict with the family of the legitimate wives. This was also a conflict between Jehovah and Baal-berith. This means that Gideon, a worshipper of Jehovah, had been intimately involved with a woman who worshipped Baal-berith. In one sense, though God had blessed and guided Gideon by His Spirit, his family was now taking part in the Baal worship because he had been involved with a woman who did not forsake her religious involvement to follow Gideon's worship of Jehovah. This is tragic, because this is what Gideon's whole mission as judge of Israel was all about. God called him to tear down the altar to Baal and Asherah and build an altar to Jehovah. Now Gideon's family was part of the worship of Baal.

Abimelech used the 70 pieces of silver to hire a band of thugs, "worthless and reckless fellows" to be part of his plan to become king. This indicates that Abimelech, though up until now had depended upon persuasion, was now so determined to become king that he was willing to use force in order to become the leader of all Israel.

We have seen Gideon take several steps in the wrong direction:

1. He took personal gain from the battle - 8:24
2. He expressed pride - he made the ephod and in the process became the High Priest of Israel 8:27
3. He caused Israel to sin after the ephod. 8:33
4. He involved himself with a concubine who worshipped Baal and did not demand that she abandon this practice, but rather accepted it and probably became involved in it to some extent.

Abimelech was now in league with Baal-berith against Jehovah. He used the 70 pieces of silver, the price of two or three slaves, to hire thugs to work for him. He was intentionally going in an ungodly direction in order to become king.

Having established his base of operations, he then made his next move.

Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah, and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. Judges 9:5

This verse made it very clear that Abimelech had no conscience. Because of this, we should not be surprised at anything he might do. He intentionally killed 70 of his brothers - people to whom he had a responsibility to protect in any struggle. Because they had not been willing to accept him, he refused his family responsibility and killed all but one. Only Jotham escaped and this only because he fled and had time to hide.

Jotham was Gideon's youngest legitimate son. This makes it possible to wonder if Abimelech did not kill his half brothers in the order of their birth - beginning with Jether, the oldest, and working his way down through the list of the 69 half-brothers. The only reason that Jotham escaped being murdered was that he hid himself

And all the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem. Judges 9:6

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This is a strategic piece of information. These people are now allies. On the surface, it sounds as though it was just two locations who both supported Abimelech. It is more than that. Beth-millo was a section of Shechem where the army installation was located. This verse, in fact, tells us that the city leaders and military leaders banded together to support Abimelech. Only now was it safe to appoint Abimelech king of Israel. It is not clear from the text whether he was crowned king of Shechem or king of Israel. One suspects that he was crowned king of Israel, but the text is not clear at this point.

Observe that the author spoke of both Shechem and Beth-millo. This could be confusing. Beth-millo was actually a quarter of the city of Shechem in which the military lived and maintained their quarters. There are some scholars who believe that Beth-millo and the shrine to Baal-berith were related to each other. This cannot be validated, but it is plausible. Baal was often referred to as the god of war.

Note the location where this took place - "by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem." It appears that this was the kind of place that Gideon tore down on a hill on his father's property. This pillar could well have been the statue of Asherah, the female consort of Baal where the people worshipped and conducted their sexual orgies in the worship of Baal.

Judges 9:7-21 - Jotham Chastised Shechem for Making Abimelech King

Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and called out. Thus he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you. Judges 9:7

You will remember that Jotham, the youngest of the 70 legitimate sons of Gideon, had hidden to escape death at the hand of Abimelech. This action took great courage. He knew that Abimelech and his base friends were looking for him and would certainly kill him if they caught him.

Jotham would not have been out in the town where he would have heard of this for himself. He did not know of it until someone who had been in the town told him of these events.

Notice how he spoke to the men of Shechem, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you." There is a confusing element in this statement. He knew that there were conditions that must be met if God would hear their cry. On the other hand, Gideon had many wives as well as a pagan concubine. Gideon started out as a real servant, but there is no doubt that he started to look after his own situation and seeking reimbursement for his service to God. Somewhere, Jotham had some training about the worship of Jehovah. Did he receive this from Gideon or from his mother? We really do not know.

One might wonder how the people would hear and understand Jotham if he shouted this message from the top of Mount Gerizim. There are two factors to consider:

1. Mount Gerizim is not so high that people could not hear if someone spoke from the summit.
2. People in that day had the ability to be heard from great distances. This must have been that they had practice in voice projection. You will remember that Jesus

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preached to thousands on the day of the feeding of the 5,000, and He was heard by the crowd.

"Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!'" Judges 9:8

This is an allegory. An allegory attempts to convey a moral truth by expressing one thing under the guise of another. This was a very popular way of teaching among the Jews and is to this day. Jotham talked about trees, but he was really talking about the actions of the men of Shechem anointing Abimelech king. Jotham had the trees speaking, which of course, they could not do.

Observe that he began with the olive tree. This tree was considered to be the most highly regarded tree in the entire Near East. The cedar was known for its size and strength, but the olive tree was known for its grace and greatness.

"But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'" Judges 9:9

The response of the olive tree was surprising. This is a totally selfish response - "shall I leave my fatness..." One of the things that the people of the near east like about the olive tree is the oil that is produced from its fruit. The real question that Jotham posed was, "Shall a person subject himself to personal sacrifice in order to serve the larger group?"

The tree, of course, posed its answer in a question. It was a way of saying, "No way!"

"Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come, reign over us!'" Judges 9:10

In the allegory of Jotham, the trees were forced to go to their second choice, the fig tree. This was a result of their rebuff by the selfishness of the olive tree. They were now dealing with second best and everyone knew it. The men of Shechem would be keenly aware of the fact that Jotham was talking about the king who had forced his way to the throne.

"But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?'" Judges 9:11

This verse begins with the word "but." This suggests that a strong contrast is in progress. Interestingly enough, the fig tree responded in the same form that the olive tree did - a selfish response.

Everyone knew that the fig tree was known for its sweet taste and good fruit that appealed to most people. The real answer the fig tree gave was a simple, "NO!" I am not willing to sacrifice the things that give me value in the community in order to serve others. This is the epitome of selfishness.

"Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come, reign over us!'" Judges 9:12

Jotham made a bold move in his allegory. Instead of talking about a different kind of tree, he moved to the vine in their search for a king. This, of course, was not a tree at all. This was clearly another step down. The request was exactly the same as the previous requests which had been presented to the trees.

"But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?'" Judges 9:13

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Again, the sentence begins with the word "but." This again suggests a contrast is in progress. There is a strong contrast between what the trees wanted and what the vine was willing to do on their behalf. The vine's concern, of course, was a very selfish one. This is one of the recurring themes in this allegory. The vine had a reputation for providing good grapes from which new wine was made. The vine was unwilling to sacrifice this reputation for the benefit of the trees. The message of the vine was simply, "I am not willing to sacrifice the thing that people like most about me in order to serve others." This, again, is a serious condemnation of selfishness.

"Finally all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come, reign over us!'" Judges 9:14

Notice that there is a slight change in the request. "Finally all the trees said to the bramble..." There is an element of desperation evident as Jotham tells the story. It is evident in that the author said, "Finally all..." This is their last ditch effort and all the trees were taking part in the presentation. They started out asking trees. Now they were down to pesky weeds. The bramble has no redeeming reputation except as fuel for the fire to heat their food.

"And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.'" Judge 9:15

The response of the bramble is different from that of all the trees and the vine. Because this is such a change in response, it points to the real issue that Jotham was addressing all along.

Observe that this sentence begins with the word "and" rather than the word "but" as the others did. We have reason to expect a change in the dialogue.

The bramble agreed, but with some serious conditions. Jotham presented the bramble's response as an "If...then" situation. Observe that this is an acceptance that is really devoid of trust. He had the bramble say, "IF in truth you are anointing me as king..." It is far from certain that this is really what the other trees are doing. It was a way of saying that the bramble needed to be convinced. If you are really going to anoint me king, then you must take refuge in my shade. Everyone who heard this would laugh. They all knew that there was no real shade created by the bramble. Again, it was most impossible for trees, which were many feet in height to take refuge under the shade of the bramble that in many cases was only a few inches off the ground.

Remember that this is a story that parallels their situation in some way. We should note, again, the presence of the word "but." This draws a sharp contrast between the expression of an honest willingness to make the bramble king, on the one hand, and what happens if they are not really willing to do so. It becomes clear that Jotham drew a parallel between Abimelech and the bramble. If seen in this light, Jotham has made a very cutting attack on what the men of Shechem had done.

"Now therefore, if you have dealt in truth and integrity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have dealt with him as he deserved—" Judges 9:16

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At this point, Jotham used the words, 'Now therefore.' Both words indicate that a strong change in the direction of Jotham's story is taking place. Until now, Jotham was telling the parallel story. Now he will make application of the story that he was really telling.

Jotham started with a conditional statement - "If you have dealt in truth and integrity." He was saying that their truth and integrity were not givens. Their use of the truth was not universally accepted. In this statement, Jotham frankly and bluntly questioned both their integrity and their truthfulness.

The word "truth" that Jotham used has to do with certainty and dependability. It is an attribute of God and finds its source in God.

Jotham also used the word "integrity." It is to be perfect, complete, blameless. Job was called perfect, complete and well rounded. It is to be finished whole heartedly. He was saying, if your words and actions are what they appear to be, IF your actions are blameless. It was a way of saying that these things had not been true.

Now, Jotham pressed his charges a bit more strongly. He said, "if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house." He frankly challenged their treatment of Gideon and his household. This was a negative way to say that they had seriously mistreated Gideon. He was, of course, absolutely right.

Jotham continued, "And if you have dealt with Gideon as he deserved." The second and third conditional challenges may seem to be the same. They are not.

1. The first challenge, "If you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house." This was his way of saying that they had not dealt well with Jerubbaal. Was what you did good? He asked if their actions were appropriate.
2. "If you have dealt with Gideon as he deserved." He was really asking how Gideon had dealt with them. On the basis of that answer, have you dealt with him as he dealt with you. One might say it another way. He did well by you and deserves better than he has received from you."

for my father fought for you and risked his life and delivered you from the hand of Midian; but you have risen against my father's house today and have killed his sons, seventy men, on one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maid-servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your relative—" Judges 9:17, 18

At this point, Jotham's statements are really becoming painful and aggressive. Notice that the verses begin with the word "for." This suggests that a reason for previous material is about to be given.

Look carefully, there is a strong contrast between verses 17 and 18; between what Gideon did for them and how they are treating his family.

As you read these verses, you are impressed with the way Jotham begins with "my father." Notice the way he spoke of Gideon.,

1. My father fought for you.
2. My father risked his life for you.

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3. My father delivered you from the Midianites which no one thought possible.

Jotham has set the foundation for a very strong argument.

Observe that he began verse 18 with the word "but." He is going to draw a contrast between what Gideon did for the people of Shechem and what they are now doing for Gideon's family. Jotham made his attack in these accusations:

1. You have risen against Gideon's house. This, he pointed out, they did by anointing Abimelech, who was not a rightful heir, to be king of Israel.
2. You have killed 69 of Gideon's legal sons when Gideon preserved the lives of your sons.
3. You have made Abimelech king when he is the son of a concubine/maidservant and not one of the sons of Gideon's legal wives. This was a shameful turn of events and would not be countenanced anywhere in that part of the world. He went on, to make matters worse, to say that you did this because Abimelech was a maternal relative, not because it was good to do so. This was a flawless attack that Jotham mounted against the men of Shechem and there was little that they could do but get more angry with him.

"If then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you." Judges 9:19

Jotham concluded his summation in another pair of conditional statements. If you read this verse carefully, though the words are open and logical, the implications of his words and tone are strong and accusative.

He was saying, if you have dealt appropriately with Jerubbaal and his house, then rejoice in your new king and let him rejoice in you. Though he used the words, it is clear that he does not believe for a moment that these dealings were appropriate.

The effect of this line of reasoning is that these people of Shechem get to identify their own destiny. Jotham said, "If you have dealt in truth and integrity." This is a way of saying that they had not, under any circumstances, dealt with truth and integrity with Gideon and his immediate family.

The "then" part of this condition is a bit caustic. He said, in effect, "then just enjoy each other. You deserve each other."

"But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech." Judges 9:20

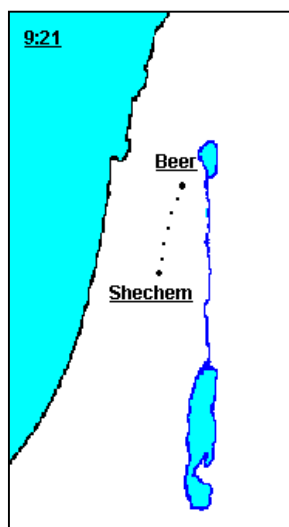
Observe that this verse begins with the word "but." This, again, suggests a strong contrast is in process. The suggestion this time is brutal and aggressive. If you have not dealt in truth and integrity then let fire come out of Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo. It was a way of saying: "let this regency which you have initiated devastate and destroy you in the process." He continued by forecasting what it should do for Abimelech as well.

He said, "let fire come from the men of Shechem and Beth-millo and consume Abimelech." This was a way of saying that in the long run, the men of Shechem and Beth-

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millo, the political and military, would be so damaged by Abimelech that they would totally destroy this king they had fraudulently anointed. It was a way of saying that they should expect their mutual anger and distrust to destroy each other.

Then Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer and remained there because of Abimelech his brother. Judges 9:21



Having concluded his courageous attack, Jotham fled for his life. You will remember, from 9:7, that Jotham stood on Mt. Gerazim to make his denunciation. His attack, though very honest, was brutal to say the least. The Shechemites and the house of Millo would be furious at him for this attack. This is especially true when they had tried to find him to kill him along with his 69 brothers, but could not locate him at all. Now he appears publicly to humiliate them.

Jotham would be able to escape from them because there was quite a distance between them. It appears certain that Jotham did not have any time to spare because these men were so angry because of what he had said and the fact that he had outwitted them. It is one thing to outsmart a person, but it adds insult to injury to appear publicly when everyone knows that they have been trying to find you to kill you.

Observe that the author said, "because of Abimelech his brother." The truth is that Abimelech was his half-brother, but he certainly was not his brother. It would be an insult to the family to claim him as such. The use of this statement pointed out a tragic situation. A brother was legally bound to protect his brother and every member of the family. Abimelech sought out and killed every member of his family except Jotham and here only because he could not find Jotham.

Observe that Jotham fled to "Beer" because Abimelech would leave no stone unturned to find Jotham, his up-start half-brother.

The previous map shows the direction of Jotham's flight. This entire area was hill country, but these were smooth hills. There was really no rugged terrain in the path of his flight. By the same token, there was no rugged terrain in the path of those who would chase him down to capture him. His only hope was in the fact that he had a head start and he knew where he was going, whereas they could only guess. In these hilly areas there was a plethora of caves and hiding places where Jotham could be hidden safely for years. This, of course, would require that someone assist him by bringing provisions.

Judges 9:22-25 - Shechem Turned Against Abimelech

Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. Judges 9:22

There is a very subtle contrast in this brief sentence. Most of the judges, chosen by God, ruled for decades. Abimelech, however, who engineered his own coronation by the people of Shechem, reigned for only three years.

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Observe another surprising thing in these few words. Not one thing, good or bad, is said about the reign of Abimelech. This is an Old Testament way of dealing with a person who has done evil and refused to repent before the Lord.

Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, Judges 9:23

This can be a difficult verse to understand and explain. There can be a fine line between God being in control of all men everywhere and God manipulating the affairs of men. A part of the situation is always the fact that God is a just judge. When evil is detected, God punishes that evil, no matter how long it may take.

Observe that it was God who acted. God did not just sanction the evil results of human disagreement. God did not just allow this, He did it. God actively sent an evil spirit between former conspirators. The men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. If you remember the summary of Jotham, this is exactly what he wished upon them.

The Hebrew in this verse is not really helpful at all. It appears that the author used the word "spirit" to describe not a demonic being, but a broken relationship. The author was saying that the relationship soured, as these always do, and the men of Shechem turned against Abimelech.

in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. Judges 9:24

The words "in order that," suggest that the author was giving a statement of purpose. When Abimelech killed 69 of his half-brothers, in 9:5, it frankly appeared that he was getting away with a terrible evil. These verses suggest that God established a divisive relationship between Abimelech and the men of Shechem to bring justice to them both for the murderous crime they perpetrated.

Observe, also, that God did not just strike them dead. He simply allowed their disturbed relationship to play itself out in mutual mistrust and punishment.

Notice, also, the author's description, "who strengthened his hand to kill his brothers." They were the accessories to the serial murders. It sounds as though Abimelech could not have murdered all his brothers without the support of his relatives from Shechem.

And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech. Judges 9:25

As is often the case, when men decide to destroy someone, it is seldom done face to face. These men created a disturbance which undercut the reputation of the king. There is a principle in this verse. People who will use subterfuge to assist you to disturb others, will use the same tools against you when your relationships turn sour. That is exactly what happened to Abimelech.

Judges 9:26-29 - Gaal Challenged Abimelech

Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives, and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. Judges 9:26

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We do not know the home town of Gaal. It sounds as though he came to Shechem with perhaps a dozen relatives. Though the text does not say, it was probably a lot more than this. You may remember a somewhat similar situation in Genesis when Abraham went to retrieve his nephew, Lot. The information is sketchy, at best. We do not know how nor why, but the people of Shechem placed their trust in Gaal. This kind of relationship is seldom sudden. It is usually a relationship that develops over a period of time when people get to know each other and trust each other.

And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them, and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech. Judges 9:27

The worship of Baal and Asherah is, at heart, a fertility cult worship. One of their most important festivals is the celebration of harvest. When the harvest of grapes was finished and the grapes were made into wine, only then did they go to the place of worship for the celebration of the harvest. This feast consisted of a great festival meal and the consumption of a great deal of wine. The text does not describe the celebration in greater detail, but from other sources we know that this was a drunken orgy that expressed itself in widespread promiscuous sexual activity.

Gaal had used the celebration of the harvest to cement relationships with the people of Shechem who were already alienated from Abimelech. When the people were sufficiently drunk, they dared to pronounce a curse upon the king, Abimelech. One can sense a plan unfolding in this verse.

1. They made friends with the Shechemites.
2. They cemented the relationships with the Shechemites at the drunken harvest celebration.
3. Only then did they curse Abimelech.

Notice the progression of this plot as it unfolds in the following verse:

Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?" Judges 9:28

This is the first frontal attack on Abimelech. The attack comes in the form of five questions:

1. **"Who is Abimelech?"** This is not so much a question as it is a vitriolic attack. What Gaal was really saying is, "Abimelech is a nobody."
2. **"Who is Shechem that we should serve him?"** This is stated in the opposite atmosphere. Gaal used a question to say, "Shechemites are far too great to be servants of Abimelech."
3. **"Is he not the son of Jerubbaal?"** On several occasions in this book, when Gideon is being referred to in a good light, the name that is used is "Gideon." When he is being referred to in a negative way, the name that was used is "Jerubbaal." We must remember that because Gideon tore down the altar to Baal and because these people were devout worshippers of Baal, Gideon would not be held in high esteem

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among them. We must remember that the name Jerubbaal means "let Baal plead." This could be seen as a slap at them.

4. **"Is Zebul not his lieutenant?"** Today we would refer to a person like Zebul as a puppet. This was not a positive statement about Zebul. Dictators must rely on loyal servants to keep them informed about what is happening in the kingdom. One might call them spies. Zebul had a position of some authority, but his major task was to keep Abimelech informed concerning what was happening in the realm.
5. **"...Why should we serve him?"** This question accomplished two things:
 - a. Gaal personally identified and allied himself with the people of the city.
 - b. He separated, in their thinking, loyalty to their city from loyalty to Abimelech. This would make opposition to Abimelech a noble thing rather than treason.

"Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army, and come out." Judges 9:29

Gaal was the consummate politician. Having made friends with the people of Shechem and having dared to stand against the king, he made his campaign promises. This was the typical braggart.

- a. He was boasting. "If you were under my authority, I would remove Abimelech."
- b. He was arrogant. He did not simply say that he was greater than Abimelech. He urged Abimelech to increase his army as much as he wanted to and come to do battle with him and his relatives.

It was like saying, "No matter how many soldiers you bring, I will defeat you easily."

Judges 9:30-33 - Zebul Warned Abimelech About Gaal

And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger burned. Judges 9:30

There is an additional expression of arrogance in this verse. Gaal boasted and challenged in front of Zebul when they all knew that Zebul was Abimelech's informer. It was a way of saying, "I know you are an informer of the king, but I don't care. You can tell him what I think of him." In almost any situation, such a statement would be a death sentence for the person who said it. Such a statement would tend to undercut the authority of the representative of the king. Everyone knew it and waited to see what would happen to Gaal.

Because this was as much an attack on Zebul as it was on Abimelech, he was beside himself with rage. This tells us that it had not been healthy, in the past, for persons to make unfortunate statements about King Abimelech.

And he sent messengers to Abimelech deceitfully, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem; and behold, they are stirring up the city against you" Judges. 9:31

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Being the informant of the king was a secretive and risky business. One would always be on the fence. If the king became upset with the way you kept him informed, you could lose your head. On the other hand, nobody likes an informant.

The message that Zebul sent to Abimelech was brief, but precise. There is a contrast between 9:29 and 9:31.

- a. In 9:29, Gaal was undercutting the king with boasting and arrogance.
- b. In 9:3,1 however, Zebul showed his loyalty to Abimelech by warning him of the subterfuge of Gaal.

Put yourself in Abimelech's shoes for a minute. You would probably think of Gaal as swaggering through the city in defiance of the rule of Abimelech. This would be most frightening to a despotic ruler.

"Now therefore, arise by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. And it shall come about in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and behold, when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you shall do to them whatever you can."
Judges 9:32, 33

These instructions do not represent the greatest vote of confidence Abimelech ever received. If one has great confidence in a king, it is not necessary to suggest the way they should approach a battle much less that they come to town by night and hide in the fields. The text is not clear, at this point. It appears that Zebul desperately wanted Abimelech to come at night because he was not sure that direct confrontation would result in victory for Abimelech.

Zebul desperately wanted Abimelech to win this encounter. The reason for this desire is simple. If Abimelech is defeated, Zebul would be out of power and would be killed in the process. Because of this, Zebul suggested a way for Abimelech to surprise Gaal.

Judges 9:34-40 - Abimelech Routed Gaal

So Abimelech and all the people who were with him arose by night and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. Judges 9:34

This verse makes it clear that Abimelech took Zebul's advice and came to Shechem by night. The fact that Abimelech's forces were divided into four parts suggests that they had completely surrounded the city. There was no way anyone could get in or out. It is clear that Abimelech was using great military tactics to bring this uprising to a close.

Now Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the city gate; and Abimelech and the people who were with him arose from the ambush. Judges 9:35

For some reason, the wording of the text leaves some information clouded. We are not sure, for instance, whether Gaal just went to the city gate or if he went there because this was the seat of government. This much is clear: When Gaal went to the city gate, Abimelech and all his men came out of hiding in order to prepare for battle. The text mentions the men of Abimelech, but it does not mention the fact that Gaal and his men were in battle-ready condition and in their positions. This probably means that Gaal and his men were not taking this threat too seriously and were caught off guard.

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And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains." But Zebul said to him, "You are seeing the shadow of the mountains as if they were men." Judges 9:36

From this text, we learn that Zebul was with Gaal at the city gate. Gaal made a tactical error. His forces were not ready for combat. He trusted Zebul, the overseer for the king. The fact that Zebul worked for the king should have told Gaal that Zebul could not be trusted to be his helper in this attempt to take the throne.

In this verse Zebul demonstrated his loyalty to Abimelech even as the battle was about to begin. This was very risky. If Gaal should win, there would be no way that Zebul could escape being killed as a traitor to Gaal. It was risky for another reason. Gaal was boasting of victory and the people of the city believed him. This would place Zebul in a very minority position. This would not be healthy as the battle was about to begin.

Zebul also demonstrated his loyalty to Abimelech in that he lied to Gaal. He said, "You see the shadow of the mountains." Gaal may not have known that this was a lie because he did not live in Shechem, but Zebul and everyone who lived in Shechem would know that this was a pitiful lie. They had seen these hills daily for many years. They would know the difference, though Gaal would not.

Zebul deceived Gaal. He lied to him to postpone his discovery of the truth about the surprise attack. This would keep Gaal and his men from being ready for battle.

And Gaal spoke again and said, "Behold, people are coming down from the highest part of the land, and one company comes by the way of the diviners' oak." Judges 9:37

Apparently, Gaal was not too perceptive. This was probably due to his unreasonable self-confidence. He was over-confident of his ability to defeat Abimelech. This being the case, there were, no guards posted on the walls of the city. This whole experience was a tragedy looking for a place to happen.

Gaal shows some ability to understand military tactics. He could see the men coming down from the mountain and said so. He also became aware of the fact that these forces were divided into at least two parts and the other part was coming from one of the sides. This should have caused him to realize that they were about to be surrounded.

Observe also that the text speaks of "the diviners' oak." It is interesting that wherever you find idolatry you will also find divination. That, apparently, was the whole idea behind what they called the "diviners' oak," the place where their prophet could divine the will of the gods. This tells us that the people of Shechem were deeply involved in the idolatrous worship of Baal and Asherah.

Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your boasting now with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech that we should serve him?' Is this not the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them!" Judges 9:38

There is absolutely no kindness in this statement by Zebul. There is only contempt. What Zebul said was true, but he said it in a contemptible way. One might add that this too was a very risky thing for him to do. It is clear, by now, that Abimelech had surprised Gaal and that the king would probably win the fray. Nevertheless, Zebul could easily have been

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killed, by Gaal, for the mockery he made of this attempted usurper. It appears that Zebul was in a no-win situation.

So Gaal went out before the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. Judges 9:39

The words of this verse sound so lame. This was an army in total disarray. They were totally unprepared for battle and had no battle plan.

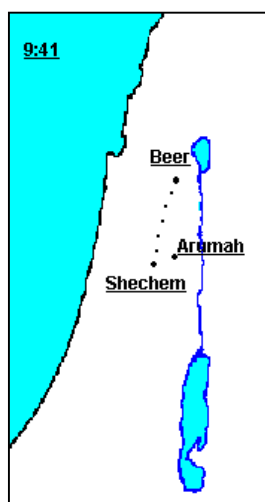
If you look carefully, you will note that it does not say that Gaal went out before his relatives to fight with Abimelech. It says that he went out "before the leaders of Shechem..." For some reason, the leaders of the city were siding with Abimelech and prepared to do battle on his behalf.

And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded up to the entrance of the gate. Judges 9:40

There is almost no battle recorded. The verse begins with Abimelech chasing Gaal and Gaal fleeing for his life. Many of those who went out with Gaal were wounded and this continued right up until they hurried back inside the gate of the city. This group of men, not an army, were totally routed right from the beginning of the encounter.

Judges 9:41-45 - Abimelech Destroyed Shechem

Then Abimelech remained at Arum, but Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives so that they could not remain in Shechem. Judges 9:41



We do not know the location of the village named "Arum." We only know that it was very near to Shechem. In all probability, it was a small settlement a short distance south of the city gates of Shechem. Throughout Palestine every walled city had small villages nearby from whom they purchased the provisions they needed inside the walls. These villages were sometimes called the "daughters" of the city. For example, Bethany and Bethphage were called "daughters of Jerusalem."

There is confusion in this verse. In verse 39, the author reported that Gaal went out to battle before the leaders of Shechem. Now, two verses later, the author reported that somehow Zebul gained enough courage and power to drive Gaal and his men back out of the city. This was a strategic military setback for Gaal and his men. If they had been able to remain inside the city gates, they would have had at least some sense of protection. Now, however, they were outside the gates with Abimelech and his men in front of them and their backs against the walls of the city. This is a trapped situation from which there could be no escape.

Now it came about the next day, that the people went out to the field, and it was told to Abimelech. Judges 9:42

This probably means that the army of Abimelech was not visible to the people who were with Gaal or the people of the city. The fact that they could not see Abimelech may have given them a false sense of security so that they ventured out into the fields to get some

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necessary supplies. Gaal's men, also, may have shared this false sense of security and ventured away from the city into the nearby fields.

There is a subtle piece of information in this verse. The text says that Abimelech was told about the people being in the field. This tells us that Abimelech was not on the scene. It does not tell us where he was, but he was not just outside the city of Shechem. He may well have been at Arumah.

There is a hint here of the preparedness that Abimelech maintained even though it appeared that he had already won the battle. When the people ventured out of the city into the fields, the information was reported to Abimelech. This meant that he had guards or lookouts posted to insure that he could not be surprised by Gaal and his men as he had surprised Gaal.

So he took his people and divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field; when he looked and saw the people coming out from the city, he arose against them and slew them. Judges 9:43

Abimelech apparently was not well trained in military tactics. This move, however, was a superior tactical decision. By dividing his men into three groups, the size of his army remained a secret even if one group was discovered. Again, by dividing his army into three groups, Abimelech would effectively spread out the enemy forces so that they could be defeated one group at a time.

The fact that the people opened the gates and came out of the city is indication that the soldiers in the field had been hidden successfully. The element of surprise was definitely working in Abimelech's favor up to this point.

The fact that Abimelech not only surprised the people from the city, but also was able to slay them says that his plan worked very effectively. Put yourself into the place of Gaal for a moment. With all your bragging, everything that you attempt to do is failing and your people are being summarily killed. It stands to reason that you would be stunned and greatly frustrated.

If you read verses 43 and 44 together, it sounds as though they conflict with each other. Read them again. You will note that verse 43 is a summary statement. Verse 44, on the other hand, describes just how he was able to slay all these people.

Then Abimelech and the company who was with him dashed forward and stood in the entrance of the city gate; the other two companies then dashed against all who were in the field and slew them. Judges 9:44

This was an excellent military move. By rushing to the gate, Abimelech and his men accomplished two things:

1. They made it impossible for reinforcements to be brought out of the city to help the men who were cut off outside the city.
2. He successfully divided the enemy. Some were in the city and could not get out. The balance of their army was outside the city and could not retreat into the safety of the city walls.

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Having divided the enemy, it was a mopping-up operation for the two groups who were hidden out in the field while Abimelech and his group stood guard at the city gates.

And Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.
Judge 9:45

In view of the fact that all the soldiers who came out of the city were killed and the gates were not closed and barred; it seems strange that it took so long for Abimelech to subdue and destroy the city. There are several possible explanations:

1. It may be that the inner defenses of the city were very strong.
2. It may be that Abimelech underestimated the number and strength of the defenders.
3. It should be noted that Zebul is not mentioned again. Abimelech may have tried to take the city and still save the life of his informant.
4. The other side of this coin might be that Zebul changed loyalties in the pressure of battle, but this seems unlikely because all the signs pointed to a victory for Abimelech.

Observe that the author reported that Abimelech took a number of steps in the destruction of the city:

1. **He captured the city.** Abimelech and the part of the army which was with him defeated the defenders of the city. It apparently took most of the day to accomplish.
2. **He killed all the people who were in the city.** This was unusual. Most often the people in a city under siege were taken prisoner and sold as slaves. Abimelech made it clear that there was not to be a living citizen left from that city. It was a city that was to be forgotten.
3. **He razed the city.** This describes the way a conqueror burns a city to the ground. When this happens the remains of the city would be only a half inch deep. At the archeological cut at the city of Megiddo there are several layers of ashes each not more than a half inch thick. These are the ashes which were left from the burning of the city by one conquering army after another.
4. **Abimelech sowed the city with salt.** This was a move that everyone in that day would understand and dread. This report sounds as though Abimelech spread salt on the ground within the city. That is probably not the case. Inside any walled city, there was no place to plant crops for food. This had to be done outside the city or in one of the daughter communities. When a city was sown with salt, it meant that for several generations, no crop would grow in that soil. It was a way of making sure that the place would be permanently abandoned. Throughout the steps reported in this verse the total abandonment of the city is primary in his concern.

These measures tell us just how determined Abimelech was that this city would never again be rebuilt and inhabited.

Judges 9:46-49 - Abimelech Killed Shechem's Leaders - Tower Fire

When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the inner chamber of the temple of El-berith. Judges 9:46

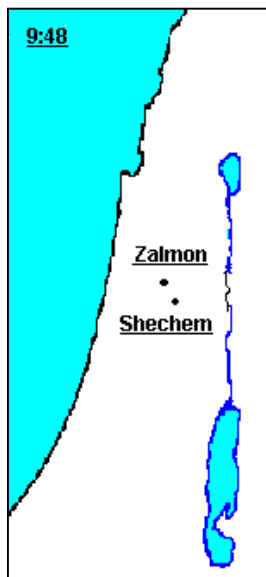
This verse may seem to be out of place. The previous verse states that Abimelech killed all the people in the city. Now, the author informs us that the leaders, who were not killed, have taken up hiding in the temple of their god.

The author spoke of "all the leaders of the tower of Shechem." Whenever a city was well fortified enough to have a tower, that tower was usually placed at the city gate to help in the protection of this most vulnerable part of their defenses. This also served the same function as the city gate in most other cities which had no tower. It was the place where official business was conducted and the officials met. The author, in this verse, is referring to the leadership of the city of Shechem.

The author informed us that these leaders entered into the inner chamber of the temple of their god. The pagan temples were designed to perform somewhat the same function as the temple of Jehovah. There was an outer court where the people could gather. There was also, however, an inner chamber where only selected people were permitted. This paralleled the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest of the Jews could enter and then only once in the year.

Observe also that the author referred to the god of the people of Shechem as "El-berith." This god was sometimes referred to as "Baal-berith." The difference was one of description. Baal was the name of their god. "El" was a name for deity which stressed his immutable power. The name "El" was one of the names for the God of Israel in the Old Testament when the author wanted to stress just how irresistibly powerful God really was. This was not an accidental change. We will discuss this, in more detail, when this issue surfaces again.

And it was told Abimelech that all the leaders of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. Judges 9:47



We do not know how they discovered this information. By whatever means, Abimelech learned that all the officials of the city had taken refuge in the tower of the city. In one sense, this made it more difficult for him because they were more secure in the tower. In another sense, however, it became easier because all the leaders were in one place where Abimelech could deal with them altogether.

So Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a branch from the trees, and lifted it and laid it on his shoulder. Then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, hurry and do likewise" Judges 9:48

You will notice, in this verse, that Abimelech went quite some distance to the north to Mount Zalmon. This, of course, did not ap-

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pear to be a military strategy. One might suspect that the enemy was wondering what he was doing and perhaps wondering about his mental capacity. This area was, and is, farm land. There were few trees in the vicinity. Abimelech went far enough north to find an area where there were many trees.

He cut down a large branch from a tree. He then urged the people to do what he had done. This would not seem too wise on the surface, but he was planning very carefully.

And all the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women. Judges 9:49

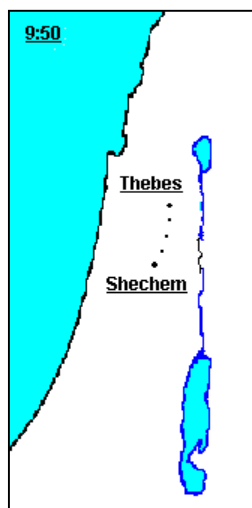
The text states that each of the soldiers did just as Abimelech had done. This would make a huge pile of wood. When they returned to the city, Abimelech piled these branches up around the tower and burned not only the branches but the entire tower as well.

About 1,000 people either suffocated or burned to death. This gives us an idea of just how large this tower and temple really were. It also gives us an idea of the tragic things that happened during their wars.

There is an irony in this verse. You may remember that the name of their god was "El-Berith." This established a strong contrast between God and Baal. The Almighty Baal could not protect himself, his people or his temple. This would certainly be a serious humiliation for the worship of Baal. That is exactly what God had in mind as He allowed this to happen.

Judges 9:50-57 - A Woman Killed Abimelech

Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it. Judges 9:50



The last indication of Abimelech's location was at Shechem. In this verse, the author tells us that Abimelech went to Thebez. This is a trip of about 20 miles.

The author gave us no information about the reason that Abimelech went to Thebez. It may have been that he feared that this city would side with the people of Shechem against him, but that was not certain.

Abimelech captured the city, though the city was probably not all that large.

But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower. Judges 9:51

It is interesting that this tower was located in the center of the city. Normally, a tower was located near the wall so as to give the soldiers protection and a height advantage. The fact that this tower was located at the center of the city tells us that it was intentionally built there in order to offer backup protection in case the battle turned sour.

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We need to remember that this tower was used both as a tower and as a place for the worship of Baal. Even if the city was small, for the tower to hold all the people and leaders of the city, it had to be unusually large. Abimelech had probably never seen such a large tower before in his life.

Look at the scene. Abimelech and his men are spread out all around the tower. Inside, however, all the people of the city with their leaders are crammed into the tower. This is a siege inside the city. Though towers and walls were their best form of defense in that day, these defenses only tended to prolong the pain and give additional pain before the final destruction. At this point, it seemed inevitable. This verse sounds as though all the people were on the roof of the tower. This was probably impossible, but certainly many people were on the large roof of the tower.

So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire. Judges 9:52

This is an interesting situation. How does one fight against a tower? In order to get to the people inside, Abimelech and his men would have to break down the door, which was like breaking down the gate to the city. It was not impossible, but it was very difficult.

All the time the army was preparing to break down the door, the soldiers on the roof of the tower were shooting arrows at the army below and throwing anything they could get their hands on to distract and harm the army below.

It was also common practice to heat tubs of grease or pitch and dump it over the top of the wall on the soldiers below. Thousands of soldiers were scalded to death in this manner.

Abimelech was going to use the standard approach to destroy the people inside the tower--he was going to burn it. This presented a problem for them. Most towers were made of stone. This tower was no exception. The gate and the internal stairways were usually made of wood. There might well be other parts of this tower, such as the roof, that would also be made of wood. If you can set the gate on fire, the flames will rise and burn the other combustible parts of the tower. The people inside the tower would be killed by smoke or by the heat of the fire. There was no intent of taking prisoners in such a situation.

But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull. Judges 9:53

There is a problem with this verse. The real danger of approaching a wall or tower was that the people on top of the wall would throw things down on the soldiers as they came near the gate. An upper millstone would probably weigh between 700 and 1,000 pounds. This millstone was usually made of basalt rock. It would be about 12 inches thick and round. It would be about four feet in diameter. It could be that the millstone was balanced on the wall to be used for this very purpose. If that were the case, then Abimelech and many others would have been killed. It could be that it refers to a stone which was much lighter. It appears that the stone was every bit as large as the text suggests. It does not mean that a woman picked up a 700 pound stone and threw it over the side. We cannot be

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certain what it does mean. Whatever else it means, observe that this great stone crushed his skull.

Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest it be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died. Judges 9:54

There is also a problem in this verse as well. If the stone crushed Abimelech's head, then it would be extremely doubtful he would have been able to issue commands to his armor bearer. It could be that the stone hit the side of his head and he could still speak. This is quite doubtful. It is just as possible that the skull was not really crushed and the king would still be able to speak.

We must keep in mind that there were many wounds that were fatal in that day which would not be so today. Whatever the situation was, he knew that he was going to die. He wanted to die nobly. It was not uncommon for a famous soldier to decide how he was going to die. It was usually because he did not want an enemy to be credited with his death. In this instance, Abimelech did not want to be shamed by being remembered as being killed by a woman.

God not only allowed Abimelech to be killed; He allowed it to happen in what would be considered the most shameful way possible -- at the hands of a woman. Abimelech wanted to put the best appearance on his death, but the Scriptures took even this away from him. He died in shame, in the worst possible way.

And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home. Judges 9:55

This would not be considered unusual. Soldiers placed a lot of confidence in their commander. They felt invincible as long as he was there and giving them direction. When the commander was killed, however, they were still the same strong soldiers. Something happened to them, however, and they were no longer able to win. Everyone knew that this was the case. It is not surprising that the soldiers of Israel would go home at this point. The battle was really over.

Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father, in killing his seventy brothers. Judges 9:56

It was the people of Thebez who killed Abimelech and his soldiers. The text is clear; it was God who repaid Abimelech for his evil. This was part of God's design. God allowed the people of Thebez to punish Abimelech in a way that would be ultimately humiliating. The text indicates that this was punishment for killing the 69 brothers. It mentions a sin done to his father. This was the fact that it would be considered a blessing if a man had a large family. If these children were good, this would be the heritage of the father. Abimelech denied his father even the possibility of this by killing all the other sons.

There is another picture of God in this verse. God is aware of our sins against each other. God will punish those who sin because their sin is ultimately against Him. This is what David meant when he said, "against Thee and Thee only have I sinned." Psalm 51:4

Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them. Judges 9:57

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You will remember that the people of Shechem sided with Abimelech against all the brothers. The text even says that they strengthened his hand to kill them. This was an evil deed.

The author spoke of "the curse of Jotham." If you go back to 9:20, you will see Jotham's curse. He said,

"But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech." Judges 9:20

That is exactly what God allowed to happen. Though few in our time would take such a curse seriously, it appears that God took it quite seriously, and it did take place.

God eventually allows evil consequences to bring just punishment upon the guilty. That happened to the people of Shechem. Apparently Jotham spoke on behalf of God when he pronounced his curse. God allowed that curse to take effect in the lives of the people of Shechem who sided with Abimelech.

Conclusion

Let us review this chapter to discover what the author has told us about God.

1. 9:22 – God is greater than scheming leaders. The judges God chose often ruled for decades. Abimelech, however, engineered his own coronation and reigned only three years.
2. 9:23 – God is in control of human relationships – He created an abrasive relationship between Abimelech and the people of Shechem.
3. 9:57 – God punishes people for their evil deeds and ways.

Aside from these three verses, God is only mentioned in the parable told by Jotham. Therefore, it is not surprising that the chapter is replete with one tragic event after another. The chapter stands in stark contrast with the many chapters where God is often mentioned and there is little mention of such tragedies. The author emphasized the mercy and justice of God.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10

TOLA AND JAIR JUDGE ISRAEL

JUDGES 10:1 – 18

1. There are five paragraphs in our best manuscripts of Judges chapter 10. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

10:1, 2	
10:3-5	
10:6-9	
10:10-16	
10:17, 18	

2. In Judges 10:1, 2, the author described the judgeship of Tola.
- Study these verses carefully
 - What did God call Tola to do?
 - Did he accomplish what God called him to do?
 - What did Tola accomplish for his people in the 23 years he was their judge?
3. In Judges 10:3-5, the author described the judgeship of Jair.
- In 10:3, what does the author tell us that Jair accomplished for the people of Israel?
 - In 10:4, the author spoke of Jair's 30 sons.
 - What did the author say about these sons?
 - What does this tell us about them?
 - What does this tell us about Jair's planning for his sons?
 - In 10:5, the author tells of Jair's burial. What can we learn from this information?
4. In Judges 10:6-9, the author described the response of Israel to the death of Jair.
- In 10:6, the author listed the gods that Israel began to serve after the death of Jair.
 - What does this tell us about Jair?
 - In this verse, the author identified the gods Israel served.
 - The list contains gods identified by name and another list identified by location. What, if anything, is the significance of this?
 - Look at the list of places whose gods the people of Israel worshipped. What knowledge can we gain from that list?
 - Look at the closing statement in the verse. How would you describe the emotional tone of the statement?
 - In 10:7, God responded to the rebellion of Israel.

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- (1). Read this verse again, carefully. Can you find a problem described in this verse? What is it?
- (2). What does this tell you about God?
- (3). The author spoke of "the Philistines" but then he spoke of "the sons of Ammon." What reason can you find for this difference in his reference?
- c. In 10:8, the author described the way Israel was treated by the Philistines and Ammonites.
 - (1). In view of past events, why would you think these two groups were so brutal to Israel?
 - (2). What would you say concerning the fairness of this punishment?
- d. In 10:9, the Ammonites came to battle Jewish tribes.
 - (1). Read 10:8 and 10:9 together.
 - (a). Place the information you find on a map of Palestine.
 - (B). What did you learn from this effort?
 - (c). What questions does it cause you to ask?
 - (2). What did you find about the other nine tribes in these verses?
5. In Judges 10:10-16, Israel put their idols away.
 - a. In 10:10, the people of Israel cried to the LORD.
 - (1). What did they say?
 - (2). What did this mean?
 - (3). Evaluate the accuracy of their statement.
 - (4). What, if anything, did they leave out of their confession?
 - b. In 10:11, God responded to Israel's plea.
 - (1). What did God say?
 - (2). How does this compare with His previous responses?
 - (3). In this verse, the LORD mentioned four nations from whom He had delivered Israel.
 - (4). What was God trying to say through this reminder?
 - (5). Why would God choose these four when there were others?
 - c. In 10:12, God continued His reminder.
 - (1). What does this include that was not present in the list in 10:11?
 - (2). Why would the LORD choose to remind them of these three nations?
 - d. In 10:13, the LORD concluded His response.
 - (1). Record the OORD'S response in your own words.
 - (2). Think carefully about this verse. What problems does it create for your thinking?
 - (3). There is a strong contrast between 10:12 and 10:13,
 - (a). What is the contrast?
 - (b). What does this tell us about God?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 10

- (c). What Biblical Illustration can you find to support what you have found?
- e. In 10:14, God continued His response to Israel.
 - (1). How would you describe God's feelings in this verse?
 - (2). Why would God deal with Israel in this manner?
 - (3). How would you describe God's frame of mind in this verse?
- f. In 10:15, Israel responded to God's statement.
 - (1). In this verse, there is a list of three things which they had done.
 - (a). What are these things?
 - (b). How would you evaluate their confession?
 - (c). Describe the intensity of their plea.
 - (2). Why do you feel that it was this intense?
- g. In 10:16, there is a picture of both God and Israel.
 - (1). How did the author describe the actions of Israel?
 - (2). How did the author portray God in this verse?
- 6. In Judges 10:17, 18, the princes of Gilead sought a leader.
 - a. In a Bible atlas, locate both Gilead and Mizpeh.
 - b. In view of their location, reread these two verses. What difficulty can you discern here?
- 7. Review your study of this chapter. What have you discovered concerning the nature and character of God?

LESSON 10: JUDGES 10:1 - 18

TOLA AND JAIR JUDGE ISRAEL

There are five paragraphs in our best manuscripts of Judges chapter 10. A brief summary of each chapter appears on the following table.

10:1, 2	Tola Judged Israel 23 Years
10:3-5	Jair Judged Israel 22 Years
10:6-9	Israel Did Evil Again
10:10-16	Israel Put Away Foreign Idols
10:17, 18	Princes of Gilead Seek Leader

This chapter takes place during a 45-year historical parenthesis. As you look at what the text says about two of the judges, it is as though nothing worthy of note happened. That may be an unfair evaluation, but it certainly does not compare with some of the other judges we have already observed. As we continue this study, we will want to watch to see if we can discover a reason for this situation.

Judges 10:1, 2 - Tola Judged Israel 23 Years

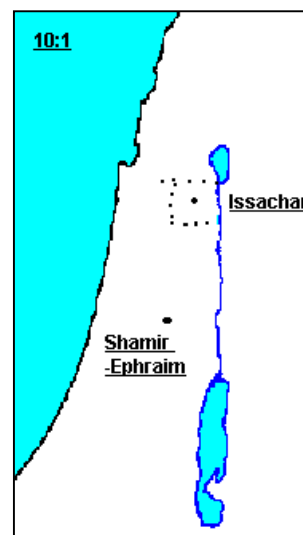
Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

Judges 10:1

There is a lesson to be learned from chapters nine and ten. Gaal used every possible means, moral or not, to achieve his goal of being king of Israel. Despite his evil attempts, he never became king. Tola, on the other hand, did nothing to gain that position. God chose him for the position of judge, and he became judge without doing anything at all to achieve it. The means we use to achieve our goals are as significant as the goals themselves. The end does not justify the means. Righteous goals can only be achieved through the use of righteous means.

We know that Tola came from Issachar. At the same time, we know that he did not live there. There are several possibilities to explain this situation:

1. He may have been displaced as a political slave when one clan conquered another.
2. He could have been from a family who had left Issachar as refugees much earlier.
3. He could have left because he differed with the local people.
4. He could have left because he had difficulties with the leaders of the clan or tribe.



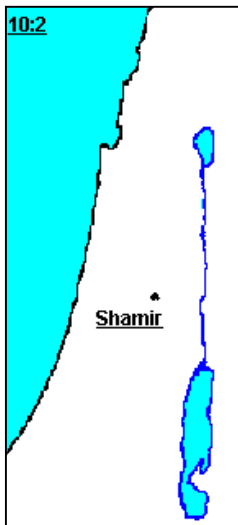
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5. The truth is that we do not know the reason.

Look at the things that we know about Tola:

1. He was the son of Puah. Of Puah, we know only that he was the father of Tola and the son of Dodo.
2. Tola was the grandson of Dodo. Of Dodo, we know only that he was the father of Puah and the grandfather of Tola.
3. Tola came from the tribe of Issachar. This tribe was not large. It inhabited one of the best pieces of farmland in the world. The tribe had never been a leader in Israel.
4. In our world, these would be the poorest of all possible recommendations. The truth is, however, they were the perfect conditions for God to use the man.

*And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.
Judges 10:2*



From the text, the only thing that we know about the judgeship of Tola is that he judged Israel for 23 years. We also know that he died and was buried in a place called Shamir. We do not know for certain where Shamir is located, but the identification on this map is our best guess concerning its location.

During the 23 years there were probably a number of things that he did, but they are not recorded. It is appropriate to assume that the things that did happen were not of any great significance in the deliverance of the land of promise from the pagan nations. This, of course, was the agenda of God for Israel in this time. In spite of the fact that God called Tola "to save Israel," Tola appears to have fallen far short of the divine expectation. The fact that God calls us to a given task does not mean that we are going to do it well or do it at all.

We should note, here, that this is the area where the fighting had taken place. The people had seen how God delivered the Midianites into Gideon's hands in this area. This was a small and insignificant tribe. They had very little territory, but excellent farm land.

Note that the text says in verse one, "he arose to save Israel." This reminds us that Israel was already in great difficulty when he came to power. There was a lot that he could accomplish for God.

Note also that the text says that "He died and was buried in Shamir." Again, we are not certain of the exact location of Shamir, but as you can see on the map, it appears that it was in the area where he lived and judged. From this information, it is safe to say that he held a degree of respect among his people. Think about that for a minute. Here is a man who came to power during a time when Israel was in deep trouble and needed leadership. There is nothing recorded that he did during the 23 years that he judged Israel. This has to say something about the condition of the people if they highly respect a man who, as their leader during a time of deep trouble, did nothing worthy of note.

Judges 10:3-5 - Jair Judged Israel 22 Years

And after him, Jair the Gileadite arose, and judged Israel twenty-two years. Judges 10:3

As in the case of Tola, the author mentioned Jair almost as an afterthought. This brief paragraph is about as general as it is possible to be.

The author told us that Jair came from Gilead. This makes him the first judge to come from the east side of the Jordan River. We cannot be sure, but this probably means that he came from the tribe of Manasseh. It is interesting that he was called a Gileadite rather than a member of the tribe of Manasseh. This may suggest that he was not in good standing within the tribe or that he was moved away from the tribe as a slave by the Midianites. This often happened.

Again, there is nothing mentioned about his reign except the fact that it lasted 22 years. It is as though his time as judge was a 22-year parenthesis in the history of Israel. The tragedy of this is that this was a time of great trouble in Israel and they needed a leader who could bring them out of this condition. The text does not say that God chose him, but we believe that He did. This suggests that with God's help, Jair could have delivered Israel, but that he did not. This is a tragic epitaph.

And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. Judges 10:4

Like Gideon, Jair had a large number of sons. This probably suggests that he had many wives. In many instances, kings and rulers had many wives, as Solomon did, because they used this means to make peace treaties with neighboring countries. This usually was frowned upon by God, but many of Israel's rulers followed this route just the same. It appears that Jair is one of them, but we cannot be certain.

This verse also tells us something about Jair's family. He may not have been an outstanding Judge in Israel, but he lived well. The fact that his 30 sons each rode on 30 donkeys suggests that they lived like royalty. The donkey was the transportation of kings when they had been successful in battle and came in peace. Jair, apparently, wanted to maintain that image for himself and his family. It should be noted that he was a judge and not a king. He wanted to keep the image of royalty despite what God wanted.

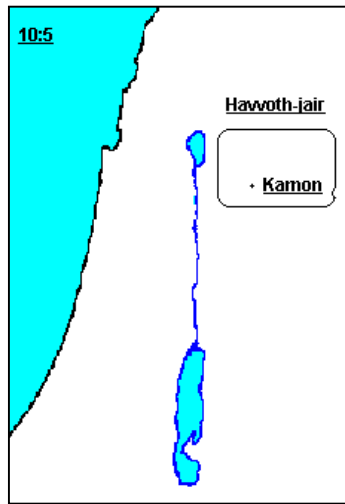
The text also says that these 30 sons each had his own city in Gilead. This was a circle of cities known as the "Havvoth jair" "The towns of Jair." We know that the towns were still called by this name when the book of Judges was written, apparently long after the events which are recorded in this chapter. The fact that each of Jair's sons was made ruler over his own city suggests that Jair set them up to live in luxury and power. It is fair to say that Jair was more concerned for the comfort and power of his family than he was to be the servant of Israel.

And Jair died and was buried in Kamon. Judges 10:5

We have no way to know if Jair was a good or bad judge. The fact that there is so little information given suggests that he did very little in a time and place where he could have served God and Israel with a mighty hand and did not do so. He went down in history as

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being the father of 30 unruly sons who wanted to be royalty despite the fact God called their father to be a judge.



Jair was buried in Kamon. This town was sometimes called "Camus." On the map you will note that Kamon is located in the eastern section of Manasseh. This was the area from which Jair had come originally. The people would not have allowed him to be buried in their tribal lands if he had not retained their respect. This is the tragedy. Jair apparently was not much more than a placeholder as a judge. Still the people respected him enough to allow him to be buried in their tribal lands.

Judges 10:6-9 - Israel Did Evil Again

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashteroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus

they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. Judges 10:6

Overall, whether Jair was a good or bad judge, we have no way of knowing. We know, because of this verse, that at least there was a diminishing of the doing evil during that time. "Did evil" most often translated into participating in the worship and rituals of the Baal worship which was strictly forbidden to the people of Israel.

The author frankly said that the people served the Baals and the Ashteroth. He went on to identify other gods that the people of Israel worshipped. Notice where these gods came from:

1. Aram
2. Sidon
3. Moab
4. Ammon
5. The Philistines

We point out this list because this is also a list of the peoples that lived in the land when Israel returned from Egypt. Though the author listed these gods separately, in fact they were much the same. They all worshipped some form of the god Baal and his consort Ashteroth. The names were different, but the idols were the same. The author used this more dramatic way to say that the people of Israel took part in the worship of all the peoples among whom they lived. This was a dramatic change of direction for the people of Israel. In the past they had worshipped Baal and Ashteroth. Now they embraced the worship of all the idols of all their neighbors. It is a very deliberate move. It is like saying to God, "We will show you just how disobedient we can become." They not only sinned; they flaunted their evil designs before God and His people.

There is a vibrant contrast that stands out in this verse. The verse begins with a listing of all the gods that the people of Israel were serving. The verse closes with the plaintive, sad statement, "thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him." It is the sad rejection of the God who had brought them out of their bondage and carried them to their Promised Land in Palestine. It stresses the ingratitude that the people felt as they disobeyed and took

part in the orgies of Baal worship. The stress, emphasis and re-emphasis of this verse tends to give us a glimpse of the fury of the author as he reported this dark moment in the life of his people.

And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. Judges 10:7

This is the response of God to the blatant rebellion of His people Israel. The word "burned" literally means "to glow," "to blaze up in jealousy." This punishment was the depth of embarrassment for the people of Israel. They took great pride in the fact that they bowed before no one.

The text says that "He (God) sold Israel into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. First, one wonders why the author spoke of the Philistines, but then spoke of "the sons of Ammon"? The author did not explain this change. One can surmise that it was done in this way because the "sons of Ammon" were in reality distant relatives of the people of Israel. They were, in fact, family. You can trace their lineage back to Esau and Ishmael. We cannot be certain what the author's reasoning was.

One must deal with the fact that God used pagan nations to punish the people of Israel. The question arises, "Does God do this?" Search the Scriptures and you will find repeated situations where God, in both the Old and New Testament, used pagan people and nations to discipline His people. We must quickly add, however, that this was done to push His people back to Him rather than to do them harm or drive them away.

And they afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites. Judges 10:8

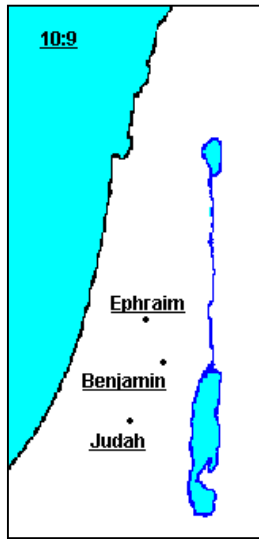
This is a harsh statement. Observe that this is a process and not a single event. First they crushed Israel that year. Then the author indicated that this same kind of activity continued for eighteen years.

This was not a single event. This was an ongoing experience of trouble. Observe that the author spoke of Israel as being "afflicted and crushed." The words "afflicted" and "crushed" are exactly the same word. This is a dramatic, graphic statement. It means to break in pieces so that it cannot be put back together. It is to harass, to dash in pieces. This is a harsh process, not a single act of devastation. The Hebrew text literally says, "And they crushed and crushed the sons of Israel that year.," This was the strongest emphasis that they knew how to formulate. This was not just a tribe or two. It says, "for eighteen years they afflicted **all** the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead." The text does not explain this situation. One wonders, did the Philistines cross to the east side of the Jordan to do harm to the people of Israel? It sounds that way. Was there a coalition between the Philistines and the Ammonites? It sounds like it. We should remember that the Ammonites had been soundly defeated by Gideon. This would do two things:

1. It gave them a reason to hate Israel.
2. Having been defeated by Israel, they knew that they needed help if they were to defeat this small band of Jewish people recently returned from their bondage in Egypt.

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And the sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed. Judges 10:9



There is a strange situation here. Verse eight tells us that the Philistines, who lived west of the Jordan River, went east of the Jordan to punish the people of Israel in Gilead. The Ammonites, however, who lived east of the river, went west of the river to destroy the people of Judah, Ephraim, and Benjamin. One wonders why they put themselves to so much travel. Why didn't the Philistines battle with Judah Ephraim and Benjamin and let the Ammonites battle with the Israelites in Gilead? There may be a valid reason, but the text does not provide it for us.

The author also indicated the effect this had upon Israel. He said, "Israel was greatly distressed." Israel had success in defeating both the Philistines and the Ammonites. In this particular engagement, however, the enemies of Israel apparently were more successful and created great turmoil in Israel.

We must be reminded that there is no mention of the other tribes of Israel coming to the aid of these tribes who were under siege. This probably means that the sense of mutual support, with which their drive into Canaan began, was gone.

Judges 10:10 -16 - Israel Put Away Foreign Gods

Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against Thee, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals." Judges 10:10

It is amazing how Israel suddenly remembered their sin against the Lord when the pain got too intense. This may be unfair, but it seems that Israel turned to God because they were suffering, and not because they were sorry for their sins. Parenthetically, this is not that uncommon, even today. It should be remembered, however, that this is the reason that God allowed them to suffer in the first place. God did not allow this because He was angry with Israel. He allowed it in order to bring Israel back to Himself.

Their confession was accurate and complete. They admitted that they had forsaken their God and that they had served the Baals. They did not mention the fact that they had done this repeatedly and that God had forgiven them only to have them repeat their evil deeds again and again.

And the LORD said to the sons of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?" Judges 10:11

Though God had forgiven Israel many times before, the response this time was a bit different. He reminded them that He had delivered them from these neighbors in the past. In kindness, God did not remind them that He had instructed them to drive these people out of the land in the first place. If they had obeyed this instruction, this would never have happened.

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This was a reminder of just how faithful God had been with His wandering people of Israel. It reminded them that their present problems were the result of their own choices and not the choices of God.

"Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands. Judges 10:12

God continued with His unusual response. God reminded them that when these same peoples oppressed them, He delivered them out of the hands of their enemies. God reminded them, also, of the fact that when they cried to Him, He rescued them. It was a picture of His unfailing love.

"Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will deliver you no more. Judges 10:13

The word "yet" suggests a contrasting, logical progression. There is a strong contrast between verses 12 and 13. Verse 12 describes the merciful deliverance of God from the pagan neighbors. Verse 13, on the other hand, describes Israel's ungrateful response.

God concluded this contrast saying, "Therefore I will deliver you no more." The word "therefore" suggests a coming conclusion. The conclusion is different from His other responses. In the past, God had always delivered Israel. They had come to the point that they knew that they could go to Him and He would deliver them, no matter how often they had failed Him. God served notice that He would no longer be their deliverer.

This tells us something about God. Some have interpreted this to mean that God really does change. This deals with God's justice rather than His faithfulness. God willingly puts up with our unfaithfulness. There comes a time, in the changelessness of God, when His patience has reached its limit. This is pointedly described in the book of Genesis. The author wrote:

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." Genesis 6:3

God continued His response to Israel's confession:

"Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress." Judges 10:14

Some have spoken of this verse as divine sarcasm. Repeatedly Israel had forsaken God for Baal. This was God's way of reminding Israel that Baal was helpless to deliver them, and He could help them. God was asking Israel to be consistent. If they were going to worship Baal, then go to Baal for help in your time of need. If you worship Me, then come to Me at all times, not just in your time of need. It is time to make a final choice. Even in His punishing of the disobedient, God is always holding out His hand to them to welcome them back. God will not, however, accept the position of being their rabbit's foot. God punishes not to harm, but to draw the wandering ones back to Himself.

And the sons of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to Thee; only please deliver us this day." Judges 10:15

Like ourselves, Israel was better at repenting than at being faithful. Notice the process of their repentance.

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1. They admitted their sin.
2. They recognized that they deserved punishment.
3. They pleaded for deliverance.

Notice the intensity of their pleading. Israel did many wrong things, but how many of us would say to God, "Do to us whatever seems good to Thee, only please deliver us this day." We would be quite happy to plead that God deliver us quickly. We might not be quite so quick to say that God could do anything He wanted to do, just deliver us. The good news is that God heard them despite their compromised motives.

So they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer. Judges 10:16

The word "so" indicates a change in the ongoing direction of the report. Israel was sincere. They put away their foreign gods. This was a big step. Most of the worship of the fertility cult was out of fear that their wives would not bear children, their flocks would have no young and their fields would not bear good crops, unless they did. They were thinking of their livelihood. They not only put away their foreign gods, they returned to serve the LORD.

There is a beautiful picture of God in this verse. Notice how the author described the situation, "and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer." The Hebrew text is much more intensive. It reads, "The soul of Jehovah was grieved with the misery of Israel." Despite the fact that Israel had sinned repeatedly, God could not stand to see them continue to suffer.

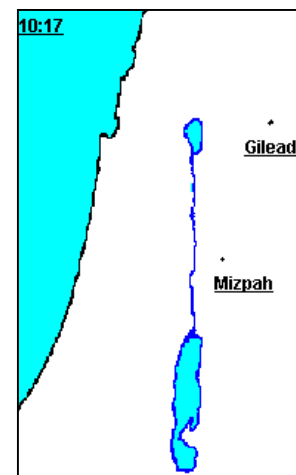
The word "grieved" means to cut short as in harvest. It is to be vexed, to be devastated. "Misery" on the other hand, means devastating toil, perverseness, debilitating effort. Again, some think that this is a picture of God changing His mind. In fact, it is a picture of God consistently following through on His design when Israel returned to Him. That is what He wanted in the first place.

The pain God allowed was not His vented anger which He could not control. It was, rather, a way to force Israel to return to Him. Israel had returned. Therefore, God could restore them. He was too merciful to allow the pain to continue another day.

Judges 10:17, 18 - Princes of Gilead Seek Leader

Then the sons of Ammon were summoned, and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together, and camped in Mizpah. Judges 10:17

The text does not indicate who summoned the people of Ammon. This was a call to battle. Again, the people of Israel found themselves between the army of Ammon and the homes of these Ammonite soldiers. There is a confrontation building in this verse. Notice how the author described it. You can see the location of the two armies on the map. A confrontation between the two was inevitable.



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And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." Judges 10:18

What an untimely dilemma the people of Israel suffered at this time! Their worst enemy was preparing for battle and the people of Israel had no leader and no general for their army. Realizing the severity of their dilemma, the leaders of Israel made a generous offer - that the man who would lead them against the Ammonites would be the head over all the people of Israel living in Gilead.

There is irony hidden in this verse. God had called several individuals to be the judge, the leader in Israel. The people would have nothing to do with their leadership. Now suddenly, Israel was in a difficult situation and they have no leader at all.

Conclusion

A review chapter ten to see what the author has told us about God would be helpful at this point

- a. 10:6 – To worship idols is to forsake God.
- b. 10:7 – To be forsaken rouses the fierce anger of the Lord.
- c. 10:7 – God turned His people over to pagan neighbors when they worshipped idols.
- d. 10:7 – God used pagans – Philistines and Ammonites – to punish His people for their idolatry.
- e. 10:11-13 – There is a limit to how often God will deliver His disobedient people.
- f. 10:14 – Even though they rebelled against Him repeatedly, God has compassion on His people and restores them when they repent.

If you reflect on this list of observations, you will notice that there is a strong emphasis on God's insistence on His unique deity. He will countenance the worship of no other God than Himself. His people ignore this fact to their peril.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 11

JEPHTHAH DRIVEN OUT: JEPHTHAH MADE RULER

JUDGES 11:1 - 40

1. There are five paragraphs in the eleventh chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, record a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

11:1-3	
11:4-11	
11:12-28	
11:29-33	
11:34-40	

2. In Judges 11:1-3, the author recorded the ejection of Jephthah by his half-brothers.
 - a. In 11:1, there are three pictures of Jephthah.
 - (1). What are these pictures?
 - (2). What do they tell us about the man?
 - b. In Judges 11:2, the author described the initial confrontation between Jephthah and his half-brothers.
 - (1). How would you describe this confrontation?
 - (2). What was the issue involved?
 - (3). What, if anything, does this have to say about the man, Gilead?
 - c. In 11:3, the author described the breakup of Gilead's family.
 - (1). Read this verse carefully. What does the verse tell you?
 - (2). What do we learn by the author's statement that "worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him"?
3. In Judges 11:4-11, the Jewish elders pleaded with Jephthah to be their leader.
 - a. In 11:4, the author told us that the "sons of Ammon" came to fight against Israel.
 - (1). Think back over our study. Is there any possible reason why they would do this?
 - (2). The text says that "after a while..." the sons of Ammon came. Why would they wait this long?
 - b. In 11:5, the sons of Gilead came to get Jephthah.
 - (1). What does this tell you about the sons of Gilead?
 - (2). Read the verse again. Who was the leader of the Jews when the sons of Ammon came to do battle?
 - (3). Put yourself in the place of the sons of Gilead in this verse. How would you feel?

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- (4). Put yourself in the place of Jephthah in this verse. How would you feel?
- c. In 11:6, the leaders of Israel came to ask Jephthah to be their leader.
 - (1). How did they deal with the way they had treated Jephthah previously?
 - (2). What would have happened to them if Jephthah had refused?
 - (3). Again, if you were Jephthah, how would you feel at this point?
 - d. In 11:7, Jephthah responded to their invitation.
 - (1). What did he say? What did he mean?
 - (2). How would you put his response in your own words?
 - (3). How would you describe his emotional state as he responded to their invitation?
 - e. In 11:8, the elders of Gilead responded to Jephthah's question.
 - (1). How did they answer his question?
 - (2). How would you characterize their answer?
 - f. In 11:9, Jephthah again responded to their words.
 - (1). On the basis of this verse, what hint do you find concerning his spiritual condition?
 - (2). In this verse Jephthah asked the elders a question.
 - (a). What was the question?
 - (b). Why did Jephthah have to ask the question?
 - (3). Literally, what responsibility did Jephthah have to these elders?
 - g. In 11:10, the elders responded to Jephthah's question.
 - (1). Why did the elders have to present the LORD as their witness?
 - (2). Look carefully at this verse. What was the nature of the vow that they made?
 - (3). Can you find a weakness in this vow? What is it?
 - h. In 11:11, Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead.
 - (1). The text says that they made Jephthah "head" and "chief." What is the difference between these two titles?
 - (2). The author said that "Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah." What did he mean by this statement?
4. In Judges 11:12-28, the king of Ammon demanded the return of land.
- a. In 11:12, Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon.
 - (1). Why would he do this?
 - (2). What answer does it appear that he expected?
 - b. In 11:13, Sihon, king of Ammon, replied to the questions of the messengers.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). What problem can you see with his demands?
 - (3). Study this verse carefully. What could Sihon hope to gain by this response?
 - c. In 11:14, 15, Jephthah responded to the king's statement.

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- (1). What was his response?
- (2). What response was it likely to stimulate?
- d. In 11:16, 17, Jephthah continued to defend Israel's activities.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). How necessary was this?
 - (3). In 11:17, Jephthah told the story of Israel's request of Edom to let them pass. What does this have to do with Ammon?
 - (4). What is the significance of the fact that when Edom refused Israel passage, they remained in Kadesh?
- e. In 11:18, Israel went around the land of Edom and Moab. How does this support Jephthah's argument with the Ammonites?
- f. In 11:19, 20, Israel contacted Sihon king of the Amorites requesting permission to pass through their land.
 - (1). What is the importance of this request?
 - (2). What was the response to this request?
 - (3). What does this add to Jephthah's presentation to Ammon?
 - (4). Why did Jephthah remind Sihon that he had refused the request and fought with Israel?
- g. In 11:21, Jephthah reminded Sihon that Jehovah had given the Amorites into the hand of Israel.
 - (1). How did this impact Jephthah's argument?
 - (2). The author concluded this verse by saying that Israel possessed the land of the Amorites. What does this add to Jephthah's argument?
- h. In 11:22, the author summarized what had happened. What does this add to Jephthah's presentation to Sihon?
- i. In 11:23, Jephthah asked a staggering question.
 - (1). What was the question?
 - (2). What was Jephthah trying to say by this question?
 - (3). Look at the names the author used for God. What is the significance of these names?
- j. In 11:24, Jephthah asked a burning question that Sihon would be hard pressed to answer.
 - (1). What is the question?
 - (2). How does this question affect the debate?
 - (3). Jephthah drew a conclusion in this verse?
 - (a). What was the conclusion?
 - (b). If you were Sihon, how would this statement affect you?
- k. In 11:25, Jephthah asked three questions.
 - (1). What were the questions?
 - (2). What did Jephthah accomplish by asking these questions?

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- (3). If you were Sihon, how would these questions affect you?
- l. In 11:26, Jephthah changed the direction of his verbal attack on Sihon.
 - (1). What was the nature of this change?
 - (2). Why would this question be important?
 - (3). What did Jephthah accomplish by the question?
- m. In 11:27, Jephthah drew his final conclusion.
 - (1). What was his conclusion?
 - (2). What is the benefit of this conclusion?
 - (3). Jephthah concluded this verse by requesting God to judge between them.
What is the significance of this act?
- n. In 11:28, the king of Ammon responded to Jephthah's presentation.
 - (1). How did he respond?
 - (2). What was accomplished by this response?
- 5. In Judges 11:29-33, Jephthah made a vow before the Lord.
 - a. In 11:29, the author described Jephthah's response to Sihon's reply. What was Jephthah's response? Why?
 - b. In 11:30, 31, Jephthah made a vow before the Lord.
 - (1). What were the conditions of this vow?
 - (2). What were the promises that Jephthah made?
 - (3). What does this vow tell us about Jephthah?
 - c. In 11:32, the author described the beginning of the battle.
 - (1). How does the author describe this?
 - (2). What is the relationship between 11:31 and 11:32?
 - d. In 11:33, the author described the result of the battle.
 - (1). How did the battle end?
 - (2). What is the significance of this information?
- 6. In Judges 11:34-40, the author described Jephthah's return home.
 - a. In 11:34, the author described Jephthah's welcome home.
 - (1). How would you describe that welcome?
 - (2). The author informed us that this daughter was the only child of Jephthah.
What does this add to our understanding?
 - b. In 11:35, the author described Jephthah's response on seeing his daughter.
 - (1). What was the response?
 - (2). Why would he respond that way?
 - (3). How would you explain this verse to a new Christian who asks why God would demand this?
 - c. In 11:36, the daughter responded to her father's grief.
 - (1). What did she say?

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- (2). What was the basis for her response?
- (3). What does this tell you about her?
- d. In 11:37, the daughter made a request of Jephthah.
 - (1). What was her request?
 - (2). Why would she make such a request?
- e. In 11:38, Jephthah responded to his daughter's request.
 - (1). What was his response?
 - (2). If you were Jephthah, how would you respond?
- f. In 11:39, 40, Jephthah kept his vow.
 - (1). What do these verses tell us about Jephthah?
 - (2). Some would say that these verses say something important about God.
 - (a). What would the verses say about God.
 - (b). How would you explain this?
- 7. Review your study of chapter eleven. What has the author told you concerning the nature of God?

LESSON 11: JUDGES 11:1 - 40

JEPHTHAH DRIVEN OUT: JEPHTHAH MADE RULER

There are five paragraphs in Judges chapter eleven. You will find a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

11:1-3	Jephthah Driven out By Half-Brothers
11:4-11	Elders Plead with Jephthah to Lead Israel
11:12-28	King of Ammon Demanded Land Return
11:29-33	Jephthah's Vow and Victory
11:34-40	Jephthah's Daughter Came to Meet Him

Judges 11:1-3 - Jephthah Driven Out By Half Brothers

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. Judges 11:1

The area of Gilead was much less accommodating for people than the area west of the River Jordan. It is not surprising, therefore, that the people there were of a rougher sort. As you look at this verse, there is a strong contrast within it. In the first part of the sentence, the author told us that Jephthah was a "valiant warrior." This was true. In the second part of the sentence, the author informed us that Jephthah was the son of a harlot. The first statement would make him a man of outstanding reputation, the pride of the whole tribe and nation. The second statement, however, would make him a mockery to everyone who knew him. He would be an outcast to all who knew his background. People, in that time, usually were not forgiving of such circumstances.

Jephthah's father was also a man of outstanding reputation. This is interesting in view of the fact that he had at least one wife, who gave him a number of children, and yet he kept a concubine as well. This is as much a commentary on the spiritual condition of the nation as it was on Gilead. The fact that the area was named after Jephthah's father gives us some idea of the position the man held in his tribe. We know that Gilead came from Manasseh. We do not know if Gilead came from the western or the eastern area that was allotted to Manasseh. Our best guess is that he came from the eastern portion. This grows out of the fact that there were two sections allotted to Manasseh. The troubled portion of the tribe appears to be those who lived east of the Jordan River.

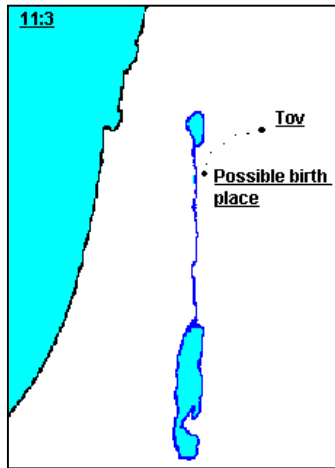
And Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." Judges 11:2

There is no mistaking the poor relationship that existed within the family. Things could hardly have been worse. The way this sentence is worded, it is possible that Jephthah was the oldest son of Gilead. Whatever the case, it is clear that the sons of Gilead's wife were concerned that their half-brother would want to be a part of the inheritance when Gilead died. The legitimate sons took matters into their own hands. They drove Jephthah out of

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the family. The text is not clear if this happened before or after the death of Gilead. This was not acceptable if Gilead was still living. Only the father could disinherit any of his sons.

So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him. Judges 11:3



This situation was so dangerous for Jephthah that he had to flee for his life. As you can see from this map, the area called "Tov" or "Tob" is located in the northern part of Gilead. The word "tov" or "tob" means "good." This is understandable. This area was some of the very best land east of the Sea of Galilee. It wasn't all that good, but it was much better than the land further south.

We cannot be certain, but it appears that this verse gives us an insight into the mental attitude of Jephthah at this time. It is almost as though he may have wanted to do the right thing in the past, but because of the way he was treated he did not care what happened any more. He was not averse to associating with worthless men. His reputation no longer mat-

tered to him or anyone else.

Judges 11:4-11 - Elders Plead With Jephthah To Lead Israel

And it came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel. Judges 11:4

This is not a surprise. The "sons of Ammon" were bitter enemies of all of the people of Israel. They had been defeated by Israel in the past, but that did not matter. They were repeatedly attempting to defeat and destroy any part of Israel that they could encounter. It was a bit like the experiences in Europe where land passed back and forth between conquerors. This was true for Poland, the Ukraine, portions of France bordering on Germany etc.

And it happened when the sons of Ammon fought against Israel that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; Judges 11:5

One wonders how the family knew that Jephthah was in the land of Tob. It may be that his reputation identified his location. Engaged in the kinds of things he did, Jephthah would be well known.

Because this part of the land was more prosperous than the southern parts makes it easier to understand why Jephthah and his "friends" went to this part of the land. It also helps explain why the "sons of Ammon" would want to take the territory back from the Jews.

This also tells us something about the legitimate sons of Gilead when they went to get Jephthah to get him to lead them in battle. The fact that they went to get him says that they were a people without a military leader. The "sons of Ammon" caught them in total disarray. Jephthah was not good enough to be their brother and fellow-heir. He was good enough to risk his life to save them from their enemies. It takes a lot of gall to do what his half-brothers did.

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and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon." Judges 11:6

Their appeal to Jephthah was interesting. There is no mention of the mistake that they made in driving him away from the family. There is no mention of their being sorry for what they had said and done to him. There was no expressed desire to make amends for what they had done. They made absolutely no effort to make it right with Jephthah for what they had done to him. They just wanted him to risk his life to defend them. Jephthah didn't need an enemy, he had family.

Their statement makes it clear that without Jephthah's help, they would not be able to fight against the "sons of Ammon." Nevertheless, there was no remorse, no contrition over their tragic treatment of their half-brother only a short time before.

Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?" Judges 11:7

Jephthah was deeply hurt by his half-brothers treatment and he was quite honest about it with them. His words were like saying, "I don't understand why you come to me. I wasn't good enough to be part of the family. Now that you are in trouble, suddenly I am good enough to risk my life for you." That must have been painful for the half-brothers, but it was the truth. As you read this verse again, the pain of Jephthah was most evident.

Put yourself in the place of the brothers for a minute. You would certainly feel uncomfortable. When Jephthah spoke as he did, there would be nothing you could say because it was the truth. You would want to change the subject as quickly as possible, and that is just what they did. You would hope that he would not want to pursue the issue further. Think about it for a minute. How would you describe the half-brother's conduct?

This is the second sentence in a row in which Jephthah reminded them that they hated him. That had to stab their consciences. Then again, maybe not.

Jephthah also reminded them that they had driven him from their father's house. This is more than just forcing him to leave the family. It is the practice of the near east where a person who is embarrassing to the family is disowned. In that day, as today, such a person was disowned and a funeral was held and the person was considered not to exist. In the story of the prodigal son, the father said, "my son was dead, but now is alive." When such a ceremony took place, the disowned person had no responsibility to the family, and the family had no responsibility to him. It is as though the person no longer existed.

Jephthah concluded with a question - "So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?" This was a devastating question that would be impossible to answer. The whole answer of Jephthah gives a bit of understanding of the attitude of Jephthah when his brothers had the nerve to ask him to risk his life for them.

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." Judges 11:8

Jephthah asked his half-brothers a difficult question. Their answer was as though Jephthah had not asked a question at all. They made no effort to give an answer, not even a

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lame answer. It was as though they felt that his question did not deserve an answer. Their only interest was whether or not he would lead them into battle.

Their only nod in the direction of decency was that they made him an offer of becoming the leader of the tribe if he would lead them in battle successfully. Selfish people can be very hard to abide. Some would call this strict honesty. It seems more like cold brass. It is like saying, "we did not care what happened to you, but we want you to care enough about what happens to us to risk your life to defend us." This is raw opportunism.

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?"
Judges 11:9

Jephthah was wary of his half-brothers to say the least. This verse is very awkward. Jephthah was involved with a worthless group of men. These men would not have been classified as God-fearing men. Suddenly Jephthah was talking about the Lord giving the enemy into his hands. One wonders where he got this training. Was this, in fact, a reflection of his early training? Was this something that he had seriously considered after the family misused him? We do not know, but we are happy that he had the strength to take such a stand. It was reasonable for him to ask if he was being invited just for the battle or if they had really intended for him to continue as their leader.

We wonder how Jephthah came by the idea that the LORD would give the "sons of Ammon" into their hands. Who could have taught him about the LORD? We must remember that his mother was not a Jew and would not have given him such training. The way he said this makes it clear that he saw this as something that the LORD would do for them, not something that they could do by themselves.

There is real doubt, on the part of Jephthah, as to whether or not they were going to keep their word and make him their ruler when the dust settled after the battle. This is not surprising since they had dealt with him in such an offensive way earlier. Thus, he was prompted to ask if they would really make him their leader when they had just said that they would.

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said." Judges 11:10

Again, we must wonder how they came by the vow that they made. They called for the LORD to be witness between themselves and Jephthah. This may well have been what Jephthah was waiting to hear. When they take an oath, they are not free to break the vow no matter what the consequences might be.

Notice, however, how they worded their vow - "Surely we will do as **YOU** have said." The question naturally arises concerning why they vowed to do as **HE** had said, rather than as **THEY** had said. As treacherous as they had been, Jephthah would be well advised to ask some questions about their vow. Whatever the case, they are now bound to the death to keep this vow that they made.

Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.
Judges 11:11

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Whatever was said between Jephthah and the elders is not recorded. We only know that he was convinced and went with them to become their leader and prepare to fight against the "sons of Ammon."

You will observe that they gave Jephthah two titles, "head" and "chief." These titles are not synonymous.

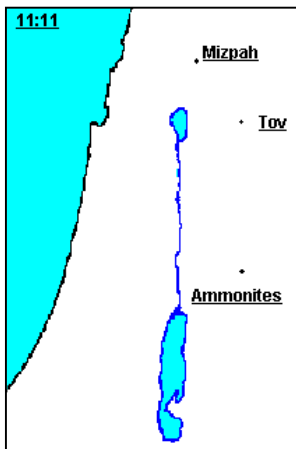
- a. **"Head"** - "rosh" (רֹאשׁ) "to shake the head," "the captain or chief," "the foremost one," "the principle and ruler."
- b. **"Chief"** - "qatsizn" (קָטִיזַן) This word describes "a magistrate," "one who decides," "a prince," "a ruler." It also means "to cut off," it describes the power to destroy.

These words sound strangely alike, but there is a difference. The differences between the two are meaningful. The "head" is one who rules by leading. He determines the direction life in the community will take. The "chief" on the other hand, is a magistrate; he rules and decides. He is the prince, the ruler. It also means "to cut off," "the power to destroy." The emphasis is on being a judge who passes judgments and decisions on behalf of the people.

The leaders of Gilead did many things wrong, but they did keep their word to Jephthah in this instance. We must keep in mind, however, that they were in dire straights when this happened.

Notice the way the author described the way Jephthah worked, "Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah." This is the way they would speak of standing in the presence of a king. To speak before the king is to do exactly as you had said. Jephthah

saw his actions as all being accomplished in the presence of Jehovah. This statement suggests a strong relationship between Jephthah and God. One wonders where this came from and when it began.



You will remember that the elders of Gilead went to Tob to get Jephthah. Now he is in Mizpah. The Ammonites, as you can see on the map, are not that far away. Whatever Jephthah was going to do, he would have to do quickly. This was especially true because he had just come to power. The time just before and just after a new ruler takes power is the most vulnerable time in a kingdom. The Ammonites were keenly aware of this and were prepared to take advantage of the vulnerability of the Gileadites.

Judges 11:12-28 - King of Ammon Demanded Land Return

Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" Judges 11:12

Jephthah was prepared to do battle, but he was not spoiling for a fight. He was a cool-headed leader. He did not have anything to prove. He started the negotiations, as he should have, by asking what the problem between the two nations was. There is little doubt that Jephthah knew of the problem, but it was a way to get the talks started.

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And the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now. " Judges 11:13

The claim made by the king of Ammon was nearly 400 years old. This was a poorly disguised cover-up for the real motive for his approaching attack. The Ammonite indulged in a bit of selective history. Observe that he made mention of the fact that Israel had taken part of his land. He made no mention, however, of the fact that his people had refused to help Israel even though they were distant family. He also made no mention of the fact that his people had refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory. He wanted to convince Jephthah that the approaching battle was the fault of Israel; they were the ones who had caused the strife.

But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the sons of Ammon. Judges 11:14, 15

Jephthah was determined to solve this problem through diplomatic sources if at all possible. As mentioned earlier, he was not spoiling for a fight. By the same token, he was not willing to just go away simply because the king was not cooperative.

Jephthah, therefore, returned his envoy with another message. He was not fooled by the selective history suggested by the king of Ammon. He denied that Israel had taken land away from Moab. He knew better and was not going to allow this misrepresentation to continue.

'For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh,' Judges 11:16

Jephthah started out by correcting the facts the king had misrepresented. He told the whole story, not just the parts on which they differed. It was a position which agreed with the teaching of the book of Exodus. (We should be reminded that though the book of Exodus may not have existed in written form, the story of the Exodus was well known in careful detail.) It also described just how much Israel had been through by the time they came to Ammon.

'then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.' Judges 11:17

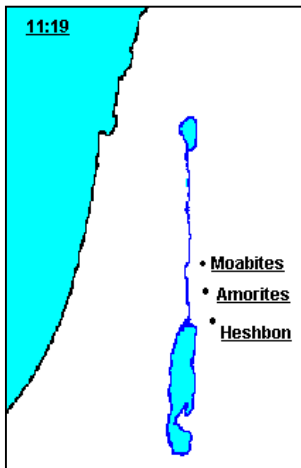
Jephthah knew his national history. He reported just exactly what had happened in Edom and Moab. These were considered crimes in the desert. The code of the desert demanded that people help travelers. These nations not only did not help them, but hindered their progress. This was not considered a small thing. It was a vicious attack these peoples carried out on the people of Israel.

Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. Judges 11:18

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Again, Jephthah told the painful truth. This could have been hazardous for him, but he still told the truth. He corrected the king's selective report of what Israel had done. He pointed out just how wrong the king and his people really were. He showed them that the Israelites went around Edom to the east. This could have been disastrous. Israel camped on the east side of Moab and received help from no one in the area. Israel even stayed on their own side of the Arnon lest they cross over into the land of Moab. This is like saying, "You may be the king, but you do not remember the truth about your history."

'And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place."' Judges 11:19



Jephthah continued with his history lesson. He reported that Israel sent messengers to Sihon the king of the Amorites. The Amorites were a loosely knit group who, across the centuries, occupied different parts of the territory from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean.

Heshbon was a city just east of the northern end of the Dead Sea. You can see the location on the map appearing with 11:19. The actions of the people of Israel were completely appropriate for their times. We must admit that it was a bit risky to allow a huge group of people to travel through your land. It would do definite damage to the grazing land for your own animals. Nevertheless, it was incumbent upon the people to allow their neighbors to pass through the land. Jephthah pointed out that

Israel asked, in the appropriate way, to have permission to pass through their land.

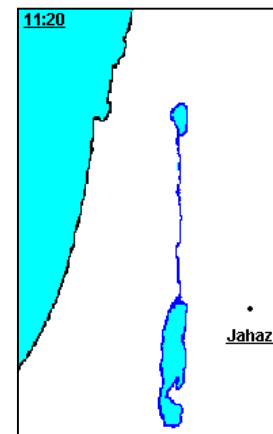
'But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz, and fought with Israel.' Judges 11:20

The text makes it clear that the basis of Sihon's refusal was his mistrust of the people of Israel. We must keep in mind that though they had not been in close proximity for over 400 years, still they were alienated relatives, and these divisions run deep.

Observe, from the text, that Sihon was determined to back up his refusal with armed might. It was not just that he brought the army. The text is clear, "Sihon gathered all his people..." All the people under the control of Sihon turned out to battle against the Israelites and refuse them passage to the land of Canaan.

This being the case, we must keep in mind that Sihon had a large well-trained army and they were fighting against a smaller army with no training and almost no weapons fit for battle. In many cases, the people of Israel fought with kitchen knives.

Sihon, his army and his people, went to Jahaz to intercept the Israelites to make sure that they did not cross their land. Again, it was not so much fear of what Israel might do,



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but rather an expression of spite for a nation of relatives for whom they would like to make life difficult, if not impossible.

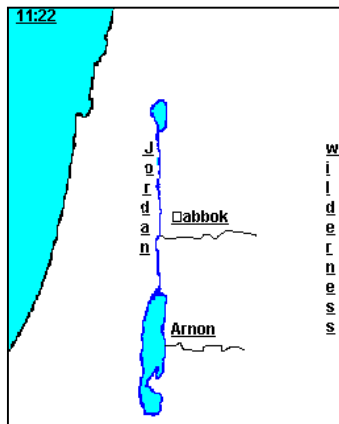
'And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.' Judges 11:21

Remember this was being said by Jephthah. Though he was reared by a pagan mother, still he knew a great deal about God's dealings with Israel and the history of the people of Israel. Observe that Jephthah gave "Jehovah, the God of Israel" credit for this victory. Notice the way he said it, "The LORD, the God of Israel gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel." This is something God did. This would not be surprising to anyone else who heard these words. It was customary, in that time and place, for leaders to give their god credit for their victories. Nevertheless, this man who had grown up outside the influence of Jewish thought gave Jehovah credit for the victory over the forces of Sihon.

Observe also, however, that Jephthah also mentioned the fact that Israel was the army on the field at the time of the battle. He said, "they defeated them."

Jephthah summarized his historical report by stating the obvious, "So Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country." Though this was obvious, it was strategic to his position. He will stress this again because it was so important.

'So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan.' Judges 11:22



This verse is a repetition of the import of the previous verse. As usual, however, there was additional information added to the repetition. The additional information was given in the form of the boundaries which the people established by their victory. On a map, it would look something like this. Notice the way he listed the boundaries:

- a. First he identified it as, "all the territory of the Amorites."
- b. From the Arnon as far as the Jabbok. This is a north to south description.
- c. From the wilderness as far as the Jordan. This is an east to west description.
- d. This is an area about 17 miles long from north to south.
- e. It is also about 25 miles wide from east to west.
- f. This was quite sufficient for Israel to make their passage through to the land of Canaan.

Jephthah has established that the land really belonged to Israel and that the Amorites had no further claim to it at all. This is the crux of his argument.

"Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it?" Judges 11:23

JEPHTHAH DRIVEN OUT: JEPHTHAH MADE RULER

The statement begins with the words, "since now..." This suggests a change in the direction of the author's thought. Jephthah prepared to draw the conclusion of the argument he has been preparing all through this report of Israel's history. He began with a statement of credible fact, "Since now the LORD, the God of Israel drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel." This would be understood by anyone who heard what he had said. Israel did the fighting, but The LORD, God of Israel, was the victor.

His conclusion is a natural outcome of the previous statement. It is his appeal to logic. It is a conditional statement. Note, however, that the author used the word "since" rather than "IF." "IF God gave the victory, and thus the land, to Israel THEN should you be the ones to receive the land when you do not worship the God of Israel?" He was saying that Sihon's position did not make sense. In good Jewish fashion, he phrased his statement in the form of a question. "Are you then to possess it?" It was a way of saying, "It is ridiculous to think that you should now possess the land." Jephthah had used an argument of impeccable logic. It would be impossible for the Amorite king to refute what he had said.

Observe the way Jephthah referred to God in his argument, "Since now the LORD, the God of Israel..." There are two important names for God in this statement.

- a. **LORD** - this is the word "Jehovah." It stresses the fact that God is eternal. Throughout the Old Testament, this name is repeatedly associated with situations of justice.
- b. **"God of Israel"** - Here the name for God is "ELOHIM." This name stresses the omnipotence of God and throughout the Old Testament it is repeatedly associated with situations involving mercy.

"Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it." Judges 11:24

Jephthah appealed to their actions in relationship with their god - Chemosh. Chemosh, the national god of the Moabites, was associated with heavenly bodies, but was identified with Baal as Baal Peor. The sacrifice to this god often took the form of child-sacrifice.

Jephthah was saying, in effect, "look at your own actions." When your god Chemosh gives you victory, you take that land without an additional thought. He then made a parallel statement about Israel. History would show that the Ammonites took over whatever land they won in battle. It would be unreasonable for the situation to be different when the Ammonites were the conquered people. When Jehovah gave your people into our hands, the land became ours. Notice how forcefully he stated his position. He did not say, "we should be able to take the land." He said, firmly, "So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it." There is no room for negotiation or movement in this statement. "God gave it: we will take it." This is an announcement, not a suggestion.

"And now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them?" Judges 11:25

Having won that argument, Jephthah then turned his attention to an evaluation of what the Ammonites had done. Again, in good Jewish fashion, he addressed the issue with a question. "Are you any better than Balak the son of Zipper, king of Moab?" This was a cutting remark.

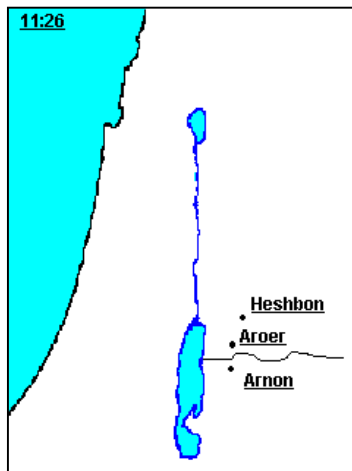
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Jephthah knew his history well. Moab was an anathema to that part of the world. The record is found in Numbers 23. Balak hired Baalim to place a curse on the people of Israel. When Baalim prayed, God told him to pronounce a blessing upon Israel. Because of this, Baalim refused to curse Israel and then blessed them. Jephthah accused King Sihon of being as bad as Balak. Jephthah drove this point home with two questions:

- a. "Did Balak ever strive with Israel?" The answer to this question is "no."
- b. "Did Baalak ever fight against them (Israel)?" Again, the answer is "no."

What Jephthah was emphasizing in these questions was that as bad as Balak was, he did not fight with Israel, but Sihon is ready to fight against Israel. This was a brutal, but honest attack by Jephthah.

'While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?' Judges 11:26



Having attacked Sihon about as strongly as one could possibly do it, Jephthah then changed the direction of his negotiations. Israel had lived in the land of Canaan, including some of the land east of the Jordan river for over 300 years. Notice the places that Jephthah listed in this verse. The Ammonites had many opportunities, during these 300 years, to attack the Israelites and take back their land, but the truth is that they did not do so. Jephthah's burden here is simple. If they had a real claim, why didn't they take up that claim during the previous 300 years. The fact that they said and did nothing to change that situation during such a long period says that they had no claim and that Sihon was using false charges to justify his coming attack. Jephthah portrays Sihon's claims as a convenience, not a fact.

'I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.' Judges 11:27

Jephthah now comes to his conclusion. He has been building up to this through the entire conversation. You will note that he made two accusations:

1. Your accusations that I have sinned against you are false.
2. The truth is that you have sinned against me and the people of Israel.

In effect, Jephthah placed a curse upon the king. Jephthah said,

"May the Lord, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon."

Observe that Jephthah called God "the LORD, the Judge." This is the name Jehovah. It stresses the fact that God is eternal. The importance of its use here is the fact that it is repeatedly used in situations where justice is being discussed. Jephthah called Jehovah "the judge." the word "Judge" is "shaphat" (שָׁפַט) and means "to judge." It is one who pronounces sentence; one who both vindicates and punishes, In this instance, that is the em-

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phasis that Jephthah was attempting to establish. In effect, the author said, "today, let Jehovah, the one who establishes guilt and innocence, judge between us and vindicate the one who is innocent and punish the one who is guilty." What a statement!

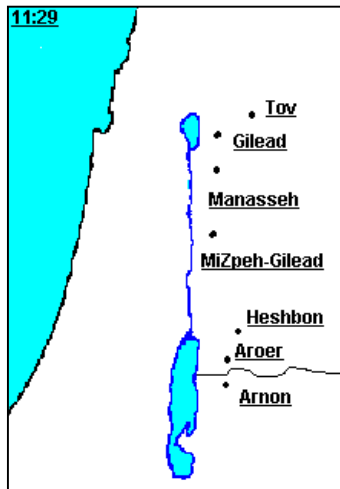
But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him. Judges 11:28

This is always the delicate part of negotiations. One never can be absolutely sure when the opponent is bluffing. Our text sounds as though Sihon just did not pay any attention to what Jephthah said. The Hebrew text reads a bit differently. One might translate it as follows: "The king of the sons of Ammon did not listen to the words of Jephthah." Sihon must have felt that Jephthah's attempts at conciliation were a sign of weakness, rather than prudence. The fact is, of course, that they were not weakness at all, but rather a calculated first step which would be followed up with force if necessary.

This was an unfortunate miscalculation by Sihon. It not only ended the negotiations, but also angered Jephthah and made him resolute to destroy all of the sons of Ammon.

Judges 11:29-33 - Jephthah's Vow and Victory

Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. Judges 11:29



Jephthah may have been the son of a pagan mother and he may have been guilty of some serious crimes against the people of the area, but at this instance, he was working under the direction of the Holy Spirit of God. The author was very direct, "The Spirit of the Jehovah came upon Jephthah." That which Jephthah did at this point was under the direction of the Spirit as a soldier acts upon the directions of his superior officer. This describes a cooperative relationship between Jephthah and God in which God takes responsibility for the actions to be taken.

Note the route that Jephthah and his men took as they went to fight Sihon rather than wait for him to come to them. He started this march from his location in "Tov." From there, he went through Gilead and Manasseh. From there he turned east through Mizpah of Gilead. This could be considered strange. Notice that he had already passed through Gilead and Manasseh and now he went to Mizpah of Gilead. The name Gilead applies to a large, general area rather than a smaller area such as one of the tribes might inhabit. The eastern half of the tribe of Manasseh was within the boundaries of Gilead. This accounts for the apparent confusion of geographic information in this verse.

Having passed through Mizpah of Gilead, Jephthah turned southeast to encounter Sihon and the troops of the sons of Ammon. One might wonder why he would take this route. As you look at the map, this is the route that would be easiest to travel. He first went to the area closest to the Jordan river. This was easy travel. If he had gone straight

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south from Tob to Ammon, he would have been climbing and descending mountains most of the time. As it was, he found the easiest land surface over which to take his army.

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If Thou wilt indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering. " Judges 11:30, 31

To say the least, this is a surprise. God did not require that Jephthah enter into covenant with Him. There is every evidence that Jephthah was completely confident of victory over the Ammonites. We can only say that he had to desire to be in covenant with God as he began the campaign. Whatever the reason, Jephthah entered into a binding covenant with the Lord.

Observe that the covenant is stated in the form of a conditional statement - "IF you will do ... THEN I will do ..." The fact that this vow was "to the LORD," suggests that it could not be changed under any circumstances. We need to look closely at the two parts of this vow:

- a. **The condition - God's promise.** In this covenant, God was promising that He would give the Ammonites into the hands of Jephthah. Jephthah did not ask God to promise that He would enable Jephthah and his men to have victory. He was, somehow, comfortable that it would be God who would give the victory.
- b. **The Promise of Jephthah** - Notice that the text says, "whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace..." This could be his pet dog. It could be the servant whose task it was to meet people, welcome them and wash their feet. This would be the lowest servant in the entire household. There is no way that Jephthah would envision that his daughter would come out to meet him. In a wealthy family, one that had servants, the members of the family would never, under any circumstances come out of the house to greet a visitor. That was the task of the gate servant and no one else would dare to take that position.

We should remember that God did not demand that Jephthah take this vow. It was Jephthah's idea from the beginning. The situation was not so desperate that he would feel that he had to do this. It had to represent a personal desire to enter into covenant with God.

Notice how he phrased his promise, "...when I return in peace." Jephthah was convinced that he would return from battle and that when he returned he would be the victor despite the lopsided encounter they were about to have. Jephthah was going to return in peace and not in humiliation.

Jephthah promised that whatever came from his house first would belong to the Lord and Jephthah would make of it a burnt offering. The burnt offering is interesting. It was to be completely consumed in the flames. There was nothing given to the priest; nothing to be consumed by the family. It belonged to God and was completely burned. The purpose of the burnt offering was to symbolize complete surrender to God. The sacrifice was to be given with view to the renewal and sanctification of the person to a life which was holy and pleasing to God. It appears that this is the idea behind Jephthah's vow before the Lord. Jephthah not only wanted to make a covenant; he wanted to symbolize his deep desire to live a life in careful obedience to God and to be holy in all his ways. What a man!

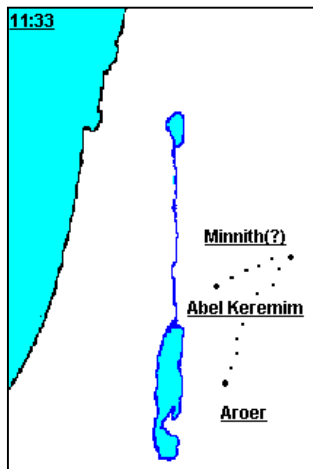
JEPHTHAH DRIVEN OUT: JEPHTHAH MADE RULER

So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. Judges 11:32

When we use the words "crossed over" it is usually a reference to crossing over a body of water. There is no body of water in the area that Jephthah and his army traveled. We must assume that the author meant that they crossed from one hilly area into another. We cannot be certain of this.

The author was clear, however, when he pointed out, "The Lord gave them into his hand." The victory was not Jephthah's great strategy. It was not the great courage and skill of his army. God gave the Ammonites into the hands of Jephthah and his army. This was an irresistible divine action and Jephthah knew all about it.

And he struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. Judges 11:33



Having given a summary of the battle, the author now gives some of the details. As you look at this map of the area, you can see the direction of the battle. The army of Jephthah followed as Sihon and his army fled to the south from Aroer through Minnith and to Abel-Keremim.

It is only natural that an army, when severely threatened and losing the battle, will retreat deeper into its own territory. This was both good and bad for Jephthah. It is good for an army when their foe begins to retreat. There is no way to securely protect yourself in strong retreat. A soldier's best efforts to protect himself and stay unharmed is when he is moving forward, not backward. It can be very bad, because hasty retreats can also be the bait in a trap. An advancing army must always be aware of such a possibility. This was one of the most often-used strategies of the armies of that day. You will find it described repeatedly in the Old Testament.

The author said, "So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel." This is a very symbolic statement. It is a way of saying that Israel won decisively. It also says that the defeat was such that the Ammonites could not mount a counter-attack any time soon. Again, God intervened and gave Israel rest from their abusive enemies. The text does not say how the army of Israel celebrated this great victory. It can be fairly assumed that the celebration did take place and on a grand scale.

You will remember that in verse 27, Jephthah called upon God to judge between the army of Israel and the sons of Ammon. That is exactly what happened, for, as the author commented, the Lord gave the sons of Ammon into the hands of Israel.

Judges 11:34-40 - Jephthah's Daughter Came to Meet Him

When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. Judge 11:34

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Any Jew of that day would be shocked to read this verse. In a home of means, no member of the family would go out of the house to greet anyone who came to their door. This was the task of the servant who watched the gate. It would be considered in extremely poor taste for a member of the family to take over this task.

This verse is a dirge, even before it is clear what is going to happen. Notice the sharp contrast included in this verse. On the one hand you have these words,

"Behold his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourenes and with dancing."

This is a great picture of joy and exuberance. There is exaltation and celebration in this brief sentence.

The author, however, also said,

"Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter."

This makes it clear that if she died, he would be a man without lineage. In spite of all his achievements; in spite of raising himself from the ignominy of being a fatherless child, he would be humiliated by dying without an heir to carry on his name.

It would be considered in very poor taste, but it is clear that his daughter came out to welcome her victorious father back home. It appears that she did not come alone. She came with tambourines and dancing. In that day, a person would seldom, if ever, dance alone. When they brought tambourines, they brought several persons to play these instruments. We should think of a large group of young ladies dancing and playing their tambourines as Jephthah approached his home. This verse is filled with almost unbearable tragedy.

*And it came about when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back. " Judg-
es 11:35*

The anguish of soul that this verse represents is almost impossible to adequately put into words. There is shock and surprise in the actions of Jephthah when he saw his daughter emerge from their home. It appears certain that he had no thought that it might be his daughter who came out to meet him upon his return.

The author indicated that "he tore his clothes." This was their way of visually expressing the extent of their deep sorrow and trauma. Remember, he had been gone for several months. Imagine how his daughter would feel when greeted by the words, "You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me." Her confusion would be immense. There is no way she could understand what he was talking about. She was glad to see him; she wanted him to know she was glad to have him home safe and then to be greeted by these harsh words had to be frustrating and confusing beyond belief.

Again we hear Jephthah talking about God and must wonder aloud where he gained this information and commitment. He said to her, "I have given my word to the Lord and I cannot take it back." Jephthah came from an idolatrous community. He came from an illegitimate part of his father's family. He would not receive the training that the legiti-

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mate sons of his father received. Still he knew about God and knew how to make a binding covenant with God.

So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon." Judges 11:36

The daughter's words are astounding. Now, we must ask ourselves where she received her training that she would be so committed to God that she would invite her father to do whatever necessary in order to keep his word to God. There is no reason to believe that she knew of the vow her father had made.

Her words echo in our ears, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD, do to me as you have said..." What a commitment to faithfulness to God! Whether she knew it or not, she was saying to Jephthah, "faithfulness to the LORD is worth more than my life." That is real commitment.

Notice how she thought of the victory, "The Lord has avenged you of your enemies." She clearly saw the victory over the Ammonites as a divine action, not the skills of her father and the army of men who followed him. The way her words are recorded indicates a cause and effect relationship. God had given the Ammonites into their hand. This was the basis for saying that Jephthah should do whatever he must in order to be faithful to God.

And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions." Judges 11:37

This verse will sound very strange to some of us. The statement "weep because of my virginity" was a very real understanding for them. People in that time and place saw the purpose of women as bearing children. If a woman bore no children, they thought that she must have sinned and this was God's way of punishing her. If a woman bore no children, then her purpose in life was missed and they would consider her life a waste.

This verse shows a major difference between their culture and ours.

THEIR CULTURE	OUR CULTURE
It was communal.	Ours is individual.
In sorrow, they tended to pull together.	In sorrow, we tend to pull away from others.
Sorrow was something they shared.	Sorrow was something we keep to ourselves.

The companions she took with her would be as sad as Jephthah's daughter because she would never bear children.

Going to the mountains, for them, was like going into the sanctuary. This was an act of worship as much as a visual expression of sorrow.

Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. Judges 11:38

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This family is full of surprises. She went to the mountains with her father's blessing. We need to remember that in that day unwed girls went nowhere without a family escort. That is still the case. It is possible that her mother escorted the group of girls, but the text is not helpful here. It appears that the mother or some other member of the family went along.

We are unaware of the identity of these companions. The word that was used means "friend," or "associates." It was a mutual sorrow for all concerned – both the daughter and her friends.

And it came about at the end of two months that she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year. Judges 11:39, 40

One trembles just to read these verses and comprehend what they mean in the life of this father and daughter. She might have run away. That was less likely because there was nowhere for a single, young girl to go. She returned as she had said. It is interesting that we do not know the name of this daughter. This is unusual. Whenever someone in the Old Testament does something outstanding, the name is always given and praise rightly shared.

We have to realize that Jephthah carried out his vow before the Lord. I cringe just to think of this verse. One thinks of his own daughter and is very clear that he could not carry out such a vow. This author would be in trouble. Jephthah was devastated, but he kept his vow before the Lord. This is an insight into the character of the man.

This raises some interesting questions. For instance, would God accept a sacrifice when a man sacrificed his daughter? Remember, that God took a strong stand against Israel when they sacrificed their children to the idol Molech. The text does not say whether God accepted the sacrifice or not. Again, remember that God did not command Jephthah to do this. He did this on his own accord. We must acknowledge that the focus is on the faithfulness of Jephthah rather than on the act which gave evidence of his faithfulness and commitment to God.

Notice that in verse 39, the sorrow expressed in that she had no relations with a man and therefore had no children. It was an astounding thing even for a Jew in that day. They set up a day to remember Jephthah's daughter. Otherwise she would have passed into oblivion unnoticed with no children to sustain her name. We should also remember that this meant that Jephthah would not have a male successor and his name would be thus dishonored.

We must also consider where Jephthah's daughter got her training that she could accept her father's decision concerning the importance of keeping his vow to the Lord. It certainly appears that though Jephthah had an unfortunate spiritual time in his life, he still was able to train his daughter in such a way that she could accept his monumental determination to be faithful.

We must be reminded that this special day is still remembered by the strictest Jews in many lands. Again they are not celebrating her sacrifice, but rather the faithfulness of her father, Jephthah.

JEPHTHAH DRIVEN OUT: JEPHTHAH MADE RULER

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12
IBZAN, ELON ABDON AND 31 YEARS
JUDGES 12:1 - 15

1. There are five paragraphs in Judges chapter twelve. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

12:1-6	
12:7	
12:8-10	
12:11, 12	
12:13-15	

2. In Judges 12:1-6, the author told of Jephthah's fight against the Ephraimites.
- a. In 12:1, the Ephraimites were upset because they were not invited to take part in the battle against the Ammonites.
 - (1). Think about the cause of Ephraim's distress. What comes to mind?
 - (2). They threatened Jephthah. What was their threat?
 - (3). There is a contradiction in this verse. What is that contradiction?
 - b. In 12:2, Jephthah responded to their angry challenge.
 - (1). What was Jephthah's response?
 - (2). If you were an Ephraimite, how would you feel when Jephthah said these things?
 - c. In 12:3, Jephthah continued his response to the Ephraimites.
 - (1). What was this response?
 - (2). How does Jephthah's report of the events differ from those of the Ephraimites?
 - (3). Read the verse again. What does it tell you about his spiritual life?
 - d. In 12:4, the Ephraimites ridiculed the Gileadites.
 - (1). What did they do?
 - (2). What was the result of this activity?
 - (3). What was the motive behind this ridicule?
 - e. In 12:5, 6, the author reported the way the Gileadites tracked down the escaped soldiers.
 - (1). How did they trap these soldiers who fled?
 - (2). How could the Gileadites find the Ephraimites who had fled?
 - (3). What was the result of this operation?
3. In Judges 12:7, Jephthah judged Israel six years.

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- a. Read this verse carefully. Where was Jephthah buried?
 - b. What does this tell us?
 - c. Compare this situation with that of the burial of the other judges. What did you find?
4. In Judges 12:8-10, Ibzan judged Israel for six years.
- a. In 12:8, the author told us where Ibzan came from.
 - (1). Where was that?
 - (2). What would the importance of this be?
 - (3). What does this verse tell us about how Ibzan came to power?
 - b. In 12:9, the author told us about Ibzan's family.
 - (1). There are four pieces of information. What are they?
 - (2). What does this tell us about the man and his values?
 - (3). What does this tell us about his way of ruling the nation?
 - c. In 12:10, the author told us of the death of Ibzan.
 - (1). He judged Israel for seven years. Does this give us any other information?
 - (2). Besides the historical fact, what do we learn from the fact that he was buried in Bethlehem?
5. In Judges 12:11, 12, Elon became the judge in Israel.
- a. In 12:11, the author told us of the background of Elon.
 - (1). What was his background?
 - (2). What does this help us to understand?
 - (3). How long did he reign? How does this compare with those who judged Israel before him?
 - b. In 12:12, the author told us of the death and burial of Elon.
 - (1). Where was he buried? What is the significance of this?
 - (2). What do we know about the ten years that Elon judged Israel?
6. In Judges 12:13-15, Abdon became the judge in Israel.
- a. In 12:13, the author described Abdon's background.
 - (1). What was his background?
 - (2). What did he accomplish while in power?
 - (3). What do we know about how he came to power?
 - (4). What is the significance of the fact that he ruled for eight years?
 - b. In 12:14, the author gave us information about Abdon's family.
 - (1). What information did the author give?
 - (2). What does this tell us about Abdon?
 - (3). What can we learn from the fact that Abdon's sons and grandsons rode on donkeys?
 - c. In 12:15, the author again gave us the burial information about Abdon.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12

- (1). Why is this important?
 - (2). What do we learn from the fact that he was buried in the city where he grew up?
7. Review your study of chapter twelve. What did the author teach you about God?

LESSON 12: JUDGES 12:1 - 15

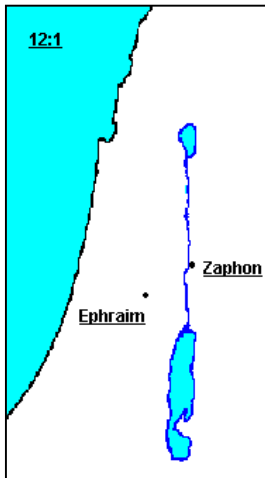
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There are four paragraphs in Judges chapter twelve. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

12:1-6	Jephthah Fought Against Ephraimites
12:7	Jephthah Judged Israel Six Years
12:8-10	Ibzan Judged Israel Seven Years
12:11, 12	Elon Judged Israel Ten Years
12:13-15	Abdon Judged Israel Eight Years

Judges 12:1-6 - Jephthah Fought Against Ephraimites

Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you." Judges 12:1



Ephraim met Jephthah as he returned from fighting and defeating the sons of Ammon. The men of Ephraim sound stern and loyal. Apparently they were upset because they were not invited to join in the battle. One must admit that the men of Ephraim had several reasons to fight with the sons of Ammon. They had suffered at the hands of the Ammonites. It is uncommon for people to be upset because they were left out of a bitter battle. Most of the time, people breathe a sigh of relief if they do not have to fight. Frankly, their acting was good, but their sincerity left a bit to be desired.

The men of Ephraim threatened to burn down Jephthah's house. This is intense anger. It would require a conquest of Gilead. It is doubtful they would try this and more doubtful they could accomplish it. They talked a good fight, but were not that good on the battlefield. Nevertheless, Jephthah could not take the risk and he had to be prepared to fight them. There is a contradiction in all of this. The Ephraimites wanted to help with the battle, to protect their family members. At the same time, they were threatening to burn Jephthah's house down. This, of course, does not make sense.

And Jephthah said to them, "I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. Judges 12:2

Jephthah was not intimidated. He set the record straight immediately. Their report of what happened left a bit to be desired. The truth was that Jephthah had called upon them when he was in a fierce battle, and they did not come to his aid. His words were firm and biting, "I called you, you did not deliver me..." This was not the only time this was true for Ephraim. They wanted to be known as loyal soldiers, but did not want to fight.

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"And when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day, to fight against me?" Judges 12:3

Jephthah continued with his correction of the record. Jephthah dealt as directly with them as he had with the others. They blamed him for the situation. He turned the blame around and corrected their explanation of the facts. He solved the dilemma by simply telling what had happened.

Jephthah had literally risked his life in order to defeat the Ammonites. Add to this the fact that he had lost his daughter as a result of the conditions in this battle.

The text mentions that he had "crossed over..." This suggests that they were fighting either in the hill country or in the vicinity of a large body of water. In either case, this was a very dangerous situation.

Observe that Jephthah claimed that Jehovah had given the Ammonites into his hands. He never claimed the victory. It was God who won the victory over the Ammonites and he knew it.

Having restated the situation as it actually happened, Jephthah challenged Ephraim concerning the reason they came to fight with him. Having corrected Ephraim's report, Jephthah asked him in view of what they had done; in view of the risks Jephthah had taken; in view of what God had done: "Why have you come to fight with me?"

Put yourself in Ephraim's position for a minute. You would have been totally humiliated by the way Jephthah talked with you. That is exactly what Jephthah had in mind as he confronted Ephraim for their brazen mishandling of the truth.

Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh." Judges 12:4

The men of Ephraim not only misrepresented the facts; they also attempted to humiliate the men of Gilead by calling them "fugitives of Ephraim." The word "fugitive" means "refugee," "people who had escaped." This was an attempt to ridicule the soldiers of Jephthah. It backfired. This made the Gileadites just that much more determined to defeat the men of Ephraim, despite the fact that they were just returning from another battle.

The men of Gilead defeated the Ephraimites. One would suspect that the men of Ephraim wished that they had not attempted to humiliate the men of Gilead. It would have been much easier on these Ephraimites had they kept their silence.

Everyone knew that if Jephthah could possibly avoid a fight he would. On the other hand, when it was inevitable, Jephthah would fight with unusual courage.

And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," Judges 12:5

A "ford" is not an American car, but a place where it is easier to cross a body of water. This "ford" is located just to the east of the land of Ephraim and may well be at the point where the Allenby Bridge is located today. The battle was over, but as usual, there were

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many soldiers who fled the battlefield and could not be captured. The Gileadites were just angry enough that they wanted to catch them all.

If these soldiers wanted to get back to Ephraim, they would have to cross the Jordan river and this was the best place to accomplish this. These soldiers would attempt to cross the Jordan as if they were just private citizens and not soldiers. We must remember that these Ephraimites, though enemies of the Gileadites, were still Jews. Because of this it would be hard to tell just who they were.

then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim. Judges 12:6

If the Gileadites asked if they were Ephraimites, they would, naturally say, "No." It would be difficult for the Gileadites to tell if they were honest or not. There was, however, one way that seemed fool-proof. In the Hebrew language there are two different "s" sounds. One is pronounced "sin" the other "shin." They are very different and written differently. For some reason, the Ephraimites could pronounce the "sin" sound, but were incapable of pronouncing the "shin" sound.

Knowing this, the Gileadites asked them to say, "shibboleth." This word means "a stream." The Ephraimites being incapable of the "sh" sound, said, "sibboleth." This immediately gave them away and the Gileadites knew that the person had lied. At this point the Ephraimite would be killed. On that day, 42,000 died in the battle and in the attempt to sneak back across the Jordan to go home.

Judges 12:7 - Jephthah Judged Israel Six Years

And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. Judges 12:7

Observe that Jephthah did not judge Israel very long. The fact that he ruled at all says that the Gileadites kept their word and made him their ruler. If you look back over the book, as we have studied it, you will notice that with each judge, the time of their control declined. Observe also that the text does not identify the city where Jephthah was buried. He was buried in a city in Gilead. This, of course, is not very specific. If you look at the other judges, we know exactly in which city they were buried. This tells us that Jephthah was not taken back to his hometown. It also tells us that there was no healing of feelings with the rest of his family and the area from which he came.

Judges 12:8-10 - Ibzan Judged Israel Seven Years

Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. Judges 12:8

This means that Ibzan was of the tribe of Judah. There is almost no information known about this judge. We only know he came to power after Jephthah died.

And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave in marriage outside the family, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. Judges 12:9

This verse tells us a lot about Ibzan's judgeship. It tells us how he tried to rule. Solomon had a host of wives because he made alliances with other nations through the marriages of

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his children. The fact that he had 60 children tells us that he had several wives. As indicated earlier, men usually only had more than one wife if their first wife was incapable of bearing children. That certainly was not the case in this instance. There had to be a lot of trouble between tribes as well as between the tribes and the nations that had been in the land when they arrived. The giving of his sons and daughters in alliance building marriages provided enough alliances to establish a relationship with every tribe and clan in the area. It should be remembered, however, that he only ruled for seven years.

The fact that he gave his sons and daughters to be married outside the tribe of Judah was forbidden. He was, in fact, violating the covenant by giving his sons and daughters to the gentiles as a way to keep peace with them. His grand children would no longer be Jews, but "goy" or "gentiles." This would place them outside the covenant God had made with their forefathers. We know nothing further about his rule or the conditions under which he ruled. It is clear that the early mutual support between the tribes was now a thing of the past. Each had to defend himself and not count on anyone else to help defend him and his family.

Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem. Judges 12:10

The fact that he was buried in Bethlehem suggests that he was well respected by the people of that city. Again, because he came from Bethlehem and when he died was buried there, many believe that this was Boaz, from the book of Ruth. This is very possible. There is reason to believe that Boaz was, in fact, one of the judges. We cannot confirm that this is the man. Though there is no verse which says one way or the other.

Judges 12:11, 12 - Elon Judged Israel 10 Years

*Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years.
Judges 12:11*



Zebulun, as you can see on the map, is located in the far north of Israel. Elon's reign was longer than that of his predecessors. Notice, again, that nothing is said, good or bad, about the time of his judgeship. It is almost as though this was a parenthesis in the history of Israel. More often than not, such a situation says that such a rule was uneventful if not evil in nature.

Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. Judges 12:12

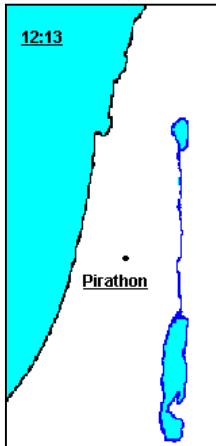
The fact that he was buried in Aijalon tells us that he was well respected among his people. We are not certain where Aijalon is located. The important piece of information is that he was buried among his own tribe's people. The fact that so little is mentioned about his judgeship suggests that it must have been a peaceful time.

This does not mean that all was well. It may mean that there was a time in Israel when nothing happened. It is almost as though it was a silent parenthesis in Israel's history.

Judges 12:13-15 - Abdon Judged Israel Eight Years

Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. Judges 12:13

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Abdon came from Pirathon. You can see the location of this city on the map. This tells us that he was an Ephraimite. This is a little bit surprising. It suggests that the wounds of the previous encounter with Jephthah had healed, at least to some extent.

Again, we do not know how Abdon came to power. The only information that we have about him is the large number of his children.

And he had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. Judges 12:14

This is a very large family. (You will notice from the text that the author did not tell us how many daughters Abdon had.) It is certain that he had several wives and perhaps concubines in order to have such a huge family.

The author told us that Abdon's sons and grandsons rode on donkeys. This was before the general introduction of horses into the Palestine area. This tells us that they were people of means, at least during the time that Abdon was the judge. It also tells us that this was a way of subtly positioning himself as a king rather than a judge. Judges did not ride on donkeys, kings did.

Abdon judged Israel for eight years. This is a shorter time period than his predecessor, Elon. If you couple this with the fact that there is nothing said about his judgeship, you discover that he was not really a great judge. His family, however, made a real fashion statement by the way they lived their lives in the limelight.

Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites. Judges 12:15

Abdon was buried in his paternal city. This probably suggests that they were not ashamed of him. They were willing for him to be buried in his hometown even though there may have been some problems with the way he ruled and controlled his family.

Though Abdon was wealthy, as a judge, he would have owned much land in the area. Because of this, they may well have been unable to stop him from being buried in their city. We do not know. We do know that his rule did not set any records for good things accomplished.

Conclusion

We now need to review our study of the chapter to see what the author has told us about God. You have probably noticed, by now, that the name of God never appears in this chapter. This does not mean that God was inactive during these 31 years. God is always active. There are times and circumstances, however, when people are more cooperative with what God is attempting to do than at other times. This inevitably affects the outcome of history during those times.

In you look again at the chapter, you will notice that this was a period of time when few notable things were recorded. For the most part, the most important thing that happened during the reign of some judges was the length of their reign. This tells us something about God.

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1. God is always active whether we can verify it or not.
2. When people, especially leaders, work with what God is attempting to accomplish, great things can happen.
3. When it appears that these leaders are not working with God to achieve His goals, little that is worthy of note seems to take place.
4. God will work miracles when people are attuned to His agenda.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

JUDGES 13:1 - 25

1. There are five paragraphs in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

13:1	
13:2-7	
13:8-14	
13:15-20	
13:21-25	

2. In Judges 13:1, the author said, "Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD."
 - a. What does this statement suggest?
 - b. Read the verse again. There is a cause and effect relationship in this verse.
 - (1). What is that relationship?
 - (2). What can we learn from this?
 - c. The Philistines controlled Israel 40 years.
 - (1). How long were previous captivities?
 - (2). What can we learn from this?
3. In 13:2-7, the author told of the announcement of Samson's birth.
 - a. In 13:2, the author indicated that Manoah and his wife had no children.
 - (1). The author, in two ways, identified the fact that this couple was childless. Why would he do this?
 - (2). Notice that the husband's name was given, but the name of the wife is not? Can you offer a good reason for this?
 - b. In 13:3, the angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah's wife.
 - (1). What difference would it make that she had been barren?
 - (2). Why would the angel appear to the unnamed wife rather than to Manoah?
 - (3). Some say that this verse is evidence of the mercy of God. How could we explain this idea?
 - c. In 13:4, the angel gave the wife some instructions.
 - (1). What were the instructions?
 - (2). Why would these instructions be necessary?
 - d. In 13:5, the angel gave his reason for the instructions given in 13:4.
 - (1). What reasons did the angel give for these instructions?

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- (2). In a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, find out as much as you can about what it means to be a Nazirite.
- (3). In this verse, the angel said, "He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." What does this mean?
- e. In 13:6, the wife came to Manoah and told him what the "man of God" had said to her.
 - (1). Put yourself in the place of Manoah. What would you think when you heard what happened?
 - (2). If you were the wife, how would you explain this experience to your husband?
- f. In 13:7, the wife continued to explain to her husband what the angel had said to her.
 - (1). Review 13:3-5. Now compare the message the angel of the LORD gave the wife with the message she gave to Manoah. What did you find?
 - (2). This message would be a surprise to Manoah. Can you think of a good reason this would be true?
- 4. In Judges 13:8-14, the angel gave instructions for Manoah's wife.
 - a. In 13:8, Manoah responded to the report of his wife.
 - (1). How did he respond?
 - (2). How did he treat his wife in these unusual circumstances?
 - (3). How did he deal with God in what seemed an impossible situation?
 - (4). How would you describe Manoah's treatment of God in this environment?
 - b. In 13:9, God responded to the prayer of Manoah.
 - (1). Manoah asked for further instruction, but God sent the angel back to Manoah's wife. How should we understand this?
 - (2). Put yourself in the place of Manoah. How would you feel when this happened?
 - c. In 13:10, 11, Manoah's wife hurried to tell Manoah about the angel.
 - (1). The text says that she ran quickly. Why would she be in such a hurry?
 - (2). Read verse 11 again. How would you describe the question of Manoah to the angel?
 - (3). How would you describe the response of the angel to Manoah?
 - (4). How did you feel when you read the words, "are you the man who spoke to the woman"?
 - d. In 13:12, Manoah gives us an indication of his mental attitude.
 - (1). What is Manoah's mental attitude?
 - (2). There is some confusion in this verse.
 - (a). What is the confusion?
 - (b). How did Manoah deal with it?
 - e. In 13:13, the angel responded to Manoah.
 - (1). What was the angel's reply?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

- (2). How did the angel answer Manoah's question?
- (3). What was the angel saying by the answer that he gave?
- f. In 13:14, the angel continued with his instructions.
 - (1). Describe what these instructions would entail for Manoah's wife.
 - (2). Manoah and his wife were very strict Jews. Why would the angel have to insist on the instruction not to eat anything unclean to such people?
- 5. In Judges 13:15-20, Manoah and his wife made a sacrifice to God.
 - a. In 13:15, Manoah and his wife perform the hospitality which was required for travelers.
 - (1). What were they doing?
 - (2). Why were they doing this?
 - b. In 13:16, the angel refused the offered meal from Manoah.
 - (1). How would you describe the angel's response when he said, "Though you detain me, I will not eat your food..."?
 - (2). What possible reason could the angel give for not eating the food?
 - (3). Think carefully about the angel's reply. Why would he want Manoah and his wife to offer a burnt offering when food was so scarce?
 - c. In 13:17, Manoah responded to the angel's instructions in verse 17.
 - (1). What does the question of Manoah tell us about his conviction regarding this whole experience?
 - (2). What was so important about knowing the name of the angel?
 - d. In 13:18, the angel responded to Manoah's request.
 - (1). How would you describe the angel's answer to Manoah's question?
 - (2). How would you explain the statement, "seeing it is wonderful"?
 - e. In 13:19, you have two sets of actions going on in the same verse.
 - (1). What are these actions?
 - (2). What kind of "wonders" did the angel perform?
 - f. In 13:20, the angel left Manoah and his wife.
 - (1). The sentence begins with the word "for." This usually indicates that a reason is forthcoming. What reason is there in 13:20 for the events in 13:19?
 - (2). If you were Manoah or his wife and saw the angel ascending like this, what would you think?
 - (3). Why would Manoah and his wife fall on their faces?
- 6. In Judges 13:21-25, the author told of the birth of Samson.
 - a. In 13:21, the author told of a discovery by Manoah and his wife. When did they discover that this angel was the "angel of the LORD"?
 - b. In 13:22, Manoah expressed great fear.
 - (1). What was he afraid of?
 - (2). Why would he be afraid of this?

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- c. In 13:23, Manoah's wife disagreed with him.
 - (1). She gave three reasons why she was sure they would not die. What were these reasons?
 - (2). What does this tell you about her understanding of God?
 - d. In 13:24, the author told us that "the LORD blessed him (Samson)". In view of what we know about Samson's later life, what does this tell us about God?
 - e. In 13:25, the author told us that "the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him..." Again, in view of what we know of his later values and decisions, what does this tell us about how God works?
7. Review your study of this chapter. What did you discover about what the author was trying to say about God?

LESSON 13: JUDGES 13:1 - 25

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON

There are five paragraphs in Judges chapter 13. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

13:1	Israel Sinned Again; God Gave Them to Philistines
13:2-7	An Angel Announced The Birth of Samson
13:8-14	An Angel Gave Instructions for Manoah's Wife
13:15-20	Manoah and His Wife Made Burnt Offering to God
13:21-25	The Birth of Samson

Judges 13:1 - Israel Sinned Again; God Gave Them To Philistines

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. Judges 13:1

You will notice that we have seen this scenario before. In one sense, it is difficult to understand why Israel would be obedient while the judge was alive, but revert to their sinful ways as soon as the judge died. It appears to tell us that Israel's compliance with God's will had more to do with their fear of a leader than with a desire to obey God. It tells us that Israel was not firm in its commitment to obey God. We need to be honest about this. In one sense this is hard to understand. In another sense, we understand quite well since we have done something of this sort on many occasions ourselves.

The author wrote, "Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord." This reminds us that all of our activities take place in the presence of God. He is an unseen guest, but He is still present.

The word "LORD" appears twice in this verse. In both instances the word is "Jehovah" which stresses the judgment or justice of God. The author was very clear. The Lord, Jehovah, actively gave Israel into the hands of the Philistines. This Philistine control lasted for 40 years. This is substantially longer than some earlier captivities. There is a cause and effect relationship in this verse.

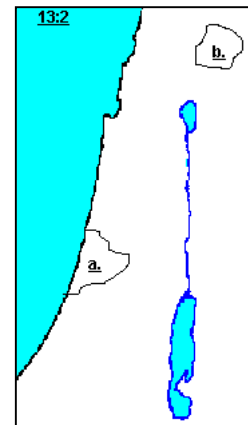
Cause - "Israel again did evil..."

Effect - "the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines 40 years."

Judges 13:2-7 - An Angel Announced The Birth of Samson

And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Judges 13:2

From the map, you can see where Manoah lived. If you look at a map which identifies the territory for each tribe, you will see that there are two locations listed for the Danites.



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- a. Near the Mediterranean Sea between Judah and Ephraim
- b. Directly north of the Sea of Galilee in area of the city of Dan.

The important piece of information about Manoah and his wife was that they had no children. The way it is written, it sounds as though this was the fault of the wife that she was barren and had borne no children. It is very doubtful if they knew, for certain, that it was the wife who was infertile. Still, it was assumed that it was the wife who was infertile.

You will note that the husband, Manoah, is named, but the name of the wife is not given. This usually happened when someone had done something wrong.

Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman, and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son. Judges 13:3

We should keep two facts in mind:

- a. This was a culture in which women did not count.
- b. This was a culture in which childless couples were not that uncommon. In such instances, it was often considered that the woman was unable to conceive. It is just as possible, however, that it was the husband who was sterile, not necessarily the wife.

It is ironic, but not surprising, that God chose to appear to the wife, and not the husband in this instance. It is interesting that even the women would not deal with barren women if they could help it. Nevertheless, the angel appeared to the unnamed wife, even though he could have appeared to Manoah.

The words of the angel were accurate - she was barren. Still he gave her a promise - she would conceive and bear a son. The fact that she would become pregnant would be enough to make her completely ecstatic. To add to that the fact that the child would be a son would send her into ecstasy.

We must remember that this would bring to an end the public shame that she received from the time she got married. This came from most everyone, especially other women who were not barren. It meant that her husband would no longer be dealt with as a sinner by most everyone in the community. This would probably improve the family relationships between the husband and the wife as well.

"Now therefore, be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. Judges 13:4

The angel instructed her to be careful not to drink wine or strong drink or to eat anything that was unclean. There are implications to this advice. It could be that he was just warning her lest she violate the instruction. This seems to be the case since this family was very strict and the idea of eating something unclean would be very foreign to them.

It could also be that she had been drinking wine and/or strong drink. Some of the women of that day had a particular problem with drinking wine and strong drink. For one thing there was always some on hand. For another, these women were quite confined to the tent unless they were tending the family flock. Put these two things together and it is

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not hard to understand how that would happen. You may remember that Sarah was accused of drinking.

You may remember that these instructions were those that were imposed upon a person who was to be a Nazirite. The angel was simply saying that the boy would be a Nazirite from before his birth. This was most unusual because boys seldom took this oath until they became a man at age thirteen.

"For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Judges 13:5

The angel continued the instructions for Manoah's wife. He not only promised that she would have a baby, but that it would be a boy. This was the answer to a mother's prayer in that day. The instruction that no razor should come on his head was another sign that this boy was to be a Nazirite. Some have wondered why it was mentioned now that no razor should come upon his head. First, observe that no razor was to come upon his head, not his face. There were times when these people would shave a boy's head because it was getting too long. We should remember, however, that this couple was very strict and the strict Jews would not shave the head except on special occasions. There were also times when people took a vow or when they experienced great sorrow. At times such as these, the shaving of the head was symbolic. The angel was saying that this should be avoided for this boy because he would be a Nazirite from birth.

Observe that the words of the angel were very specific. He said, "He shall BEGIN to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." This would be a portion of good news for the Jewish people. Frankly, they wanted someone to finish the job, not just start to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Nevertheless, the angel was specific, this boy would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Still this would be a joy to a mother's heart. Every woman hoped that her son would be able to do this.

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came to me and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. And I did not ask him where he came from, nor did he tell me his name." Judges 13:6

Now, put yourself in the place of Manoah. Remember that women who stayed in the tent were often problem drinkers. That had probably never been a problem in this family, but it was always a possibility. It would not be unusual for Manoah to think that his wife had been drinking a bit too much. Indeed, after he heard her message about an angel he might be convinced that she had been drinking.

We should also remember that in the desert, no man was allowed to speak to a woman who was not his wife. She specifically said, "a man of God came to me..." All of these things could cause Manoah to wonder what was happening.

The name for God appears twice in this verse. In both instances, the name for God was "Elohim." This name for God stresses the fact that God was omnipotent. This name was usually used in situations where the mercy of God was stressed. This is certainly one of those occasions.

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There is a hint here concerning the emotional involvement of Manoah's wife. She did not ask the angel from whence he came. Also, he did not give her his name. A good host must always inquire about a person's home and the comfort of the journey. The fact that she did not was an important cultural error and was probably due to the fact that she was so shocked by his words.

"But he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'" Judges 13:7

The angel promised that she would bear a son. This was probably more than she could manage in terms of excitement. This couple had been married for many years and during that time had never had a child. Now she was telling her husband that she was going to conceive and bear a son. The probability of this was very remote and they both knew it.

She reported the words of the angel accurately. She also repeated the warning about wine and strong drink. There are two surprises in the announcement, aside from the fact that she would conceive and bear a son.

1. This baby boy would be a Nazirite from birth.
2. This baby boy would be a Nazirite until he died.

Both of these statements would be surprising to them because both were unusual. Most of the time, the Nazirite vow was for a short period of time. It seldom started at birth and just as seldom continued until the time of a man's death. Again, if your name was Manoah, what would you be thinking?

Judges 13:8-14 - An Angel Gave Instructions For Manoah's Wife

Then Manoah entreated the LORD and said, "O Lord, please let the man of God whom Thou hast sent come to us again that he may teach us what to do for the boy who is to be born." Judges 13:8

What a marvelous response! He did not accuse his wife of impropriety. Manoah did not argue with God about this revelation. There is a very interesting situation concerning the names of God in this verse.

- a. **"Manoah entreated the LORD."**
 - (1). The word "LORD" is "Jehovah." This name stresses the eternity of God.
 - (2). It was usually used in situations which described God's justice.
- b. **"O LORD"** - This word for "LORD" is "Adonai." This is the informal name by which Israel usually referred to God. It stressed the fact that God was their master, their Lord.
- c. **"Let the man of God whom you sent..."** Again, the word "God," in this verse, is "Elohim." This name describes the omnipotence of God. The name was repeatedly used in situations where the mercy of God was being described.

Manoah, in spite of the fact that he was probably shocked by these announcements, was very courteous. He only asked that God send the angel again so that they could learn what they needed to know in order to raise the child properly. He did not ask for confirmation of the announcement. He only asked for further instruction.

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Manoah spoke of "the boy who is to be born." There is a conviction in his voice that God would do exactly as the angel had said, even though they had been without child for many years. This is unusual faith.

And God listened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again to the woman as she was sitting in the field, but Manoah her husband was not with her. Judges 13:9

God heard the request of Manoah. Whatever else is taught in this story, it is clear that God hears the prayer of his people. Notice, however, that the angel came to Manoah's wife a second time, even though Manoah was the one who made the request. It is almost as though the angel waited for a time when Manoah would not be present. We cannot account for this situation, but it appears that she had been shamed for many years and God was taking this into account and ministering to her needs as well.

Notice that the angel came to her as she was sitting in the field. The text does not explain, but it appears that she was tending their flock.

So the woman ran quickly and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came the other day has appeared to me." Judges 13:10

It was important to the wife for her husband to see the angel that she told him about. This was probably due to the unusual nature of what she had told Manoah. It is natural that she would want him to have some corroboration so that he would not think that she made this up.

Notice that it appears that she was in a hurry. It is as though she did not even talk to the angel, but hurried off to get her husband so that he could hear for himself what the angel had to say.

Then Manoah arose and followed his wife, and when he came to the man he said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to the woman?" And he said, "I am." Judges 13:11

Again, Manoah did not question her out of disbelief. It does not appear that Manoah was in as much of a hurry as his wife. It is as though Manoah did not believe his wife, but wanted to check the whole thing out for himself. This would disturb us a lot, but it did not disturb the angel at all. The angel gave an honest answer to what we might consider an impertinent question.

Notice that Manoah spoke of his wife as "the woman." This sounds cold, but it was not. The term he used identified a woman, a wife. Again, it may sound as though Manoah was disrespectful when he spoke of his wife as "the woman." That was not really the case. This was the term by which any man would identify his wife. Observe, also, that the angel did not challenge or take offense at the question. He simply answered the question as it was asked.

And Manoah said, "Now when your words come to pass, what shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" Judges 13:12

The way Manoah asked his question, it is clear that he was convinced that the announcement of the angel would indeed come to pass. Manoah did not say, "IF your words come

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to pass..." He said, "WHEN your words come to pass." This is a very high level of conviction that it would take place.

Manoah asked, "what shall be the boy's mode of life..." The word for "mode of life" is "mishpat" (מִשְׁפָּט) and literally means "a verdict," "a judicial pronouncement." This may seem difficult to understand. In the mind of Manoah, someone, presumably God, would make a decision and announcement concerning the way this boy should live. It would not be a choice for the baby, but a lifestyle he would receive without debate or question.

Manoah also asked about his son's vocation. This is much more difficult to explain. The word translated "vocation" is "maaseh" (מַעֲשֶׂה) and literally means "action." It is a way of saying what a person will do with their life, what will they produce in life? As indicated earlier, this is difficult. In that day every boy did that which his father did. When the father was no longer able to work and give direction, his son would take over the family and do what his father had done all his life.

Manoah was attempting to deal with some sense of confusion. There had been many people who had taken the Nazirite vow. This situation, however, was different. In most instances, the Nazirite vow was for specific periods of time. That was not the case here. Samson was to be treated as a Nazirite from before his birth until the day he died. To our knowledge, that had never happened before nor since.

Manoah's question was interesting. Unlike many places in the twentieth century, every boy knew that he would find his vocation doing what his father did. To ask what the baby's vocation would be must have struck even Manoah a bit strangely. Everyone did what his father had done.

So the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Let the woman pay attention to all that I said. Judges 13:13

If you look closely at the text, you will note that the angel did not answer Manoah's question. He was much more interested in the wife's obedience to his instructions than what the future of this baby boy would be. The angel did not say that the question was unimportant. By the answer he gave, the angel indicated that her obedience to his instructions was a much higher priority than deciding what the boy's future vocation would be.

"She should not eat anything that comes from the vine nor drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing; let her observe all that I commanded." Judges 13:14

The angel continued with his instructions for the wife. The angel indicated to Manoah and his wife that she should not eat anything that comes from the vine. This was a significant instruction. It would prevent her from eating grapes. She could not eat raisins which was an important part of their food supply. She was to drink no wine or strong drink. This would be a hardship. Water supply in that part of Palestine was at a premium. What water they could find was often bad if not harmful to drink. If she could not drink wine, it limited her, for the most part, to drinking the milk of the goats.

There was also the instruction about refraining from eating anything unclean. It would seem that this would strike them strangely. These were strict religious Jews. They would rather starve than eat something unclean. Nevertheless, the angel included even the most

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obvious instruction for them. Again, these were instructions for the Nazirite vow. It was another way of stressing the fact that even before his birth, this baby was to be under the Nazirite vow.

Judges 13:15-20 - Manoah and His Wife Made Burnt Offering to God

Then Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain you so that we may prepare a kid for you." Judges 13:15

In their haste to listen to what the angel would instruct them to do, Manoah and his wife forgot some of the required amenities of their society. If a traveler comes to your area, you must invite him into your home and prepare food and lodging for him for at least three days. Suddenly they realized what they should have done and attempted to make up for their tardy hospitality.

And the angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Though you detain me, I will not eat your food, but if you prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. Judges 13:16

At first, the angel's words sound harsh and rude. They were not. At this point, we must deal with the identity of the "angel of the LORD." Some say that this was Jesus, while others say that he was what the text says he was, "the angel of the LORD." If, indeed, he was an angel of the LORD, then it would be inappropriate for him to receive a sacrifice. The sacrifices should be for God alone.

Notice that they were talking about a burnt offering. This is a sacrifice that is totally consumed on the altar. None is saved for the offerer; none is saved for the priests. It was totally consumed in the flames, with the exception of the hide, which was given to the priest. This sacrifice was a symbol of one's entire surrender to God; a symbol of a life lived in such a way as to please God.

And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?" Judges 13:17

The way Manoah asked this question suggests that he had some confusion about who this person was and what he was doing. There is absolutely no doubt, however, that Manoah was convinced that the angel had told them the truth and his instructions were to be followed.

Manoah did not say, "IF your words come to pass..." He said, "WHEN your words come to pass." There is a great difference in these two statements. His purpose was simple. He felt the angel was worthy of honor and he wanted to honor him appropriately when each of the things took place as he had foretold them. Manoah dealt with the angel in much the way one would treat a prophet.

Again, we must remind ourselves that Manoah did not know that this person was "the angel of the LORD." This may be hard for some to accept. We must accept it because of the statement in verse 16, where the author said,

For Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. Judges 13:16

Even though Manoah's wife told him, in 13:6, "A man of God came to me..." In 13:8., Manoah prayed and said, "Please let the man of God..." One might suspect that through

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what the wife said, and what the angel said that Manoah would understand that this was, indeed, the angel of God. The text, however, is clear, he did not know.

But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" Judges 13:18

There is a contrast between verses 17 and 18. This is indicated by the word "but" at the beginning of this sentence. The angel of the LORD was not cooperative at this point. Instead of telling his name, the angel asked a question, in good Jewish style. He said, "Why do you ask my name seeing it is wonderful?" The word "wonderful" is "pala" (פלא) and means "distinguished," or "difficult." This was not the angel's name, but a description of his character.

So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering and offered it on the rock to the LORD, and He performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on. Judges 13:19

This is a serious act of obedience on the part of Manoah. He made the sacrifice even though the angel of the LORD would not eat it. Everything necessary for the burnt offering was present and prepared for sacrifice. Manoah offered the kid and the grain as a burnt offering to the LORD. As indicated before, when Manoah and his wife sacrificed the burnt offering, they made a dedication of their lives to the LORD.

Observe what else was happening. The text says, "and he (the angel of the LORD) performed wonders while Manoah and his wife looked on." The text does not say what these miraculous things were. Some scholars believe that one of these miracles was that fire came out from the rock altar to burn up the sacrifice. The text does not say that this is true. There are some who believe that "the angel of the LORD" was really Jesus.

For it came about when the flame went up from the altar toward heaven, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. Judges 13:20

The verse begins with the word "for." This usually suggests that a reason or answer is coming. At least one of the miracles was that the angel ascended in the flame of the fire. Think about that. Put yourself in the place of Manoah and his wife. Suddenly you see the angel of the LORD ascend in the flame and He was not consumed in the process. There may well have been several other miracles. It appears, though the text does not say so, that these were done to help Manoah and his wife understand that this is something that God is doing.

Manoah and his wife responded immediately. They fell down with their faces to the ground. This is not hard to understand. People then thought that if you saw the face of God you would die. They were afraid, at this point, that they had seen the face of God and would immediately die.

Judges 13:21-25 - The Birth of Samson

Now the angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah or his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. Judges 13:21

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The author does not clarify how Manoah knew that this was the angel of the LORD when he did not return to them. He had seen several miracles. One miracle was that the angel ascended in the flame. For whatever reason, Manoah now knew that this was, indeed, the angel of the LORD. Up until this time, Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD.

So Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." Judges 13:22

It is clear that Manoah believed that he had seen God. He also believed that if you see the face of God, you will die. He was readying himself to die. This is an unfortunate understanding. One good feature of it, however, is that they had an enhanced opinion of who God is. We could use some of that.

But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time." Judges 13:23

At this point, Manoah's unnamed wife did not share his opinion about dying. She responded to his gloomy report with a conditional statement IF...THEN."

- a. The IF part of the statement was "IF indeed the Lord had desired to kill us." She was not accepting that idea, but supposing it for the sake of argument.
- b. THEN - the natural consequences of the first part of the statement. God would not have accepted the burnt offering if He were going to kill us. He would not have shown us all the things that He had just shown them. He would not have let them hear the things the angel had said to them.

The THEN part of this equation does not make sense if you assume the IF part. In the wife's mind, there was good reason to believe that there was no way that they were going to die.

If we look back at verse 20, it is clear, from the text, that both Manoah and his wife believed that they would die if they saw the face of God. There appears to be a complete change of mind in the wife when you read verse 23.

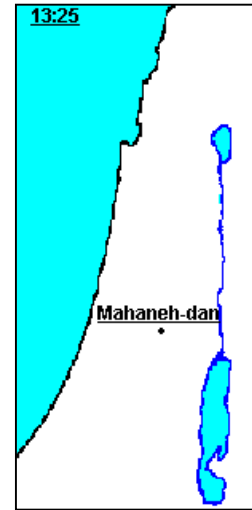
Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the LORD blessed him. Judges 13:24

The name "Samson" literally means "little sun." We do not know why they gave him this name. It would be easy to speculate on the reason. It would be thought that he would bring a great deal of sunlight into a home that was filled with shame because they had previously been childless. This verse sounds as though only nine months have passed since verse 23. That is probably not true. The statement "and the child grew up..." suggests that several years have passed. One might reasonably assume that the boy had already reached the age of manhood - 13 years. It was clear that the LORD was blessing this young boy in a way that others were not blessed. This is interesting in view of the fact that God knew what Samson would do in his adult years. This tells us something about God. God will relate to us and use our lives even though He knows full well that a time will come when we will falter. This is abundant grace.

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And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. Judges 13:25

Again, it sounds as though this verse happens immediately following the previous verse. That, of course, is not true. By the time this verse happened, many years had passed and Samson was now a full-grown man. We know the kind of lives Samson's parents lived. There is no statement in the text to tell us the depths of Samson's faith during his formative and early adult years. This causes some question in view of what he became later in his life. Still, God had chosen to work through him and proceeded to initiate the process. This is the only place that we know of in the Scriptures where Mahaneh-dan is mentioned. There may have been a settlement, but it was the name of a small body of water - runoff from the hill country. This may suggest that he was a shepherd. There is nothing certain about this assumption.



You will also note in this verse, that the location of Samson was carefully reported. You will note on the map that each of the three listed places are located there. You will also note, however, that they are not listed in the order that they are listed in the text of the book.

Conclusion

As you complete your study of this chapter, it is important to review your work to see what the author has told you about God.

1. 13:1 – He is aware when people do evil.
2. 13:1 – He used even pagans to punish the evil in His people.
3. 13:3 – He has servants (angels.)
4. 13:5 – He calls for people to be sanctified, to be set apart for His service.
5. 13:8 – He hears and answers the prayers of His needy people.
6. 13:16 – He receives the offerings of His people.
7. 13:18 – His servants (angel) did miraculous things.
8. 13:23 – He is merciful
9. 13:24 – He blessed His chosen servant.
10. 13:25 – The Lord has a Spirit.
11. 13:25 – God's Spirit stirs His servants to act on His behalf.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 14

SAMSON DECEIVED BY HIS PHILISTINE WIFE

JUDGES 14:1 - 20

1. There are four paragraphs in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary for each paragraph.

14:1-4	
14:5-9	
14:10-14	
14:15-20	

2. In Judges 14:1 - 4, the author described Samson's choosing of a Philistine wife.
 - a. In 14:1, Samson went to Timnah and saw a woman he wanted for his wife. What problem, if any, do you see with this fact?
 - b. In 14:2, Samson approached his parents to get the Philistine woman for his wife.
 - (1). How would you describe his request to his parents?
 - (2). What problems does this create for Samson's parents?
 - (3). From the perspective of his family and neighbors, what problem did this request create for them?
 - c. In 14:3, Samson's parents responded to his request.
 - (1). What did they reply?
 - (2). Why would they respond in this manner?
 - (3). Samson also responded to their reply.
 - (a). What did he reply?
 - (b). What was the basis for wanting this woman for his wife?
 - d. In 14:4, the author gives us a glimpse into the story of which Samson's parents were not aware.
 - (1). What do we know that Samson's parents did not know?
 - (2). What difference does this make?
 - (3). It sounds as though God would violate the command not to marry outside the covenant people in order to punish the Philistines. Is this true?
 - (4). The closing statement of the verse suggests that this was a time when the Philistines ruled over the Israelites.
 - (a). What difference would this make?
 - (b). How would this impact what God did through Samson?
3. In Judges 14:5-9, the author tells how Samson killed a young lion.
 - a. In 14:5, 6, the author tells the story of this young lion.

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- (1). How does this episode relate to the story of Samson?
- (2). What does this story add to our store of knowledge of the life of Samson?
- (3). The text says that the Spirit of Jehovah enabled Samson to do this. What are the implications of the Holy Spirit working in Samson when he was doing something God told them not to do?
- b. In 14:7, Samson went to talk to the woman he wanted for his wife. How did Samson evaluate this woman?
- c. In 14:8, the author described Samson's return for his intended bride.
 - (1). What does the lion have to do with Samson's trip to get his bride?
 - (2). What effect do the bees and honey have upon the story being told?
- d. In 14:9, Samson returned to the spot where he killed the lion and took some of the honey to share with his parents.
 - (1). The author hinted of the secrecy with which the lion incident was held. Why would this be important?
 - (2). What benefit would this secrecy provide?
4. In Judges 14:10-14, the author tells us of the marriage of Samson.
 - a. In 14:10, 11, the author tells of a feast that Samson provided for the members of the wedding party, family and friends.
 - (1). In this situation, Samson was feasting with Philistines who were the enemies of his people; people who took advantage of his countrymen. Why does Samson do this?
 - (2). The family provided 30 "companions" for Samson. Is there any parallel in our culture for this provision?
 - b. In 14:12-14, Samson, as the custom was, provided the entertainment by means of a riddle.
 - (1). What were the conditions of the riddle?
 - (2). Was Samson participating in a gambling situation?
 - (3). What were the terms of this gamble?
 - (4). What was the result of this gamble?
 - (5). If you were one of the 30 men, how would you feel?
5. In Judges 14:15-20, Samson paid the debt he promised to pay if he lost.
 - a. In 14:15, a serious problem is described.
 - (1). What is it?
 - (2). What pressure did the 30 men bring upon the bride and her family?
 - (3). What threat did these men make?
 - b. In 14:16, Samson's wife appealed to Samson.
 - (1). What was the basis of her appeal?
 - (2). What did she want? Why?
 - (3). What was Samson's reply to his wife?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 14

- (4). What should Samson have realized from this experience?
- c. In 14:17, Samson's wife pressured him to explain the riddle to her.
 - (1). How did she do this?
 - (2). What did she do with the information Samson gave her?
- d. In 14:18, the men of the city told Samson the answer to his riddle.
 - (1). How did they tell him?
 - (2). What was his reply to them?
 - (3). What did he mean by this statement?
- e. In 14:19, the author described Samson's response to their answer.
 - (1). How did Samson respond?
 - (2). What help did Samson have?
 - (3). What problem, if any, do you see in this verse?
 - (4). How does the author describe Samson's feelings toward the 30 men?
 - (5). What did Samson do?
 - (6). How pleased would the 30 men be with Samson's payment of the debt?
- f. In 14:20, there is a surprise ending to the chapter.
 - (1). What was so surprising?
 - (2). Why would the bride's father do such a thing?
 - (3). What does this verse tell you about the atmosphere at the feast when Samson paid his debt?

LESSON 14: JUDGES 14:1 - 20

SAMSON DECEIVED BY HIS PHILISTINE WIFE

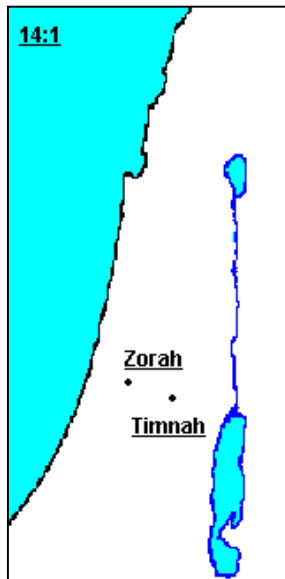
There are four paragraphs in Judges chapter fourteen. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

14:1-4	Samson Sought a Philistine Wife
14:5-9	Samson Killed a Young Lion
14:10-14	The Marriage of Samson
14:15--20	Samson Killed 30 Philistines to Pay His Debt

Judges 14:1-4 - Samson Sought a Philistine Wife

We must always remember that Samson, for all his actions, was destined to be a judge in Israel. We must always be on the alert to determine whether he was a good or bad judge for the people.

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. Judges 14:1



There are a number of confusing things about the story of Samson. Normally, it would be considered wrong for a Jew to even go to a Philistine city. Samson was to be a very strict Jew from before the time of his birth. Now he does things that are strange and even wrong in the minds of careful Jews.

Observe that the text says that "he went down to Timnah." As you can see on the map, Timnah is almost directly east of Zorah, Samson's hometown. This is the hill country directly west of Jerusalem. Still it is correct to say that that you "go down from Zorah to Timnah" because Timnah is at a lower elevation.

As a member of a very strict Jewish family, Samson would have known that he should not even consider a wife from among the Philistines or any other "Gentile" people. The parents would have told him early and often that he had been specially chosen as a servant of God. It would have been clear to him that he should live a very circumspect life. One would think that he would know better. On the other hand, those of us who know that we have been specially chosen of God to be His servants still do not live every day with that in mind.

So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife." Judges 14:2

Had Samson been thinking clearly, he would have remembered that he could not take a wife from among the Philistines. Again, had he been thinking clearly, he would have re-

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membered what the Philistine people had done to his own nation. These were people who had been brutal to the Jews. They had caused ongoing suffering among the Jews wherever they could.

Again, it was the normal procedure for the father to choose a wife for his son. It was never acceptable for a son to tell his father which woman to get for his wife. The father in his great wisdom made that decision without the advice of anyone. This was an issue between the father of the man and the father of the woman, and no one else. Samson was violating all the rules of their culture and religion in seeking this Philistine wife and he knew it.

By the way, we do not know her name. In most instances, names are omitted as a way of saying that the person was not doing right. That may have been the author's intent here, but we cannot say for sure. One thing we can say for Samson, at least he asked his father to arrange the marriage. He did not try to do this on his own.

Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me." Judges 14:3

Observe that the father and the mother both tried to persuade Samson not to take a Philistine wife. Normally, a Jewish boy would never argue with his father. If the father said it, he did it. Samson may have been more obedient at other times than here. Manoah and his wife tried to get Samson to follow the instructions that Jews never take a pagan wife. Certainly Samson would know that to take a pagan wife would be in violation of the covenant with God. He would also know of the recent history of Israel where many of the Jews had to send their pagan wives back to their families because of this very situation. They made it abundantly clear that they thought that this was a very bad decision on Samson's part. In a certain way, Samson seemed callused about the whole situation. He wanted this girl for his wife and did not care that it broke his parents' hearts.

Notice how Manoah referred to the Philistines - "the uncircumcised Philistines." This was a term of derision among the Jews. It asserted in strong terms that this represented an alienation from God. Notice that in good Jewish form, Manoah asked Samson a question - "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives or among all our people that you go to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" Manoah was not seeking information. This was a way of saying, "There are plenty of girls among our relatives. (These people preferred to take wives for their sons from among their immediate family.) There are even many more girls among all the people of Israel from whom you could choose a wife, did you have to humiliate us and bring divine disfavor on the family by seeking a Philistine wife?"

This apparently made no impression on Samson at all. He answered his father as though he had not even heard what Manoah had said. He simply said, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me." Samson's reply was an instruction to his father. No self-respecting Jewish boy would ever do this to his father. The basis of his choice was a sensuous one. He totally ignored his parents suggestion. This was inappropriate for a Jew as long as his father lived.

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This raises a question, does God ever use an evil means to achieve a just, righteous end? We will be watching this issue throughout the story of Samson. The fact is that God can do whatever He wishes to do. This is not saying that the end justifies the means. It does say that God has used evil forces to accomplish His goals many times. God used the Philistines to punish Israel. He used the Ammonites to do the same thing. There are repeated instances throughout the Old Testament where this very thing happened.

However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel. Judges 14:4

This verse is a parenthesis. It is as though the author was pulling back the curtain on this episode so that we can see pieces of information that have not been displayed up to this point. One of these pieces of information is that Manoah and his wife did not know that God was the one who was causing Samson to take an interest in this girl and desire her for his wife. We must constantly be reminded of what the angel said to Manoah's wife, "He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." This is a part of that beginning. God is sovereign. What He wills, He does. God often used the natural desires and directions of people to accomplish His will in the world. Though it is not mentioned, the Philistines had done extreme evil against Israel. God never allowed anyone to go free from punishment when they had done harm to His people, Israel. There will be much more.

We must keep in mind that this happened at a time when the Philistines were "ruling over Israel." The word for "rule" is "mashal" (משל) and means "to reign," "to have power," "to govern." It identifies a type of rule which is abusive and abrasive. The task to which God called Samson was to bring fierce judgment upon the Philistines for their abuse and brutality to Israel.

Judges 14:5-9 - Samson Killed a Young Lion

Then Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came as far as the vineyards of Timnah; and behold, a young lion came roaring toward him. Judges 14:5

It is interesting that there is no mention of any other children born to Manoah and his wife here or anywhere else in the Scriptures. This passage deals with the process of the marriage arrangement. In most instances, the two fathers would make the arrangement and settle the financial agreement which the father of the groom would pay to the father of the bride. In most instances, neither the bride nor the groom had any say in that agreement. There were some occasions when a father would listen to the desires of his child, but these instances were rare. In many cases, the bride and groom would not know each other or see each other until after the ceremony was completed. In other instances, after the agreement was made, the parents and the groom would go to the home of the bride to make the announcement. That is what happened in this verse.

The text indicates that the family came as far as the vineyards of Timnah. This area is just west of the north-south ridge which parallels the Mediterranean Sea coast. This area gets a lot of rain coming off the sea. It is good for growing grapes. Timnah was a small city on a hill. The vineyards would be on the side of the hill below the city. Such a location would be isolated enough for wild animals to exist. Notice that the text says,

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"a young lion came roaring toward him."

Observe that the text says "toward him," not "toward them." Though the text does not explain this situation, it appears that Samson was alone at the time of the attack. The reason for this is unclear.

And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, so that he tore him as one tears a kid though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done. Judges 14:6

The text clearly states that the Spirit of the LORD, (that is Jehovah) gave Samson strength he did not otherwise have in order to tear the lion apart. As a means of emphasis, the author indicated again that the parents were unaware of what had happened. This produced certain results.

- a. The parents, as well as everyone else, were unaware of just how strong Samson could be.
- b. Without disclosing this information to others, the LORD showed Samson how strong he could be with God's help. This was an unusual display of strength and agility.

So he went down and talked to the woman; and she looked good to Samson. Judges 14:7

Because of their culture, it would be totally inappropriate for Samson to talk with his intended wife until the parents had finalized the agreement. The fact that he could talk with her indicates that the arrangements were complete.

Observe that a second time the author tells us, "she looked good to Samson." This is a way of emphasizing the fact that Samson focused upon the sensuous. Other qualities received little if any attention at all.

When he returned later to take her, he turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion; and behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the body of the lion. Judges 14:8

The author wrote, "When he returned later to take her..." This is the time for the wedding. The wedding would ultimately take place at a place chosen by the groom's father. It would not take place in the home of the bride.

On the way to get his bride, Samson stopped to see what was left of the lion he had killed. As sometimes happened, when there was no natural habitat for them the bees would swarm in whatever protective covering they could find. This tells us something about the kind of place in which the confrontation with the lion took place. It had to be quite barren. In such surroundings, the carcass of a dead animal would be used by a swarm of bees as a place for their nest.

This part of the story tells us something about the time of the year in which these events took place. The text says there was honey and a swarm of bees in the body cavity of the young lion. The bees would swarm and collect honey during the summer months.

So he scraped the honey into his hands and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion. Judges 14:9

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It should be clear that he was doing this without the protective gear of beekeepers today. That, in itself, was no small task. Samson scraped the honey into his hands and ate as he went. The text also indicates that he shared some of the honey with his mother and father. One wonders why the parents did not ask where he had gotten this honey. Apparently, that did not happen. As you may have noticed, the author made obvious mention, on more than one occasion, of the secrecy with which the power of Samson was kept from his parents. No one but Samson and God knew of this unusual power. Nevertheless, this display of power would make an impression on Samson himself one more time. That would be very important.

You will also notice, from this verse, that Samson's parents were with him on this trip. That is as it should be. They were really the ones who were in charge of this whole event.

Judges 14:10-14 - The Marriage of Samson

Then his father went down to the woman; and Samson made a feast there, for the young men customarily did this. Judges 14:10

These are still more of the proceedings for the wedding itself. The father of the groom would go down to the home of the bride. He would make sure that this was the girl for which the agreement was made. He would pay the dowry to the father of the bride. In most instances, at least part of the dowry would be given to the bride to sew onto her head covering. This served in that culture much as a wedding ring does in our culture.

At the same time, there was another ceremony that took place involving the groom. This consisted of a very festive meal which the groom prepared or had prepared for him. It also consisted of some fun kinds of things to pass the time. It was the groom's responsibility to provide for this.

And it came about when they saw him that they brought thirty companions to be with him. Judges 14:11

In a custom somewhat similar to ours, the groom had friends who took part in the ceremony with him. It would be like the groomsmen in our weddings. These festivities would take place at the location of the bride's family. In such a case, the groomsmen would not come from the groom's hometown because of the great distance. In such a case, the bride's family provided the "friends" from among their family and acquaintances. The fact that they had 30 friends to stand with the groom suggests that this was a very large wedding and a very expensive one. These pieces of information suggest that the families were very important and at least one of them would be very wealthy.

Then Samson said to them, "Let me now propound a riddle to you; if you will indeed tell it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes. Judges 14:12

The use of riddles was very popular among eastern people. They are people who liked to gamble and they still do. They added wagers to the riddles to make the whole thing more exciting. In some cases, large sums of money would exchange hands over such arrangements. Note that the groom mentioned the "seven days of the feast." This does not mean that they ate for seven days. Nevertheless, the whole experience covered a week. This is the reason that they had to do some things just to keep from being bored.

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Note also that there were 30 changes of clothes involved in this wager. This would be an immense loss. Think of it in terms of buying 30 suits. By making the wager in this way, everyone in the wedding party had a part in the bet. Thus, if they won, every one of the 30 "friends" would benefit.

Observe the way they referred to the clothes. He mentioned two different kinds of clothes.

- a. **"thirty linen wraps"** - This was the outer garment and because it was linen, it was quite expensive. Remember that these were Philistines and they had the very best.
- b. **"Thirty changes of clothes"** - These were the undergarments. It was like a floor-length tee-shirt.

If Samson had to pay for 30 of these outfits, it would cost a fortune. Everyone knew that this was going to be very expensive before the feast was over.

"But if you are unable to tell me, then you shall give me thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes." And they said to him, "Propound your riddle, that we may hear it." Judges 14:13

It should be noted that this was a legally binding contract. Samson has told them what he would do if they were able to solve the riddle. Observe that this verse begins with the word "but." This suggests a coming contrast of serious proportions. Now he told them what the consequences would be if they were unable to solve the riddle.

- a. He would receive 30 linen wraps. These were very costly outer garments.
- b. He would also receive 30 changes of clothes. This was the "tsitsit" the floor-length tee-shirt.

It should be noted that anyone who faulted on such a bet would be publicly shamed out of the community. There was no way to escape the payment of such a bet.

So he said to them, "Out of the eater came something to eat, And out of the strong came something sweet." But they could not tell the riddle in three days. Judges 14:14

Samson's statement follows precisely the format of such a riddle. It should be clear that his statement of the riddle was absolutely truthful. This riddle was most difficult. Part of the difficulty was the fact that there could be many different answers, but only the right answer would be acceptable. We are told that after three days of intense concentration, the family and friends were unable to figure out the riddle. If they had not found out the riddle in three days, it was reasonable to think that they were not going to be able to discover the answer to the riddle. You can well imagine that by this time the tension was beginning to rise a great deal.

Judges 14:15-20 - Samson Killed 30 Philistines to Pay His Debt

Then it came about on the fourth day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may tell us the riddle, lest we burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us to impoverish us? Is this not so?" Judges 14:15

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The "guests" and "friends" were less than noble to say the least. It was common to lose in the game of riddles. People often lost on purpose in order to give the new couple a start on their life together. These guests did not take kindly to losing.

They came and threatened Samson's intended wife, blaming her for what had happened to them. This, of course, was done secretly. Such a threat was unheard of. The bride was to take the side of her husband and his family in everything from the moment of her wedding. These friends were asking her to continue taking sides with her birth family.

This was done in the form of a threat. If she did not comply with their wishes, they would burn her to death. If she did not comply, they would burn her father's house with the whole family. This was serious.

In order to force her hand even more, these friends maligned her motives. They accused her of inviting them to the feast in order to impoverish them. That was not the case, but they wanted it to appear that way. They repeated the charge as a means of emphasis.

And Samson's wife wept before him and said, "You only hate me, and you do not love me; you have propounded a riddle to the sons of my people, and have not told it to me." And he said to her, "Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?" Judges 14:16

It is clear that the unnamed wife gave in to the demands of the guests. She deceived her new husband. One must say that her challenge was not very sophisticated. It was the custom that the one propounding the riddle would give the answer to no one, not even his own family. The people of that day would have thought that her little charade was quite unacceptable. Nevertheless, she did what she felt she had to do.

Samson was quite appropriate with his answer to her challenge, at least by their standards. He asked a rhetorical question, "Behold, I have not told it to my father or mother; so should I tell you?" The answer to this question would be , "naturally not!"

However she wept before him seven days while their feast lasted. And it came about on the seventh day that he told her because she pressed him so hard. She then told the riddle to the sons of her people. Judges 14:17

There is a problem in this verse. The entire feast lasted only seven days. This episode, according to verse four, took place on day four. This verse says that she wept/pretended before Samson seven days. That being the case, then the seven day feast would have lasted eleven days. That would never be the case. It would be appropriate to understand that she wept during the remaining days of the seven day feast. Samson gave in to her pressure on the last day. Having discovered the answer to the riddle, she immediately told the answer to her relatives and friends. In this, she took sides against her husband and with her birth family. This was absolutely intolerable in that culture. Once she was married, she gave her full allegiance to her husband and his family. In effect, she severed ties with her former family.

Samson could have demanded his money back for such a betrayal. Her family would have understood such a demand, but to the Jews it was unacceptable.

So the men of the city said to 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 to

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them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have found out my riddle." Judges 14:18

Notice that on the very last day of the feast the guests gave Samson the answer to his riddle. They answered in questions which is exactly the way near eastern people would answer such a riddle.

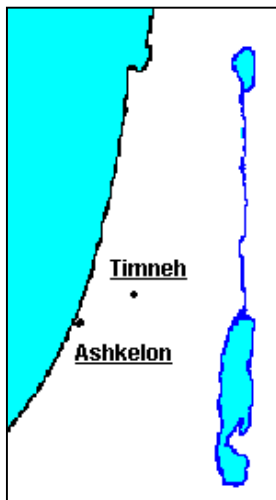
Observe that they told him the answer on the last day, just before the sun went down. People in that culture counted days differently than we do. Days ended at sun-down rather than at midnight as ours do.

If you read Samson's reply carefully, it sounds crude to say the least. In that culture, however, it would not be considered crude. It was a customary way of saying that you used my wife against me. Samson used a conditional statement to make his allegations.

- a. IF - "you had not plowed with my heifer..."
- b. THEN - "you would not have found out the riddle."

This was a very strong, serious accusation. There is no recorded response by which the family and guests defended themselves. This would cause us to believe that it was exactly as Samson said.

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house. Judges 14:19



This is a very difficult verse to say the least. Many people are loathe to make such a statement about God. The truth is that the Spirit of the Lord equipped Samson for a task that God allowed him to perform. The question naturally arises, "Could God allow Himself to support the murder of the enemies of His people? The answer is "yes." This happened more than once in the Old Testament. God punishes sin when there is no repentance. The Philistines, in their idolatry, took a strong, arrogant stand against Jehovah. This must be punished and it was.

Observe that Samson kept his word. He killed 30 Philistines and took their clothing to give to the family of his unnamed wife. This accomplished two things:

- a. It killed 30 Philistines who had killed and abused scores of Israelites.
- b. Taking their clothing away from them brought shame to the memory of the Philistine men who were left both dead and naked.

Though Samson kept his word, his Philistine counterparts would not be happy with their winnings. Each tribe and national group had their own distinctive clothing. When Samson gave them clothes that were taken from Philistine men, they would know that he had taken them from another Philistine. The family members and friends would be glad that they won the bet, but extremely angry that Samson had taken these clothes away from a fellow Philistine. In their minds it would take away the entire joy of winning.

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Observe also how the author described Samson's feelings - "His anger burned." The word for "burned" means to blaze up hot. It is to be totally incensed; to be as angry as it is possible for a person to be.

But Samson's wife was given to his companion who had been his friend. Judges 14:20

This was unusual, to say the least. When a marriage was consummated, no change could be made. The groom could be very angry with his new wife and punish her. Nevertheless, she would always be his wife as long as she lived. Only unfaithfulness could change that. The text does not tell us why Samson did not take his wife with him. She might not be living with him, but she would always be his wife. That did not seem to be the case. Samson did not take his wife along. There is no record of the dowry being returned to Samson's father. There is only a record that the bride was given to what we would call the "best man." The best man, then as now, was to look after the best interest of the groom. That did not appear to be the case in this story.

Conclusion

We need to review the chapter to see what this chapter has to say about God. It is clear that it says some unfortunate things about Samson. We now need to look to see what this says about God.

14:4 – God can use the marriage of his servant to a pagan woman to accomplish His will.

This is interesting in that God had forbidden them to marry anyone from the foreign nations who lived in the land.

14:6 – The Spirit of the LORD can enable His servants to do mighty deeds.

14:19 – The Spirit of the LORD enabled Samson to kill 30 men in Ashkelon in order to repay the family members who had used his wife to get the answer from him.

This chapter raises some significant questions concerning God. Does God do what He tells His people not to do? It appears, in this instance, He did. Does God empower His people to kill? Again, it appears that He did.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 15

SAMSON'S REVENGE - FOXES, JAWBONE OF AN ASS

JUDGES 15:1 - 20

1. There are three paragraphs in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

15:1-8	
15:9-13	
15:14-20	

2. In Judges 15:1-8, the author told of Samson's burning of Philistine fields.
 - a. In 15:1, 2, Samson attempted to visit his wife, but his father-in-law refused to allow him to enter her part of the tent.
 - (1). Why would the father-in-law refuse?
 - (2). What was the father-in-law's excuse? Was it valid?
 - (3). On the basis of the text, how would you evaluate the actions of the father-in-law?
 - (4). If you were in Samson's place, how would you feel?
 - b. In 15:3, Samson responded.
 - (1). The text says of Samson, "He said to them".
 - (a). Whom would the author identify as "them"?
 - (b). What does this suggest for our understanding?
 - (2). What response, if any, did Samson give to the news that his wife had married another man?
 - (3). Samson said, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm."
 - (a). What is the inference of this statement?
 - (b). What was Samson really saying?
 - c. In 15:4, 5, several questions are raised.
 - (1). What questions can you discover in the text?
 - (2). What impact would Samson's actions have on the Philistine community?
 - (3). How would the Philistines survive because of his actions?
 - d. In 15:6, the Philistines discover the damage and identify the one to blame.
 - (1). What reason did the Philistines give for Samson's actions?
 - (2). What does this tell us?
 - (3). How did the Philistines react to the actions of Samson?
 - e. In 15:7, Samson responded to the actions of the Philistines.

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- (1). Samson said, "Since you act like this..."
 - (a). To whom was he speaking?
 - (b). What did he mean?
- (2). Samson gave them two promises.
 - (a). What are the promises?
 - (b). What change does this represent for the Philistines?
- f. In 15:8, the author described Samson's attack on the Philistines.
 - (1). What did he do?
 - (2). Why would he hide in a cave?
3. In Judges 15:9-13, the author described the coming of the men of Judah.
 - a. In 15:9, the Philistines came and camped in Lehi.
 - (1). What is the implication of this action?
 - (2). What does this say about the men of Judah?
 - b. In 15:10, the men of Judah met with the Philistine army.
 - (1). What did they ask the Philistine army? Why?
 - (2). What was the response of the Philistines?
 - (3). What motive did the Philistine army express as they answered the men of Judah?
 - c. In 15:11, 3,000 men of Judah went down to the rock of Etam to seize Samson.
 - (1). The men of Judah brought 3,000 men to take Samson.
 - (a). What does this tell us about the attitude of the men of Judah toward the Philistines?
 - (b). What does this tell us about the attitude of the men of Judah toward Samson?
 - (2). The men of Judah asked Samson two rhetorical questions.
 - (a). What would Samson's answer be to the first question?
 - (b). What would Samson's answer be to the second question?
 - (3). Read Samson's answer again. What motive does he reveal?
 - d. In 15:12, the men of Judah told Samson why they had come.
 - (1). What reason did the men of Judah give for their coming?
 - (2). What does this tell us about the men of Judah?
 - (3). Read Samson's reply again.
 - (a). What did he say?
 - (b). Why would he be so concerned about these men of Judah killing him?
 - (c). What does this tell us about him?
 - e. In 15:13, the men of Judah responded to Samson's request.
 - (1). What was their response?
 - (2). If you were Samson, how would you feel when you heard these words?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 15

4. In Judges 15:14-20, Samson killed 1,000 Philistines.
 - a. In 15:14, 15, the men of Judah delivered Samson over to the Philistines.
 - (1). If you were Samson, at this point how would you have felt, especially with the Philistines shouting over your tragedy?
 - (2). How would you explain the fact that the "Spirit of the LORD" came upon Samson and enabled him to kill 1,000 Philistines?
 - (3). What does this tell us about God?
 - b. In 15:16, Samson summarized his exploit.
 - (1). Read this verse again. What was Samson saying?
 - (2). How would you explain that Samson took credit for what happened?
 - c. In 15:17, Samson renamed the area.
 - (1). How would you describe the emotions described in this verse?
 - (2). In a Bible dictionary, look up- the new name of the area - Ramath Lehi.
 - (a). What does this mean?
 - (b). Why do you think he gave the area this name?
 - d. In 15:18, Samson grew very thirsty.
 - (1). In this verse, Samson prayed about his thirst.
 - (a). How would you describe his attitude as he prayed?
 - (b). His prayer was presented in logical fashion. How would you express this logic?
 - (2). Why was he so concerned about falling into "the hands of the uncircumcised"?
 - e. In 15:19, God answered Samson's prayer.
 - (1). How did God answer that prayer?
 - (2). What does this tell us about God?
 - f. In 15:20, the author summarized the time that Samson judged Israel.
 - (1). In view of all that had happened in the time Samson judged Israel, is this an appropriate summary?
 - (2). The author has said nothing about whether the people worshipped God during this time or not. What does this say about the impact of Samson's rule?
5. Review your study of chapter 15. What have you discovered about God in this story?

LESSON 15: JUDGES 15:1 - 20

SAMSON'S REVENGE - FOXES, JAWBONE OF AN ASS

There are three paragraphs in Judges chapter 15. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

15:1-8	Samson Burnt Philistine Fields
15:9-13	The Men of Judah Bind Samson
15:14-20	Samson Killed 1,000 Philistines

Judges 15:1-8 - Samson Burnt Philistine Fields

But after a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it came about that Samson visited his wife with a young goat, and said, "I will go in to my wife in her room." But her father did not let him enter. Judges 15:1

The word "but" signifies a contrast between the material just written and that which is about to be written. You will remember that in chapter 14, Samson's wife betrayed him and told her family the answer to the riddle. This resulted in the death of 30 Philistines in Ashkelon and the marriage of Samson's wife to the one who stood with him at his wedding. Whether Samson knew about this marriage is doubtful. The author is contrasting this scene with that which comes next in the story.

The phrase "after a while" is quite vague. It could mean a few days, but it probably means a much longer period of time. This idea is strengthened by the next statement, "in the time of wheat harvest." The author makes no explanation about why Samson waited so long to go to his wife; he just stated the fact. One might assume that this was an expression of his anger.

Observe that he was not prepared to take her home as he should, but was simply visiting her. This would never be acceptable in that culture. Immediately following the wedding, the groom must take his bride to his father's tent.

Notice that he brought a young goat. This was a present and was intended to be used in a feast. It was a symbolic way of saying, "Let's put all these things behind us and start all over again."

You will also notice that Samson was going to visit his wife in her part of her father's tent. There is a problem here. She was married a second time, but she still had her own part in her father's tent. Again, the wife must go with her groom to his father's tent.

The bride's father was really on the spot. Normally, he would hold the dowry that Samson's father had paid. He would also hold the dowry that the second groom had paid. It would be impossible for him to allow Samson to go into the daughter's part of his tent when she had been married to a second man. He had to find some way to ease out of this impossible situation.

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And her father said, "I really thought that you hated her intensely; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister more beautiful than she? Please let her be yours instead." Judges 15:2

We must remember the hospitality of the east. They must never displease their guest, but they had to save face at all cost. The father did this by attempting to place the responsibility upon Samson. Whether it was true or not, one might understand how the father might get this impression. There was great anger. There was murder of 30 of this father's fellow Philistines and Samson did not take his wife with him. He did not return for her for several months. It would be a reasonable assumption that Samson might hate his wife. Nevertheless, she was his wife and available to marry no other man. For good or bad, this woman was totally under the care of Samson and her father had no right to accept the dowry of another man. It might make the father feel better when talking to Samson, but he had no excuse for giving his daughter to a second man in marriage.

It was not uncommon for a father to offer his next younger daughter when the older one was already taken in marriage. You will remember the problem that Jacob had with Laben over Rachel.

The bride's father was courteous, but this could mean that he was in a difficult place. It did not necessarily mean that he felt as cordial as it appears. It is most doubtful if he did.

Samson then said to them, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines when I do them harm." Judges 15:3

Notice that the text says, "He said to them..." This suggests that Samson was not dealing with the father alone. It probably means that the father had gathered the men of the family in anticipation of trouble from Samson. After all, Samson had already killed 30 Philistines in his anger with this family.

Observe that Samson did not argue the point. This was not explained by the author. It may well be that he knew it would be fruitless since the second marriage had already been consummated. It may also be that he was still so angry that it no longer made any real difference to him.

Samson said, "This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines..." There is an inference in the way he said this that he felt he was blamable for what he had done to the 30 Philistines in his anger over the betrayal of his wife to her family. Whatever the situation, Samson's motive is clear - an eye for an eye.

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches, and turned the foxes tail to tail, and put one torch in the middle between two tails. When he had set fire to the torches, he released the foxes into the standing grain of the Philistines, thus burning up both the shocks and the standing grain, along with the vineyards and groves. Judges 15:4, 5

This sentence raises several questions:

- a. Where did he put these foxes after they were caught?
- b. How did he catch them?

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- c. Was no one aware of what he was doing?
- d. Did no one attempt to stop him from this destruction?
- e. How could he tie the tails of the foxes together without being bitten?

These are questions for which there is no hint of an answer in the text.

Observe, also, the food supply that Samson burnt up in this attack:

- a. All the grain.
- b. The vineyards
- c. The groves - apparently these were palm groves for dates and figs.

Samson burnt up almost an entire year's supply of food. The only apparent exception was the herds that they also kept. These people would be in a starvation situation for the entire year unless they raided the Jewish settlements and stole food from them. This was a common occurrence.

Then the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he took his wife and gave her to his companion." So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire. Judges 15:6

There was no doubt in the minds of the other Philistines concerning who was responsible for this crime. This sentence makes it clear that the other Philistines were distressed with the bride's father because he married his daughter to two men at essentially the same time. Though the text does not say, the other Philistines may have been angry with the father because he made an agreement to marry his daughter to a Jew in the first place.

The other Philistines came and burned out the father and the bride. The reason that the bride acted as she did in the first place has been removed, but she was burned out anyway. The only difference is that it was done because she had caused the destruction of their food supply rather than because she caused them to lose the wager with Samson. The loss that she ultimately experienced was greater than the loss she attempted to prevent. We should note that the action of the Philistines was characteristic. They tended to solve all problems with violence.

And Samson said to them, "Since you act like this, I will surely take revenge on you, but after that I will quit." Judges 15:7

Samson was aware of all that had been done. In one sense, the Philistines took some of the revenge for him. Still, he would take some revenge for himself. This was a face-saving activity rather than a real expression of his anger.

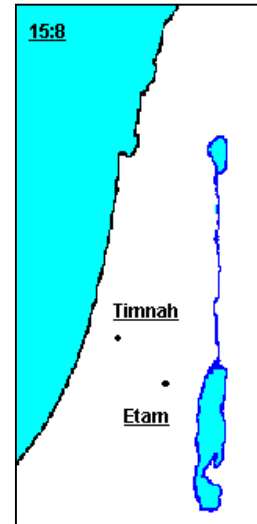
You will observe that there is some reasoning in Samson's actions. He wanted revenge, but it was not without limits. This was new. Previously, he just let his anger have its way and the Philistines suffered the consequences. Now he affirmed that he was going to take revenge, but that this would be the end of it. There is nothing in the text to explain why he suddenly placed some limits on his anger.

And he struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter; and he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam. Judges 15:8

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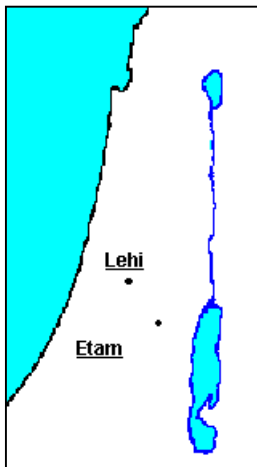
This is a strong, but very general statement. We do not know how Samson struck these members of the family. Did Samson kill them with a jawbone as before? Did he kill everyone or just the men? These are questions for which there are no answers in the text. We only know that the slaughter was immense. We also know that he went down and lived in the cleft of the rock of Etam." As you can see on the map, this was not a long trip. Etam is in a valley. There are limestone cliffs above the village. Erosion had carved a larger number of caves in the cliffs. People used these caves as a hiding place in times of war. It was easy to hide in them. You will remember that when David and his men were hiding from Saul they hid in these caves as well.

One might wonder why Samson would run and hide when he had been so successful in defeating the Philistines up to this point. There is no explanation in the text.



Judges 15:9-13 - The Men of Judah Bind Samson

Then the Philistines went up and camped in Judah, and spread out in Lehi. Judges 15:9



It is not hard to understand that the Philistines were not satisfied to absorb such a brutal defeat. That was not their style. They always sought revenge on any hardship visited against them. We do not know how, but they apparently knew where Samson had gone. The Philistines went and camped in Lehi, which is in Judah. On the map you can see where they were. If you compare this map with the previous one, you can see just how close they were to the spot where Samson was hiding. The fact that they were camped there suggests that they were prepared to stay a long time. It also tells you just how determined they were to get Samson for what he had done to them.

We do not know precisely where Lehi is located, but we know it was in the vicinity of Beth Shemish. This was a very logical place for them to camp. Lehi was located on the east side of a coastal plain. It may not have been as good a battle field as Megiddo, but it was close. An additional recommendation was that this was an area where there was an abundant supply of food. The Philistines were angry and were prepared to stay as long as necessary to achieve their goal. We must remember that the Philistines controlled all of Israel at this time. It was not really dangerous for them to be out in force like this. They had nothing to lose but time.

And the men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" And they said, "We have come up to bind Samson in order to do to him as he did to us." Judges 15:10

Observe that the men of Judah, who live in the area, did not come out for battle. They came to ask the Philistines why they had come up against the people of Judah. It is hard to believe that the people of Judah did not know why the Philistines had camped at Lehi. In

view of past experience, it would be important to find out because the Philistines could not be trusted to remain peaceful.

The Philistine reply was revealing. They were motivated by the principle of an eye for an eye. They were going to repay Samson for what he had done to them. They were determined to take Samson back with them. It was abundantly clear that their intentions were the worst. They had learned nothing from what had happened so far in their relationship with Samson.

Then 3,000 men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then is this that you have done to us?" And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." Judges 15:11

This makes it clear that this was no small matter to the men of Judah. This tells us something of just how much they feared the army of the Philistines. These men of Judah came well prepared to take Samson back with them. It tells us that though the men of Judah feared the Philistines, they were also well aware of just how devastating Samson could be and they wanted nothing to do with this. The last thing they wanted was to get in the middle of a confrontation between Samson and the Philistines. The men of Judah knew that it was not wise to trifle with their captors, the Philistines. They were prepared to sacrifice Samson in order to get the Philistines to go home and leave them alone.

The men of Judah asked Samson a rhetorical question - "Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" Certainly he knew. Everyone knew only too well about the Philistines. However, Samson was not as frightened of the Philistines as they were. He was also angrier with the Philistines than they were.

Observe that they asked him a second rhetorical question - "What then is this that you have done to us?" The honest answer would be, "nothing." He had done something against the Philistines, but nothing against the men of Judah. It became the problem of the men of Judah, however, when the Philistines crossed over into their territory. Granted, the men of Judah were of common national background with Samson. Granted they had a common enemy with Samson, but they otherwise had nothing in common with Samson and wanted none of his problems with the Philistines.

Samson's answer was enlightening. He said, "As they did to me, so I have done to them." As we can see in this story, the eye for an eye response always creates an equal or greater response. There is no end to the violence of this kind. It is an emotional response that only escalates. It is not a calm, intellectual response. It did not solve the problem for Samson or for the Philistines. Nevertheless, neither was willing to lay it aside.

Unfortunately, this has been the case in the Near East for centuries. The situation in that part of the world is not different today. Each action is met with a similar action if not one which is more severe.

And they said to him, "We have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines." And Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me." Judges 15:12

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The men of Judah were totally prepared to hand over Samson rather than confront the Philistines. They had no reticence at all in this decision. Think about that for a minute. How would you feel if you were Samson? Certainly he would remember that at least part of what he was doing was on their behalf as well as his own people, the tribe of Dan. Still they were prepared to hand him over to his death. One would expect him to be greatly disturbed by this attitude.

Whatever his thought, Samson did not argue the point for a minute. It may seem strange, but Samson was concerned that the men of Judah might kill him. He expressed no concern at all that they might turn him over to the Philistines. He would not want to be that violent against his own people, despite the fact that they were going to turn their backs on him. This is confusing. It may be that he knew that he could violently protect himself against the Philistines. He certainly would not want to hurt fellow Jews, even though they had no concern for his safety. He asked them to take an oath that they would not kill him. This suggests that he would trust them if they agreed to the oath.

So they said to him, "No, but we will bind you fast and give you into their hands; yet surely we will not kill you." Then they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock. Judges 15:13

The men of Judah promised that they would not kill Samson, and they kept their word. They were completely open with Samson about their intentions. They were going to bind him and turn him over to the Philistines. One must ask just how Samson felt knowing that his country-men would hand him over to almost certain pain and death. We do not know for certain what it means that they bound him with two new ropes. It could just mean that it took two ropes to bind him. It could also mean that they tied his hands with one rope and his feet with the other. The fact that these were new ropes suggests just how determined they were that he was not going to escape.

Observe that it says, "they brought him up from the rock." We do not know for sure what this means, but it could mean that the cave where he hid was half way up the side of the rock cliff. Thus, they could bring him up to the top of the cliff from his cave hideout. This was usually the way that a person was removed from one of these caves.

Judges 15:14-20 - Samson Killed 1,000 Philistines

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. Judges 15:14, 15

It appears that the men of Judah brought Samson down to the Philistine camp in Lehi. The Philistines didn't have to do a thing to get Samson. The men of Judah were so frightened that they brought Samson out for the Philistines. The author has painted a picture of a victory celebration on the part of the Philistines.

Again, notice that it was the Spirit of the LORD that came upon Samson, not his own strength. The things that Samson did were enabled by the "spirit of the LORD." Once more we must ask, "Is it right for the Spirit of the LORD to enable Samson to kill so many

men when he was not so pure himself?" The shouting of the Philistine soldiers, suggests that they believed that their god had brought about this coupe. Whatever the reason, the Spirit of the LORD enabled Samson to break the new ropes as if they were strings. The text tells us that Samson killed 1,000 soldiers with the jawbone of an ass. This was a great fete. It was made greater by the fact that Samson was not armed. He used what he could get his hands on and still killed 1000 men without being killed himself. This is what he had been saying he could do.

Then Samson said, "With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have killed a thousand men." Judges 15:16

Though the surrounding text was written in prose, this verse is Hebrew poetry. They saved this kind of expression for important records. This was not just raw strength. One must wonder out loud, what were the 999 men doing while Samson killed the first man. Were they so stunned that they were immobile? We do not know. We do know that this had to involve great skill, speed and determination. Samson had them all.

One wonders why Samson took the credit for this action. Granted, Samson did the killing. It is just as true, however, that God enabled Samson to do this. God was ultimately involved in this event. One must ask, "How did Samson feel when he had finished killing all these Philistines?" He could have felt pride and there is some reason to believe that this was certainly involved. He could have felt elation that his enemies were gone. He could have felt sadness that he had to do this. This, however, does not seem to fit his style. We will deal with this question again, shortly.

And it came about when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand; and he named that place Ramath-lehi. Judges 15:17

The text says that he threw down the jawbone. This is an act of distress. It may well have been a sense of contempt for what he had to do in order to survive. It was not sorrow that the Philistines had died. It was probably that this desperate thing was necessary in the first place. There are some mixed emotions here. He would certainly be happy that he had won the struggle. There would certainly be some elation that the enemy had lost. Everyone in Israel hated the Philistines with a passion. It may well have been great discomfort that he had to take so many lives. This, however, seems a bit remote.

Samson named the place "Ramath-Lehi". The naming of the place was not a chamber of Commerce decision. Every name in that culture had great meaning. This name meant "the hill of the jawbone." Places were named for fame or for infamy. This was the latter.

Then he became very thirsty, and he called to the LORD and said, "Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of Thy servant, and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" Judges 15:18

The name "LORD" throughout this story, is "yahweh" or "Jehovah." This is the name for God associated with justice. The fact that he became thirsty suggests that this was done in mid-summer. Though we cannot be sure, it seems right.

Notice how Samson said it, "Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of thy servant." In this verse, Samson acknowledges that it was God who gave the Philistines into his hands. Samson spoke of himself as God's bond-servant. If he was serious, then

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this means that he saw himself as God's faithful servant. God could ask him whatever He willed and it would be done.

Samson attempted to use logic in his questioning of God. This would be a situation where he would be saying, "It doesn't make sense to deliver them into my hand and then let me die of thirst."

Samson had another concern. He said, "Shall I die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" This was a valid concern for the name of God. It is one thing to win the battle. It is quite another to then lose the peace by failing to provide for your people. Like David, this is exactly what Samson was concerned about.

But God split the hollow place that is in Lehi so that water came out of it. When he drank, his strength returned and he revived. Therefore, he named it En-hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. Judges 15:19

We know that this is a limestone area. It is possible that there was a water course through the rock. This often happened. In such instances, there were often places where the water hollowed a basin-like area in the rock where soft or weaker rock was found. If this was the case, then this hollowed out place was filled with water and it came out when God split the rock. Again, it is possible that the "hollow place" refers to a low area where there was a spring near the surface. This is possible, but we cannot be certain that it is what happened. This seems extreme to us because we do not live in an area of extreme heat. Samson did. To be without water can place a person in jeopardy in a very short period of time.

The name "En-hakkore" is another name for Lehi. The name means "the spring of Him who called." It was not uncommon for a place to be named in a manner such as this. We must remember that most of their history was verbal and they needed something to remind them of what happened in each place. The giving of such a name was one way to make sure that this information would not be lost.

So he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines. Judges 15:20

The way the author dealt with the life and ministry of Samson is ironic. There are prolific details about his exploits, good and bad, in the land. There is nearly nothing listed about his reign. The only information we know is that he ruled Israel 20 years. This usually suggests that there was little opposition to his reign by his people and that little, if anything, happened that was worthy of report. We do not know if these were good years in the life of Israel. We do not know if these were years when God was honored and served by all the people. One has to be a bit skeptical about this possibility. We can only presume that they were blessed because God was with Samson, not because he was so good.

We also know that these were years when the Philistines continued to control the land of Israel. Samson was the judge, the ruler of the land, but he had to do that under the guidance of the Philistines. It had to be a most difficult challenge. We can only surmise what all lay behind these terse statements about the way Israel handled their problems before the LORD.

SAMPSON'S REVENGE – FOXES, JAWBONE OF AN ASS

Conclusion

We need to review our study of this chapter. It is important to record the things it tells us about God.

15:14 – The Spirit of the LORD came upon Samson to empower him to break the ropes that bound him and then kill a thousand Philistines.

15:18 – God heard the cry of Samson, His not so faithful servant. God will use and defend His servant who is less than perfect.

15:19 – God produced a natural miracle in order to preserve the life of Samson.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 16
DELILAH BETRAYED SAMSON - DEATH
JUDGES 16:1 - 31

1. There are eight paragraphs in the sixteenth chapter of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

16:1-3	
16:4-9	
16:10-12	
16:13, 14	
16:15-17	
16:18-22	
16:23-27	
16:28-31	

2. In Judges 16:1-3, the author told the story of how Samson destroyed the gates of Gaza.
- a. In 16:1, compare Samson's actions with the message of the angel in 13:5-7.
 - (1). What did you learn?
 - (2). How do the passages compare?
 - (3). How can we account for this?
 - b. In 16:2, the men of Gaza "lay in wait for him."
 - (1). Why would they do this?
 - (2). On the basis of this verse, what motive could they have for killing Samson?
 - c. In 16:3, Samson surprised the men of Gaza.
 - (1). What did he do?
 - (2). In a Bible atlas, trace the steps of Samson reported in this verse.
 - (a). What did you learn?
 - (b). What does this tell us about Samson's motives?
3. In Judges 16:4-9, Samson toyed with Delilah's determination to betray him.
- a. In 16:4, Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. How can we explain his actions in view of the fact that as a Jew he was supposed to stay away from pagan women and marry within the people of Israel?
 - b. In 16:5, the Philistine leaders compelled Delilah to attempt to discover the source of Samson's strength.
 - (1). What motives can you see at work in Delilah?
 - (2). How would you describe Delilah's relationship with Samson at this point?

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- c. In 16:6, Delilah asked Samson, directly, about the source of his strength.
 - (1) How can we explain her actions?
 - (2).Put yourself in Samson's place. Would you tend to become suspicious at her insistence?
- d. In 16:7, Samson answered Delilah's persistent question.
 - (1) How would you describe his answer?
 - (2) What problems are evident in his answer?
 - (3) To what danger is Samson opening himself?
- e. In 16:8, the Philistine leaders tested Samson's explanation.
 - (1).This verse is evidence of Delilah's loyalty. Where is her loyalty?
 - (2).In view of this fact, how can one account for Samson's actions?
- f. In 16:9, Delilah continued her unrelenting pressure to discover the source of Samson's strength.
 - (1).Think about the fact that she said to him, "the Philistines are upon you, Samson!" What does this tell you?
 - (2).If you were Delilah, how would you feel when Samson snapped the cords like string?
- 4. In Judges 16:10-12, Delilah again attempted to find the source of Samson's strength.
 - a. In 16:10, Delilah complained because Samson had deceived her.
 - (1).Think about her complaint for a moment. What comes to mind?
 - (2).If you were Samson, how would you feel when Delilah said these words?
 - b. In 16:11, Samson responded to Delilah's complaint.
 - (1).What was his reply?
 - (2).There is a serious problem with his answer. What is it?
 - (3).What danger did Samson face in this situation?
 - c. In 16:12, Delilah followed Samson's instructions to bind him.
 - (1).In view of Samson's other instructions, how could Delilah believe this one?
 - (2).It appears that Samson was getting away with his toying with Delilah. What was really happening?
- 5. In Judges 16:13, 14, Delilah again attempted to discover the source of Samson's strength.
 - a. In 16:13, Delilah complained, again, that Samson had lied to her.
 - (1).Think about this for a minute. What comes to mind?
 - (2).Look at Delilah's question. How has she approached the problem of discovering his strength?
 - (3).How did Delilah increase the pressure on Samson?
 - (4).Samson answered Delilah's pressured question.
 - (a). What mistakes did Samson commit in his answer?
 - (b).How could he have done the right thing?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 16

- b. In 16:14, Delilah tested the latest explanation Samson had given her.
 - (1). What should Samson have discovered from what Delilah had been doing?
 - (2). What had Delilah revealed by her pressure?
- 6. In Judges 16:15-17, Samson finally confided the truth to Delilah
 - a. In 16:15, Delilah again complained that Samson had lied to her.
 - (1). What charges did Delilah make against Samson?
 - (2). How did she increase the pressure on Samson to tell her the truth?
 - b. In 16:16, the author described Samson's response to her pressure.
 - (1). How did the author describe this response?
 - (2). How would you phrase Samson's feelings in your own words?
 - c. In 16:17, Samson finally told Delilah the truth.
 - (1). How would you describe his feelings as he did that?
 - (2). Think about Samson's decision to tell Delilah everything.
 - (a). Did he really think he could continue to stay alive if he confided the source of his strength?
 - (b). How would you describe the relationship between Samson and Delilah?
- 7. In Judges 16:18-22, Delilah had a man shave off Samson's hair.
 - a. In 16:18, Delilah called for the Philistine leaders to return.
 - (1). What was she doing?
 - (2). What does this tell us about her?
 - (3). There are hints about motive in this verse. What are they?
 - (4). How would you describe the religious significance of what she did?
 - b. In 16:19, Delilah had Samson's hair cut.
 - (1). Why would Delilah be apt to believe Samson concerning this explanation when he had deceived her repeatedly?
 - (2). There is a message in the words, "and his strength left him." What is that message?
 - c. In 16:20, Delilah checked to see if Samson's strength was really gone.
 - (1). Samson's words, in this verse, tell us something about him. What is it?
 - (2). The author said, "He did not know that the LORD had departed from him." What should we discover from this statement?
 - d. In 16:21, the author described the Philistines' treatment of Samson after his capture.
 - (1). What was to be gained by gouging out his eyes?
 - (2). The text says, "they bound him with bronze chains." What is the significance of this?
 - (3). Why would they take Samson to Gaza?
 - e. In 16:22, the author informed us that Samson's hair began to grow again.
 - (1). What does this tell us about Samson's condition?

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- (2). What does this tell us about the Philistines?
- f. There is some interesting information to be found in reviewing the times Samson toyed with Delilah over the source of his strength. Study the four verses, 16:7, 11, 13 and 17. What did you learn as you reviewed these experiences?
8. In Judges 16:23-27, the Philistines held a great festival mocking Samson and sacrificing to Dagon.
- a. In 16:23, the Philistines attributed the capture of Samson to their god, Dagon. What can we learn from this fact?
- b. In 16:24, there is a strong contrast.
- (1). How did the Philistines see Samson?
- (2). How did God see Samson?
- c. In 16:25, the people talked about Samson.
- (1). This verse seems out of character for Samson. How can one explain this?
- (2). If you were Samson, what effect would this experience have on you?
- d. In 16:26, Samson begins his action of revenge.
- (1). The text says that Samson spoke to “the boy who was holding his hand.” What insight can we gain from this information?
- (2). Since Samson was blind, how would he know about these pillars?
- (3). Review this verse again. What does it tell you about the character of Samson?
- e. In 16:27, the author gave us a picture of the crowd at this festival.
- (1). What was the author attempting to do with this information?
- (2). What was your immediate reaction when you read these words?
9. In Judges 16:28-31, Samson took revenge against the Philistines.
- a. In 16:28, Samson prayed for help.
- (1). List the things Samson asked God to do?
- (2). Study this list. What does it tell you?
- (3). There is a serious theological problem in this verse. What is it?
- b. In 16:29, Samson prepared to pull down the temple.
- (1). What does this verse tell you about Samson?
- (2). What does this verse tell you about Samson’s relationship to God?
- c. In 16:30, Samson pulled down the temple to Dagon.
- (1). Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.”
- (a). Is this suicide or self-sacrifice on behalf of God? How did you decide?
- (b). What problems can you see concerning this situation?
- (2). What significance, if any, do you attach to the statement, “So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life”?
- d. In 16:31, the author described the burial of Samson. Why would this be important?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 16

10. In Judges 13:5, the angel spoke to Manoah's wife. In that conversation, the angel told her the reason for the fact that her son was to be a Nazirite. As you reflect over the life of Samson, in what way was that purpose accomplished in Samson's life?
11. In Hebrews 11:32, Samson appears in Faith's hall of fame. In view of the events and actions of Samson's life, how would you explain his presence on this list?
12. Review this chapter again. Record the things that the author teaches us concerning the person and nature of God.

LESSON 16: JUDGES 16:1 - 31

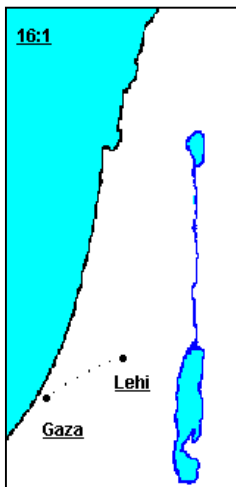
DELILAH BETRAYED SAMSON - DEATH

There are eight paragraphs in Judges chapter 16. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

16:1-3	Samson Destroyed Gaza Gates
16:4-9	Samson Toys With Delilah's Determination to Betray Him
16:10-12	Delilah Bound Samson with New Ropes
16:13, 14	Delilah Made a Web of Samson's Seven Locks
16:15-17	Samson Confided to Delilah About His Hair
16:18-22	Delilah had Samson's Head Shaved - Samson Enslaved
16:23-27	Sacrifice to Dagon - Samson Mocked
16:28-31	Samson Avenged Philistines in His Death

Judges 16:1-3 - Samson Destroyed Gaza Gates

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. Judges 16:1



The word "now" indicates a turn in the direction of the author's message. We have no reason to believe that Samson had gone elsewhere since 5:19 when the author indicated that he was in Lehi. Samson went to Gaza. This fact raises questions. Samson was already a wanted man among the Philistines. Gaza was a Philistine city. Surely he would be vulnerable there. As you can see on the map, it was a distance of about 45 miles. This is a bit more than a two-day walk. Because this is a mountainous region, he would probably go west to the plain along the coast and then south to the city of Gaza.

We should keep in mind that these people are Philistines. They were worshipers of Dagon, the father of Baal. Dagon was represented by an image with the body of a fish and the head of a man. He was the national god of the Philistines. The temple at Gaza was one of the special temples for the worship of Dagon. The worship of Dagon is associated with agriculture. This usually involved fertility cult worship, which is another name for orgies.

The text says that Samson had a relationship with a harlot in Gaza. This harlot was probably a temple prostitute. To be involved with her would be to participate in their idolatrous worship. The question naturally arises, if Samson was a Nazirite from the womb; and if he was set apart to be a special servant of God, then how can one explain his involvement with a prostitute, especially since it was probably a temple prostitute from the worship of idols? This just does not make sense. It has to be blatant disobedience.

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Samson could not claim ignorance. He went to a Philistine city and he knew it. He also knew that he was not supposed to go to a gentile city. He had been taught to stay away from gentile cities as much as possible.

He committed adultery with a prostitute. This, of course, was contrary to the Law of Moses and he was well aware of that. He probably took part in an idolatrous orgy, while having sex with a temple prostitute, and he knew he was to have nothing to do with idols or illicit sexual activity. He was doing all the wrong things he could do and he knew it was wrong. In view of all these misdirection's, one wonders how God could use such a blemished servant. We do not know how God could do that. We do know that He did.

Then it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." Judges 16:2

The first sentence of this verse suggests that Samson's reputation had preceded him. They knew all about him though he apparently had not been there before. From the text, it is clear that the men of Gaza were going to do to Samson what the men of Lehi had been unable to accomplish. The men of Gaza thought that they had three things going for them:

1. There were many of them and only one of him.
2. They had the element of surprise on their side.
3. He had been sleeping with the harlot and would not yet be wide-awake.

They made the mistake of thinking that these things would give them an advantage over Samson. It did not. It is clear that they were prepared to kill Samson. This gives us an insight into their morality. It was acceptable to kill a person in an eye-for-an-eye confrontation. It did not matter that those he killed had mistreated him.

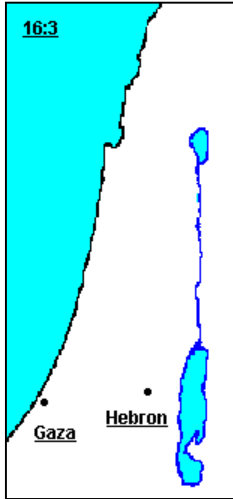
Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron. Judges 16:3

This verse raises several difficult questions:

1. Did Samson realize or anticipate that he was being stalked and thus left at midnight?
2. Did Samson destroy the gates of the city as a way to let the people know that he knew what they were doing? Was he toying with them? It certainly appears that he was.
3. If Samson wanted to destroy the city gates why did he not smash them rather than leaving them on the top of the mountain?
4. While he was carrying the city gates of Gaza to the top of the mountain opposite Hebron, why did the men of Gaza chase after him to kill him as they intended to do?

The text gives us no actual information concerning these questions, but there is the pervasive feeling that Samson knew what they were doing and was toying with them.

DELILAH BETRAYED SAMPSON - DEATH



This verse gives us a clear insight into the strength of Samson. The city gates of any city were built in such a way as to deter an army, much less an individual. Nevertheless, Samson not only broke through the doors, but also took them with him up to the top of the mountain. Such doors would weigh hundreds of pounds.

We know that it took a host of soldiers to put the city gates in place to defend the city. Still, Samson pulled the posts out of their secure positions and carried them off into the mountains.

Observe that it says Samson carried the gates to a mountaintop opposite Hebron. This sounds as though it was a very short distance. This map gives us an indication of just how far it was. If you look in a Bible Atlas, you will note that the distance from Gaza to Hebron is about 40 miles and going through the mountains it would be several miles more. Samson had to carry the city gates a long distance. It would certainly have been impossible for anyone else. This draws a serious contrast between Samson on the one hand and those who waited to kill him on the other.

Judges 16:4-9 - Samson Toys with Delilah's Determination to Betray Him

After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. Judges 16:4

Samson acts like an accident looking for a place to happen. It is almost as though he looked for things to do wrong. Delilah must have been a Philistine. It is thought that she was a courtesan. She was certainly able to conduct herself in an acceptable way when court pressure was brought to bear upon her. This area, though not a large city, was a place where Philistine officials lived or had summer retreats. It was a valley amidst high hills to the west of Jerusalem.

Again, we are reminded that Samson, though called of God to be a judge of Israel, did the very things that he knew were against the will of God as well as a devastation to his parents. One wonders again and again, could God use such a person who continually gives himself to sinful actions and directions? Fortunately for us, the answer is yes. Our lives may not be all that God wants us to be, but He will use whatever broken life we bring to Him. That is exactly what He did with Samson.

And the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and said to her, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies and how we may overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." Judges 16:5

The author does not tell us how Delilah felt about Samson. We do know, however, that when Philistine officials put pressure on her to betray Samson, she did not hesitate. Her instructions were clear, "Entice him, and see where his great strength lies." The word "entice" is "pathah" (פָּתַח) and means "to open," "to allure," "to flatter," or "to persuade." This is exactly the same word the other Philistine leaders used to urge Samson's wife to find out the meaning of the riddle. These are the only two places in the book of Judges that this

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word is used. Whether true or false, she is to say whatever is necessary to find out why he was so strong and they were not.

She was further instructed, "see where his strength lies." One might ask, "What do they mean, 'See where his strength lies?'" Though the text does not say so, it appears that they may have thought that he had some external source of strength such as an amulet, a special garment or something of this nature. The truth was that he did not have an external source of strength, aside from the Holy Spirit. It was not something he said or wore, but the help of the God of Israel.

The officials continued with their instructions. "See how we may overpower him." In some way, they planned to do him harm. We must remember that this was a man who was seriously interested in her. This says something unfortunate about their values.

Their final words were, "that we may bind him and afflict him. The intention of the Philistine leaders was now absolutely clear.

It is highly improbable that she had not been told about the trouble between the Philistines and Samson. These are violent people. They would not just warn him if he had done them harm in any way at all. She had to know that if she complied with their desires, he would be killed. For people of that culture, this was the way to deal with anyone who represented an area, which was not necessarily friendly to your people.

The leaders of the Philistines did not rely upon her national loyalty to do what they needed her to do. The incentive for her to cooperate with them was money, lots of money. We do not know how many elders came to see her. Each of these men was to give her 1,100 pieces of silver. We do not know exactly how much money that would be, but it appears that it would be at least three years wages. If there were several elders present, she would receive many years' wages for just this one cooperation with their intent.

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength is and how you may be bound to afflict you." Judges 16:6

The text does not indicate whether she needed time to think about this decision. It sounds as though they made the request and she complied immediately. We can only conjecture, but it appears that this was not a difficult decision for Delilah.

She was very direct in her approach to Samson. One wonders why anyone would give an answer to such a question. Knowing the brutality of the Philistines, Samson should have known that to answer the question was to seal his own doom.

And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh cords that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Judges 16:7

It is usually thought that Samson was toying with temptation when he dealt with Delilah. There is no doubt that he was doing just that. He should not have been there in the first place. He should not have been answering such a question at all. It was a risk that was too great to take.

There is another consideration. Samson lied. Samson knew that his strength came from God. In his lie, he failed to give glory to God. Everything that took place between the Jews and the Philistines was considered a confrontation between Jehovah and Dagon.

DELILAH BETRAYED SAMPSON - DEATH

Here was an important thing that God had done and Samson failed to acknowledge that God had given him the strength. If Samson had admitted that God gave him his strength, he would have compromised nothing of his strength.

The answer Samson gave, though a lie, was also foolishness. Had the Philistines not been superstitious, they would have known that Samson was toying with them. There was nothing in "seven fresh cords" that would cause Samson to lose his strength.

Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh cords that had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Judges 16:8

This verse makes it clear that Delilah was not just providing the Philistine leaders with information. She was a vital part of the plan to kill Samson. She was the one who tied him with the "seven fresh cords." This verse indicates just how frightened the Philistines were of Samson's power. There was nothing in seven fresh cords, which had not been dried, that could account for his strength. To believe this was to believe in strange powers, which were beyond human capability. The Philistines accredited this to their gods. Samson knew better. He may have been playing to their religious beliefs, a mild form of mockery.

Delilah had committed herself. She was with the Philistine leaders and against the man who wanted her to be his wife. A Jewish man would not tolerate this kind of betrayal. If his wife or his intended betrayed him, she would be returned to her father and the dowry returned to the groom's father.

This was a very dangerous game Samson played. At this time he was getting away with it quite nicely, but the danger was always there and his opportunities to be tripped up were high and mounting.

Now she had men lying in wait in an inner room. And she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he snapped the cords as a string of tow snaps when it touches fire. So his strength was not discovered. Judges 16:9

This was a very carefully developed plan to kill Samson. Delilah was increasingly a part of the plot to kill the man who wanted her for his wife. Her betrayal was despicable, but not unacceptable among the Philistines.

The text speaks of an "inner room." The intent was probably another part of the tent. This makes it clearer that she was as intent upon destroying Samson as any of the Philistine leaders. The family tent was made up of several smaller compartments. Each son, for instance, would have his own portion of the tent. The Philistine leaders were probably in one of these other compartments to which Samson would have no access.

Delilah's test of Samson's explanation gives us some information. Observe that she said to him, "The Philistines are upon you Samson." Apparently the alienation between Israel and the Philistines was a topic of discussion between them. This illustrates that Samson was really traveling in dangerous waters.

The word "but" indicates that there is a serious contrast in this verse. She had anticipated that the cords would bind Samson. The contrast is that the cords were like nothing at all to his strength. This contrast tends to run throughout this entire story.

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There is a touch of pathos in this verse. The author said, "So his strength was not discovered." That was the whole point of the effort. They had been duped again. The Philistine attempt to kill Samson was foiled.

This created an awkward situation. Delilah was trying to discover the source of his strength in order to destroy him. Samson was toying with her and lied to her about it. Now it was out. They both had to deal with their mutual deception of each other.

Judges 16:10-12 - Delilah Bound Samson with New Ropes

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Behold, you have deceived me and told me lies; now please tell me, how you may be bound." Judges 16:10

This is a strange situation. Delilah had deceived Samson in order to cause his death. Now she accused him of deception when he was simply toying with her. She continued to deal with the whole situation in a deliberate fashion. She may have hoped that if she was direct, he might not understand. She accused him of telling her lies. That of course was the truth, but she did not know how right she was. She had the audacity to ask him again how he could be bound and thus killed. One wonders how she could accuse him of lying when everything that she said and did was a lie.

And he said to her, "If they bind me tightly with new ropes, which have not been used, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Judges 16:11

Samson passed up a great opportunity to witness concerning the power of Jehovah. Naturally, Delilah would not want to hear this because she was a worshiper of Dagon. As you can see in the text, Samson toyed with Delilah again. Samson had many problems in this verse.

1. He had no business being in this place at all.
2. He had no business seeking the favors of a Philistine woman.
3. If he had not been here, he would not have been in a position of lying and refusing to glorify God.
4. He toyed with sinful situations rather than fleeing from them as God commands.

Though he should have known better, Samson made another attempt to deceive Delilah. He knew that she tested his first explanation and there was every good reason to believe that she would test this second attempt as well.

So Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" For the men were lying in wait in the inner room. But he snapped the ropes from his arms like a thread. Judges 16:12

There is no reason to believe that Delilah believed or disbelieved Samson's statement. There was no reason to do so. She could simply check it out to see if, indeed, he had told her the truth, which she and the Philistine rulers wanted to hear.

Again, Delilah dealt directly with the fact that Samson and the Philistines were combatants. The thing she did not do was identifying the fact that she was in league with the Philistines. The author carefully indicated that in another part of the house or tent, the Philistines were lying in wait just in case Delilah did find out what the source of Samson's strength really was.

DELILAH BETRAYED SAMPSON - DEATH

We should note just how all this appeared. It appeared as though Samson had toyed with Delilah and had been no worse off for his toying. There is no visible evidence that any harm had been done by his charade. Each lie he offered Delilah put increasing pressure on him to tell her the truth. If he had stayed where he belonged, there would have been no pressure on him to confess the source of his strength and die. Samson was an accident looking for a place to happen. It did.

Judges 16:13, 14 - Delilah Made a Web of Samson's Seven Locks

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Up to now you have deceived me and told me lies; tell me how you may be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my hair with the web and fasten it with a pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man." Judges 16:13

Delilah seems to be the picture of patience. That was not really the case. If you read the verse again, you will note some increasing tension in her words. She did what she had to do. If she had proved impatient, she might never have found out the source of his strength at all. At great expense, she had to find out the source of Samson's strength or face real difficulties with the Philistine leaders. Samson was the only one who had this information. She knew that she would be violently harmed if she did not produce the information. She had no alternative but to patiently apply pressure on Samson to divulge the information. Notice also that she now accused him of both deception and lies. This is a way of increasing the pressure on Samson to tell her the truth.

Delilah's response was interesting. She confronted Samson with the fact of his dishonesty. Again it took a lot of gall for a person who misrepresented herself to tell him that he had lied. Her apparent patience should not be interpreted to mean that she had a very high comfort level. This should be seen as skyrocketing. The pressure was on her to produce the information and do so immediately.

You will remember that Delilah's question approached the problem as though Samson's strength had an external source. In effect it did, but not in the way that she thought. She was thinking in terms of power that would come from some pagan worship or form of magic. She may have thought that his strength came as a result of an amulet that he was wearing. In many idolatrous forms of worship this kind of thing was believed. She could also have been probing to see if there was a certain set of words that he had to say in order to have such great strength from the gods.

Samson played into this external idea again. We should be reminded that while he was doing this, he was also passing up a great opportunity to witness to the power of God. Observe the suggestions of Samson are getting dangerously close to the truth. It is clear that it will only be a matter of time before he tells her the truth.

So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his hair and wove them into the web. And she fastened it with the pin, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin of the loom and the web. Judges 16:14

The fact that Samson slept in the presence of Delilah does not require that there was any illicit sexual activity, but it does look suspicious. The truth is that he had no business be-

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ing in this Philistine home in the first place. He had no business sleeping in the presence of a woman who was not his wife.

While Samson slept, she decided to test the latest explanation Samson had given her concerning the source of his strength. She did exactly as he had told her to do. She took his seven curls and drew them into strands like the strands on a loom. These were then fastened with a pin from the loom. It was as though she had gotten his hair ready to weave with another substance. We should remember that the "pin" had a different connotation for them than it has for us. We think of a "pin" as something very fine and weak. A weaver's pin was about 15 inches long and about an inch or two thick. It was very strong and could withstand great pressure.

Again, Delilah said to Samson, "The Philistines are upon you." This, of course, woke Samson up. Just the process of waking up yanked the pin from its moorings, which were probably the ground of the tent. Samson pulled all of it out of its secure position. This would have been very damaging to the average individual.

Judges 16:15-17 - Samson Confided to Delilah about His Hair

Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me these three times and have not told me where your great strength is." Judges 16:15

It was immediately clear to Delilah that she had been deceived again. She added much greater pressure by challenging his statement that he loved her. This was a way of saying, Your actions make a farce of your claim to love me.

Her question was penetrating to say the least. "How can you say 'I love you' when your heart is not with me?" Notice that there is no record of his reply to that question. It was her way of saying "stop toying with me." This gives us a picture of just how great her tensions were at the time. It appears that she was trying not to get him upset with her. If she did, he would never tell her what she needed to know. On the other hand, she wanted to increase the pressure on him so that he would ultimately tell her the source of his strength. We must remember that the Philistine leaders must have been impatient with her not being able to get the information to them before this time. They would be afraid that he would leave and they would miss this opportunity to take his life.

Observe that Delilah made three charges:

1. "Your heart is not with me."
2. "You have deceived me three times."
3. (You) have not told me where your great strength is."

In the midst of all this, we should not forget that she was not as clean as she might be. She was a very active part of a plan to put him to death while pretending to love him.

She was absolutely right. She now had him in a corner. He must either tell her the truth or be seen as a liar and disinterested in her. This was the hidden danger in all that he had done, which seemed so innocent. Eventually such toying with evil will always catch up with the one who follows god.

DELILAH BETRAYED SAMPSON - DEATH

And it came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death. Judges 16:16

Persistence was the means by which Delilah sought to wear him down. This is also the enemy's tool to break us down. Samson's response to her persistence was understandable. It says he was "annoyed" to death. The word "annoyed" is "qatsar" (קָצַר) which literally means to dock or to curtail. It is to be so pressured that one is grieved and discouraged. It is "to be loathed," "to be wearied of the pressure." This causes impatience, which is exactly what Delilah wanted to see. It is as though he wanted to say, "I just don't want to hear another word about it."

So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, "A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man." Judges 16:17

The word "so" indicates that an explanation is forthcoming. "He told her all that was in his heart." This gives us an insight into his thinking. When he told her everything, Samson had something specific in mind. It was not a defiant determination to do something he knew he was not supposed to do. This was exasperation, frustration and impatience. He just wanted her to leave him alone about it. This is a favorite tool of the enemy. Many times people have given in to error not because of defiance, but because of exasperation and frustration, because of exhausting pressure toward evil.

Samson was absolutely honest with Delilah. The relationship between these two people came to the fore in confrontation. He was a Nazirite to the Lord from birth. Delilah, on the other hand, was an active devotee of Dagon worship. The two of them were arch-enemies pretending to be lovers.

Did Samson realize what he had done? Having exposed the source of his strength, did he think that he could survive and be as strong as he had been if they should shave his head? Did he fool himself into thinking that she would not pass that word along and the Philistines, who wanted him dead, would not do everything in their power to take his life?

Judges 16:18-22 - Delilah Shaved Samson's Head - Samson Enslaved

When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. Judges 16:18

Delilah was the precursor of the modern spy. She betrayed him after she accused him of doing the same thing. Notice that she said, "Come up once more." This suggests that there had been serious trouble between Delilah and the Philistine leaders who were hidden in the other part of the tent. The Philistine leaders had become frustrated with the things Samson told her would rob him of his strength.

The men came and they brought their money. They were going to keep their word. They were to deliver Samson to his death. She would be seen as a hero to her people. She would be thought of as a hero before her god - Dagon. To the rest of the world, however, her name, Delilah, would become a synonym for betrayal and deception.

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And she made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. Judges 16:19

In that culture, a single man was not allowed to be alone with a single woman under any circumstances. Samson knew that he was doing something that he should not. Some people have given a number of interpretations to the statement "sleeping on her knees." Most of these innuendoes are not verifiable. We honestly do not know what it means. We only know that he was in a situation where he knew he should not have been. Only trouble could come from what he was about.

Delilah called for someone to come and shave off the seven locks of his hair. Samson allowed himself to be in a situation where the command of God concerning his hair would be violated. When Samson's hair had been cut, Delilah began to "afflict" him. The word "afflict" is "anah" (עָנָה) and literally means, "to shout." It is to apply verbal pressure. She was determined to test out what he had said. This is not surprising since he had deceived her repeatedly. This idea was as strange as the others he had told her were. The thing that frustrated Delilah was that all of these possibilities could be real in her understanding of the gods and evil spirits.

Some of the saddest words in this story are in this verse, "and his strength left him." The word "left him" is "suwr" (שָׁוַר) and means to withdraw, to turn aside. The strength was still there, but when the hair was cut, the strength withdrew like a rejected suitor. Samson was given this strength in order to serve God. His strength left him. He was now unable to serve God as he was created to do. This is tragic.

And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him. Judges 16:20

The thing that Delilah said to startle him was in fact a true statement. It is amazing how often the enemies used truth or near truth to devastate the servant of God.

In this verse we also get a glimpse into Samson's mind. He said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." He thought that his actions had no affect upon the gift God had given him to serve divine purposes. He was wrong. People tend to ignore the consequences of sin, until it is too late. Could it be that Samson had come to believe that the strength God gave him was his own strength? Had he forgotten that God had given the strength and it was symbolized in the length of his hair? The text is silent on this issue, but one has to wonder.

The word "but" identifies a contrast. This contrasts what Samson thought, on the one hand, with the real situation on the other. This is a serious contrast. Another sad statement is also found in this verse. "But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him." Observe that in verse 19 it says, "his strength left him." In verse 20, it says, "The LORD left him." Both statements are absolutely true. There comes a point where God will no longer exercise patience with our failures and disobedience. When the hair was cut, the strength left him and so did the LORD. Observe the way the author put it, "The LORD had departed from him." This expresses a situation that has already taken place. It is over and done.

DELILAH BETRAYED SAMPSON - DEATH

Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison. Judges 16:21

At this point, the threat of Samson to the Philistine community had come to an end. He was no longer a threat to the Philistines or anyone else. It was God's presence, not the length of his hair, which made Samson different from other people.

Notice that the text tells us that the Philistines "seized him and gouged out his eyes." This was a common Philistine practice. They did not want him dead. They wanted him under control and no longer a threat to their people. As long as he could not hurt them, Samson was more beneficial to them alive than dead. He could be used for their entertainment and to rouse people to greater anger against their enemies the Jews. The Philistines were some of the most brutal people on the face of the earth. They would cut off an enemy's thumb so that he could not hold a sword or club. They would cut off his large toe so that he did not have dependable balance and therefore could not fight well. It was a means of great humiliation as well as great sport for them.

The Philistines took Samson from Sorek to Gaza. You can see on the map that this was at least a three-day journey. This trip was more than a journey from one place to another. Remember that their greatest place of Dagon worship was at Gaza. They intended to humiliate Samson as part of their worship of Dagon. They would present him as a part of their celebration of the victory of Dagon over Jehovah.

"(They) bound him with bronze chains." Bronze was the strongest metal that they had at that time. This fact reveals just how determined they were that Samson would not escape to do them even more harm. It also shows how much they feared the great power that he possessed. The sad part about this is that there was no need for such extreme measures. Samson was now no stronger than any other man was. He could not hurt any of them. They just did not know it.

"He was a grinder in the prison." This was the worst punishment that they could have given him. They were still under the assumption that he had unusual power, which was greater than any other person. In his work as a grinder, he took the place of a horse or mule. He pulled a grinding wheel that weighed several tons. Granted, this was rolling weight, but he had to do this for many hours at a time. It was more than most any other person would be able to stand. Indeed, most people would not be able to even move such a stone by themselves. It would be necessary for the rulers to force several slaves to pull these massive stones. The text does not say, but it appears that Samson had to pull this stone all by himself. Because they were still under the impression that he had strength that was much greater than any other man, their expectations of him were much higher than those for any other prisoner. This would be devastating to Samson. We have no idea how long this went on. We must assume that it was done over a lengthy period of time.

However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. Judges 16:22

The word "however" suggests a turn in the direction of the story. Slaves and prisoners received no personal care whatsoever. Their lives consisted of three things: work, sleep and eat. Because of this neglect, Samson's hair was neither washed nor cut. This whole sce-

nario suggests that the Philistines were not too impressed with the idea that the length of Samson's hair was the key to his strength. They were just happy that they were able to capture and keep him from doing them greater harm.

Because of this, like all the other prisoners, his hair was never washed, much less cut. A prisoner's hair would be a filthy, infested mass, totally unkempt. Unbeknown to the Philistines, Samson's hair began to grow again. You can almost see the plot of the author in this statement. The hair will begin to grow and Samson's strength will begin to return.

On four occasions in this chapter, Samson toyed with Delilah's persistent attempts to discover the source of his strength. These are found in 16:7, 11, 13, 17. If you reread these verses, you will observe that each lie he told pushed him closer to the necessity of telling the truth. As we know, when he finally told the truth, he lost his freedom and further ability to serve God. This points up the real danger of toying with temptation.

Judges 16:23-27 - Sacrifice to Dagon - Samson Mocked

Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands." Judges 16:23

The word "Now" identifies the fact that having made a change in the direction of the story, the author will expand on that change. As we indicated in verse 21, the Philistines believed that Dagon, their god, had given Samson into their hands. Now they were going to make a great feast and sacrifice before their god.

As we reported earlier, Gaza was the location of their greatest shrine to Dagon. They wanted to make a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the fact that Dagon had delivered Samson into their hands. For such a great occasion, all the leaders of the Philistine people gathered at this great shrine to their god.

There is an important message here. We need to remember that when we falter, it does not just reflect upon us. It inevitably appears to be a victory of the enemy over our God. It is not, but it appears to be that way. We need to remember this when we are struggling with temptation. The name of God is affected by our failure to be faithful.

When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hands, Even the destroyer of our country, Who has slain many of us." Judges 16:24

Read this verse again and you will notice that the Philistine people identified Samson in three different ways:

1. **"Our enemy"** – The word for enemy is "oyeb" (אֹיֵב) and comes from the root word which means hostility or hatred. This is an active, ongoing adversarial attitude. It is like saying this is the person we love to hate.
2. **"The destroyer of our country"** – The Hebrew word is "chareb" (חָרֵב) that literally means "parched," or "draught." It suggests something that is totally devastated, something that totally demolishes like an axe. This is the way they thought of Samson. It would be with good reason. If you remember, Samson had done some devastating things in their kingdom.

3. **“Who has slain many of us”** – The Hebrew might be translated, “who has multiplied our fatally wounded.” It is easy to understand why they might think this way. Remember, Samson had killed at least a thousand at one time.

It is very doubtful if Samson ever thought that his actions would lead to something like this. Just the sight of Samson caused the Philistines to praise Dagon. It is strange, but something that Samson did to himself the Philistines attributed to Dagon. The Philistines saw him as a murderer and an enemy of their god. They did not see him as the servant of Jehovah he was created to be. It is a shocking reminder that our weakness can flaw our witness.

It so happened when they were in high spirits, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars. Judges 16:25

The words "It so happened when they were in high spirits," in the Hebrew text, are "when they were good in the heart of them." This could mean that they were increasingly excited about their experience of worship and were working up into frenzy. It could also mean that they were beginning to feel the affects of the alcohol that was a vital part of their worship. In many cases, their worship was little more than a drunken orgy. The truth is that we do not know for sure what the inference is at this point.

The text says that they wanted Samson to be brought out, "that he may amuse us." The word "amuse" is "shachaq" (שַׁחַק). As we indicated earlier, this word means "to laugh beyond control," to deride, to mock to the point of scorn." The Philistines had made fun of Samson. He was being totally humiliated and he knew it.

At the same time, this was their time to humiliate Jehovah as well. What happened to a person was closely identified with the god they worshipped. What they did to Samson, they intended for Jehovah as well.

The text says, "Samson entertained them." The word "entertained" is "tsachaq" (צַחַק) and means to laugh uncontrollably, it is to laugh in derision it is to make fun of someone for something they have done that is unfortunate. Notice how similar this word is with "shachaq" which was used previously. It appears that this likeness is intentional. The Jewish people often used a play-on-words for purposes of emphasis.

Samson gave them the opportunity to make fun of him and deride him. The question immediately arises, Why did he do this? This seems totally out of character for Samson. It is possible that he wanted them to be lulled into complacency so that he could do them harm.

The text states that “they made him stand between the pillars.” The text makes no effort to explain what this meant. It could mean that this was the place where he was to stand. It is more probable that this was like a stage area where he was forced to stand so that they could make fun of him. It was probably the center-stage of their place of worship. There, everyone could see and mock him.

then Samson said to the boy, who was holding his hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Judges 16:26

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This verse opens yet another glimpse into the situation of Samson's slavery. As you know, he is now blind. To add to the humiliation of Samson, this man who had frightened the whole nation of Philistines was now being led around by the hand by a little boy. What a contrast! This man had been the greatest power in that part of the world, but now he was the helpless individual he had become.

A question arises, "If Samson was blind, then how did he know that the building was being held up by pillars. There are several possibilities. He could have remembered the appearance of the building from before he lost his sight. This may not have been the first time that they had brought him out to humiliate him in this arena. He could have asked the little boy leading questions on a previous outing. The text is silent on this question. Samson's request sounded innocent enough. It is not hard to understand why the little boy would comply with such a request. People could laugh and make fun of him no matter where he stood in the arena.

This scenario also gives us another glimpse into the character of Samson. A lesser man might have given up and decided to just suffer out his slavery without making more trouble for himself. That was not the way Samson thought. He never forgot whom he was or what he was supposed to do. Even in the depth of humiliation and with no hope of relief in sight, still he was looking for an opportunity to defeat his enemies. We must consider whether this is undiluted revenge or the strength of character, which expressed itself in tenacious, determined commitment to destroy the evil that had devastated his life. We could conjecture about this, but we will have more evidence shortly. We will take up that issue when it becomes even more appropriate.

Now the house was full of men and women, and all the lords of the Philistines were there. And about 3,000 men and women were on the roof looking on while Samson was amusing them. Judges 16:27

Even a casual reading of this verse makes it very clear that this verse is a parenthesis. If you reread verses 26 and 28, you will note a strong emphasis on the impending possibility that he would destroy this whole gigantic arena. If that is the case, and it appears that it is, then this parenthesis highlights the extent of the carnage that would happen when he finally brought down the house.

The word "now" in this instance, suggests that an additional piece of information is being introduced. This information sheds light on the importance of previous verse. This is a huge gathering. We do not know exactly how many people were in this great temple, but it would not be surprising if there were at least 10,000 people there altogether. This gives us an idea of just how eager the people were to worship Dagon for the capture of Samson who had frightened all of them in the recent past. All the dignitaries of the nation were in this one building. Indeed, a major portion of the important individuals of government and culture among the Philistines were all present.

There are two ways to see this picture. There were 3,000 just on the roof of the temple. There is no estimate suggested concerning how many were in the seating below the roof. One could look at this as a massive victory celebration of Dagon over Jehovah. On the other hand, one could also say, look at the opportunity to devastate the entire Philistine culture.

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There is a picture here of the Philistine mind as well. They were here to praise Dagon for the victory over Jehovah regarding Samson. In their eagerness to rejoice over the humiliation of Jehovah and Samson, they forgot that his hair was getting long again. No one thought to make sure that he had his hair cut short and often. This is the picture of a whole people caught up in gloating. Very often when people gloat over their victory and taunt the ones they defeated, they become lax, feel invincible and become open to a surprise defeat all over again. The Philistines had that very experience.

Judges 16:28-31 - Samson Avenged Philistines in His Death

Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Judges 16:28

Samson prayed very carefully. He called to the "LORD." The word "LORD" is "Jehovah." This is important because the name Jehovah stood for two things:

1. It is the name for God that was associated with Justice. It is the name for God that is used repeatedly in the prophetic books as these men of God spoke on behalf of God in terms of judgment.
2. It is the name that highlights the eternality of God. For instance, in Exodus, chapter three, God called Moses to go back to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of bondage. When Moses asked what he should say when asked the name of the God who had sent him, he was told,

And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14

The words, "I am who I am," in Hebrew, are "YHWH asher YHWH" (אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה)

This is the second time that Samson's prayer has been recorded. You may remember that in 15:18, the author recorded another prayer of Samson's. On that occasion, Samson was famished because of thirst. He had just killed a thousand Philistines, but felt he was dying of thirst. He pleaded with God to deliver him from this frightening situation. God provided water.

As you look at verse 28, you will notice that there are three different references to God in this verse. They are as follows:

1. **"LORD"** - The word LORD is Jehovah.
2. **"Lord"** -? This is the name "Adonai." This is the very common name for God. Because the Jewish people could not speak the name "Jehovah" when they encountered this name in the text, they would use the name "adonai" in its place. This name literally means "owner," "master." This is the name by which a slave addressed his owner. This is a very personal name for God. It is often used to describe the sovereignty of God.
3. **"O GOD"** - The name GOD, used here, is "Elohim." The word "GOD" is usually used to translate the divine name "Elohim." This name focuses attention upon the omnipotent power of God. It is used repeatedly in situations where the mercy of God is being highlighted. It is quite certain that Samson had this in mind when he used this name in prayer. He wanted God to display this omnipotent power to de-

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stroy the Philistines. Samson also wanted God to display His mercy one more time in allowing Samson to have revenge over his enemies the Philistines when Samson knew that he did not deserve God's help.

Samson made two requests in this prayer:

1. **Please remember me** - The word "remember" is "zakar" (זָכַר) and means, "to mark so that it will be remembered." It was also used to convey the idea "to be male." This is because these people referred to a person by their father's name, but not by their mother's name. Thus the mother might well be forgotten. The word eventually came to mean, "focus your attention on," or "to think carefully about." This tells us something about what Samson believed. He felt that if God would forget him, he would have no chance at all. "O God remember me" is a plea for God to be actively involved in the dilemma in which Samson found himself at this time. The desperation of Samson is quite evident in this prayer.
2. **"Please strengthen me just this time"** - It is as though Samson knew that he had no right to appeal to God for anything; as though he also knew that he was not going to survive this whole experience.

Samson explained the purpose of his request to God - "that I may be avenged at once of the Philistines for my two eyes." There is a problem with this prayer. Samson requested God to give him revenge against the Philistines. Granted, the Philistines had earned the wrath of God. The Scriptures clearly teach, however, that vengeance belongs to the Lord. It would seem that Samson was out of line in his request. The revenge that Samson wanted was the lives of the thousands of Philistines gathered to humiliate him and God as well as to worship Dagon. It appears that Samson and David were men of similar passion concerning God. David asked God to do some horrible things to his enemies because they were mocking God in the process of attempting to destroy him. This is exactly the same situation in which Samson found himself. His words speak of revenge, but it appears that his motive focuses upon what these Philistines had done in relation to the God of Israel.

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars, on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left. Judges 16:29

Having prayed asking God for help, Samson still took the responsibility and did the job that he knew needed to be done. It appears certain that he planned in advance to pull down the building, that it was not a spur of the moment decision. This suggests that he must have known in advance about the structure of this temple in some detail.

And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. Judges 16:30

Samson prayed until he died. If you read the verse again, you will note that there is no record of a confession; no statement of repentance. Did he repent at leisure while he was grinding grain? Did he repent while the people were making fun of him and mocking Jehovah? We just do not know.

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Samson also said, "let me die..." Why would Samson ask to die? Most people in danger would beg to live. Some would ask if this weren't suicide. We must remember that there is a difference between committing suicide on the one hand and sacrificing oneself on behalf of someone else on the other. The results of the two actions are the same, but the motive is different. Both would die, but for different reasons. It appears that when Samson said, "let me die" he was not expressing his eagerness to end his life. He was, rather, sacrificing himself in order to stop the mockery of Jehovah that he could hear throughout this vast arena.

I see a different Samson in this arena than we saw when he was with Delilah. This in itself can represent a repentant spirit. Once he was bent upon only one thing, satisfying his own human desires. Now he was motivated to give himself to put an end to those who would mock God.

Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him, brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years. Judges 16:31

The fact that his family members came and buried Samson in his father's tomb says more than just where the corpse was placed. It identifies the fact that the family had not disowned him during his times of rebellion. In that culture, it was the place of the family to bury their dead. This would only be refused if the person had been disowned. With all his rebellion and failure to make wise choices, still the family claimed Samson as their own and gave him the honor of the family name even in his demise.

Looking back over the chapter, one wonders how would you evaluate the life of this man? We need to see how closely he came to fulfilling his intended purpose. In Judges 13:5, the author told the story of the angel speaking with the wife of Manoah. He said,

"For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Judges 13:5

The angel described the life of a person who lived in close relationship with God. This presents a problem. A close relationship with God does not fit the kinds of things Samson did. He had an intimate relationship with a harlot who was probably a temple prostitute for the place of worship of their fertility cult. He was moved by revenge, which is not like God. He lied to Delilah and toyed with her efforts to trap him on four different occasions. Again this is not what one would expect from a godly man. Still, God chose this man before he was born to carry out this mission.

To add to the confusion of our search, there is a verse in the New Testament that deals with the life of Samson. The author of Hebrews wrote,

And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, Hebrews 11:32

Samson was included in faith's hall of fame. The author did not tell why his name was included. We just know that he was there at the same level of importance as Isaiah. Again, we must ask ourselves, "What was there about this man that would qualify him to be considered a towering example of faith?"

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It appears that the answer can be found in the words of the angel to the wife of Manoah. Remember, he said to her,

"For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Judges 13:5

Read the sentence again. Observe that the angel said, "And he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." It does not say that he would be able to completely accomplish this task. It just states that he would begin the process. If you look at the Old Testament history, you will note that the Philistines did not disappear at this point, but once Samson brought down the place of worship and in so doing killed the Philistine leadership, they were never again the threat they had been for so long. To this extent, Samson accomplished the task for which God brought him into the world.

How does one deal with the sinful things Samson did? He was guilty of disobedience because he kept company with pagans who hated Jehovah. He lied to Delilah. He failed to give the praise to God for the great power that God had placed in his life. He even prayed to ask God to help him get revenge upon the Philistines.

The answer to this part of the question can be found in Judges 16:30. It does not say that Samson asked God to forgive him. It does show that there was a change in this man. He had spent the entirety of the story satisfying his own personal needs and desires. At this point his attitude changed. Here he pleaded with God to help him die with the Philistines. He saw his own life as expendable if the enemies of God could be destroyed.

Naturally, the question arises, was this suicide, which the scriptures decry, or was it self-sacrifice in order to vindicate the name of God? People will differ on this count, but it appears that this was a man living a sacrificial life, even when he was about to die.

It seems that this is one of the best pictures of the mercy of God in the Old Testament. There is no doubt that in the past, Samson had been far from saintly. Nevertheless, God forgave his past, strengthened him for his task and rewarded Samson's determination to be faithful no matter what the cost. The evil of the past was forgiven. It was as though he had never done any of these things. That is the great message of mercy that one can find in this book.

Conclusion

There are a number of different pictures of what God is like in this chapter.

1. **God is patient and just.** 16:20 - He allows His people to make their own choices, even if those choices are to rebel and disobey Him.
2. **God is gentle.** 16:20 - God eventually departed from Samson. God is patient with our rebellion, but eventually He will allow us our rebellion. He will not force His loving presence upon us.
3. **God is faithful.** 16:20 - God is candid. Samson knew he was not to allow his hair to be cut. When he toyed with temptation, God allowed Samson's strength to be withdrawn.

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4. **God is just.** 16:21 - God not only allows us freedom to choose, He also allows us the consequences of our choices and actions.
5. **God is merciful.** 16:28, 30 - God heard the cry of the guilty sinner and answered his prayer though he did not deserve such consideration.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 17
MICAH HIRED A LEVITE FOR A PRIEST
JUDGES 17:1 – 13

1. There are two paragraphs in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

17:1-6	
17:7-13	

2. In Judges 17:1-6, Micah stole his mother's silver.
- In 17:1, 2, the text raises two main questions.
 - What are the two questions?
 - What can we learn from these problems?
 - In 17:3, Micah returned the silver to his mother.
 - This verse presents a problem. How would you identify this problem?
 - What explanation can we offer for this situation?
 - In 17:4, the mother did something that is quite confusing. Hint: Read verses 3 and 4 together.
 - What is the confusion?
 - How can we understand this confusing situation?
 - Read 17:56 very carefully. What errors can you detect on the part of Micah?
 - How would you express the content of 17:6 in your own words.
3. In Judges 17:7-13, Micah hired a Levite to be his priest.
- In 17:7, there is, again, the potential problem in this verse. What is the potential problem?
 - In 17:8, the author described the Levites situation. How would you interpret the words "to stay wherever he might find a place"?
 - There are some implications here concerning God. What are they?
 - What does this tell us about conditions in Israel?
 - In 17:9, 10, Micah invited the priest to be his priest.
 - Why would this be wrong?
 - What are the implications of such an arrangement?
 - Read 17:10, 11 together.
 - Who is "the young man"?
 - What inconsistency do you discover in these verses?
 - In 17:12, Micah consecrated the priest in
 - What are the implications of this action?

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- (2). What problems could this create?
- f. Read 17:3 very carefully.
 - (1). What information has the author shared with us on this issue?
 - (2). What are the implications of this statement?
- 4. What positive statements, if any, about God can you find in this chapter?

LESSON 17: JUDGES 17:1-13

MICAHI HIRED A LEVITE FOR A PRIEST

There are two paragraphs in the brief seventeenth chapter of Judges. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

17:1-6	Micah Stole the Silver; Idol Dedicated to Jehovah
17:7-13	Micah Hired a Levite as Priest

Judges 17:1-6 – Micah Stole the Silver; Idol dedicated to Jehovah

Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. Judges 17:1

Observe that this is an abrupt change in the direction of the book. The author gives us a bit of information about Micah – he was from the hill country. The author does not attempt to explain this fact. We can't be certain, but this often meant that he came from a group of people who had been routed by the Philistines and took refuge in the hills and caves.

And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD." Judges 17:2

There are several problems to deal with in this verse. Observe the progression of this verse:

1. Micah took the silver
2. His mother placed a curse on the thief, not knowing that it was her son.
3. Micah confessed his theft to his mother.
4. His mother pronounced a blessing upon her guilty son.

Frankly, that would not have been a common scenario. A curse just wasn't changed or set aside, no matter what might happen as a result.

Secondly, the mother appears to be in charge of the family. This certainly was not the general practice in that time and place. If the father was dead, the eldest son took immediate control of the entire family, including his mother. In this case, however, the mother appears to have taken control of the family. It is clearly stated that she has control of the family wealth, which was sizeable. Everyone who heard of this would have been stunned.

Mother also made a religious decision. This would be unheard of in that culture. The religious life of the family was the responsibility of the father. If he was deceased or incapacitated, it became the responsibility of the eldest son, but never the mother or daughters.

There is also a question about the curse. The mother placed a curse on the one who stole her silver. Such a curse could not be retracted. Rather than invoking the curse upon the discovered thief, her son, she promptly pronounced a blessing upon him. Granted, she

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may have done this for joy, rejoicing that the money was not lost and her son had cleared his conscience. Again, it may have been done for fear that the curse might destroy him.

The fact that he confessed the theft suggests that he may have felt she would not invoke the curse simply because he was her son.

Observe that Micah's mother used the name "LORD" to identify God. This is the name "Jehovah" which was used in situations where the justice of God was being highlighted. It is most interesting that she felt that this would be justice.

He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you. Judges 17:3

It is interesting that Micah returned the silver to his mother. Surprisingly, the mother then dedicated the 1,100 pieces of silver to the Lord. The words "wholly dedicated" are put very forcefully. The words are "hakadosh hikadoshti" (הַקְדֵּשׁ קִדְשְׁתִּי). It is like saying, "In sanctifying, she sanctified the money." The author used repetition to make a strong statement even more forceful. He wanted it to be clear that this money had been set apart for God.

The mother used the word "for." This word suggests the purpose for which she made the dedication, "For my son to make a graven image."

This presents a problem. Micah's mother dedicated the money to the LORD so that her son could make a graven image for God. One of the problems is that God repeatedly forbade Israel from making or keeping a graven image. One might assume that these images were of a bull like the golden calf in the book of Exodus. The problem with this is that the golden calf, in Exodus, roused the fierce anger of God. We know that throughout this book of Judges and the period of the Judges, there were many people who wanted to make a graven image to God much like the carved statues of Dagon whom the Philistines worshipped.

So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah. Judges 17:4

The word "so" indicates that an explanation is forthcoming. The author indicated that the mother gave 200 pieces of silver to the silversmith. One immediately wonders why 200 pieces? Why not 300? Or, why not 100 pieces?

It is possible that she took the penalty for theft, (the return of the stolen property plus 20% of the value.) The problem would be this. Twenty percent of 1100 pieces would be 220 pieces of silver and not 200. We should note that the 20% was a very specific number and should be strictly adhered to. This is not explained in the text, but appears to be the intent of the passage.

Observe also, that Micah's mother gave this silver to the silversmith for the purpose of making them "into a graven image and a molten image. These are not synonyms.

- a. A graven image is a carved image usually carved from stone or very hard wood.

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- b. A molten image is an image that was poured or cast in a mold.

Another problem presents itself. These two images, which the law strictly forbade, were kept in Micah's house. An obedient Jew could neither make nor keep these images in his house.

And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest. Judges 17:5

What a shock! Could a Jew really do such a thing? He did. The word "shrine" literally means "house of gods." It is exactly the same kind of place the Philistines had for their gods. Again this is the kind of thing God constantly instructed Israel to flee.

Micah made the "house of gods" for Jehovah, but this reduced Jehovah to the same level as any of the gods. God was greater than that. He could not be limited to being an image on a shelf. In spite of the fact that this was a shrine for Jehovah, it was still an act of direct disobedience and they knew it.

Micah committed another act of disobedience. He was an Ephraimite. There were no priests who originated in the tribe of Ephraim. There were Levitical priests who lived in the territory of Ephraim, but no Ephraimite priests. Micah designated his son as his priest. The problem was that only God could sanctify a person to be a priest. In this instance, Micah played God, but to his sorrow.

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. Judges 17:6

This verse appears like a parenthesis in the story. This is the first time that this statement appears in Judges, but it will not be the last. This is a very tragic, shocking statement to consider. We will say more about this later.

Judges 17:7-13 – Micah Hired a Levite as Priest

Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. Judges 17:7

Again, the word "now" suggests a change in the direction of the book. The facts of this verse present a serious problem. Observe what the author said about this man:

- a. he was of the family of Judah.
- b. He was a Levite.

It is possible for a Levite to live in Bethlehem. There were many Levites who lived there. It is not possible for a man from the tribe of Judah to be a Levite. One wonders how to account for this confusion. There are a few possibilities:

- a. It is possible the people were so lax in their faith that they did not take the lineage of the Levites too seriously when they needed a priest. This would certainly fit the other information we have about the spiritual conditions of the times.
- b. It is possible, but not probable, that he was from a Levitical family living in Bethlehem and was dealt with as a Bethlehemite.

The former possibility seems most plausible, but the truth is that we do not know.

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Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. Judges 17:8

There is a sad comment hidden in this verse. The author said, as kindly as possible, that the Levite, whatever his background, had to look after his own needs. The Law forbade that. The people were commanded to care for the needs of the priestly families. This, obviously, was not being done. The people of the community apparently refused, or were unable to provide for him and he had to go and look for a way to sustain himself.

The author wrote, "To stay wherever he might find a place." His desperation was highlighted by the fact that he had no particular place to go. He was going to go wherever he could find food and shelter. This identifies the boundaries of survival. He was a lot like a refugee or the modern day homeless. The fact that he went to Ephraim gives us an insight into the conditions in Israel. Judah was in poor shape. They refused or were unable to provide for the priest. Ephraim had a terrible reputation. They were at a much lower spiritual level than most of the other tribes. Still, that is where the Levite went. For a person to go to Ephraim for this kind of help was a real symbol of his desperation.

And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place." Judges 17:9

There are some that might feel that Micah's question was inappropriate. It was not. His inquiry was expected of a person who met a traveler. The answer would tell the questioner what he was expected to do for the traveler. The law of the desert required that they provide food and shelter for the traveler. He was merely doing what he was expected to do.

The Levite responded with the truth. He was a Levite. He came from Bethlehem in Judah. This should have shocked Micah. The sad part is that it does not appear to have shocked him at all. The Levite had no particular destination in mind. He was like a refugee. He would stay wherever he could find food and shelter.

Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance." So the Levite went in. Judges 17:10

It is interesting that Micah invited the Levite to come and be his priest when his son was already fulfilling that ministry. It could be that his son did not like the job. It might be that his son did not know how to be a priest. For whatever reason, Micah extended the invitation and it was accepted.

Micah invited the Levite to be "a FATHER AND A PRIEST TO ME." Priests and prophets were often given the endearing title of "father." Micah was inviting him to be his spiritual counselor. Micah made a generous offer. This suggests that Micah already was doing very well financially. There was, however, a problem with the offer that Micah made. He was an Ephraimite appointing a Levite to his task. He made him a specific, but generous wage offer rather than the offerings promised by God. We cannot be sure, but if the Levite received the offerings, as the law commanded, he might have fared even better than he would with the offer Micah made. Everything about this arrangement was contra-

MICAH HIRED A LEVITE FOR A PRIEST

ry to the design God had given concerning the sons of Levi. The Levite was willing to accept the offer. This probably reflects his desperation rather than the wisdom of his choice.

And the Levite agreed to live with the man; and the young man became to him like one of his sons. Judges 17:11

There is some confusion about the identity of the person the author called "the young man." This confusion can be clarified by looking at verse 12 where the author identified the young man as the Levite. This, however, brings a different problem to the surface. In verse 10, Micah invited the Levite to "be a father and priest to me." In this verse, however, the author reports that the Levite, "the young man," became like one of his sons." The author made no effort to explain this reversal of roles. The problem that this creates is that the Levite came under the control of Micah. The Levites were never under the control of anyone other than the Levites.

This fact also means that the Levite was cared for as though he was one of the family. This arrangement gave the Levite a sense of security, but it also gave Micah leverage over the actions of the Levite. This is something that God would never have allowed.

So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. Judges 17:12

One of the difficulties with this verse is that it sounds so harmless, but, in fact, it creates a severe problem. Micah consecrated the Levite. This made him Micah's priest and not God's. They started out their relationship with a bad situation. No good could ever come from it.

Read the verse again. There is a certain possessiveness that is expressed in this verse. The Levite became Micah's priest. This is like saying he belonged to Micah. He lived in Micah's house. Anyone who lived in a man's house was under his control and command. God, through the centuries, had carefully arranged the lives of the levitical families so that they were only responsible to Him. This arrangement worked just the opposite.

Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest." Judges 17:13

At this point, Micah's motivation comes to the surface. He was keenly aware of the possible financial benefit he could realize if he had his own priest. The people in that day had a superstition that the presence of a priest could bring financial benefit. It is reasonable to believe that some of the priests might have encouraged such an attitude. It would give them a position of power and an entree with people of means. There are several instances where priests were motivated by financial gain.

The other side of this is that Micah was not above financial advancement even if it meant doing God's work in his own way. The upshot of this is that Micah was not only disobedient, but he was superstitious as well. This experience also gives us an insight into Micah's view of God. His actions suggest that he believed that God could be moved to bless if we will do good things. Otherwise, the blessing will not come. This is an attitude and outlook that was prevalent in most forms of idolatry. Unfortunately, it is present among some Christians as well.

Conclusion

There are some faulty understandings about God in this chapter. Even these are important to know. If one takes the false idea about God and identifies the opposite, you will have a positive teaching about God.

17:2 – Micah's mother pronounced a curse on the thief. This involved God. When she discovered her son was the thief, she changed the curse to a blessing. This is manipulation. You cannot manipulate God to fit your convenience.

17:3 - Micah's mother dedicated some of the money to the Lord so that her son could make a graven image to the Lord. For her, sacrifice was more important than obedience. The opposite of this is that God considers our obedience much more important than our sacrifice.

17:5 – Micah had household gods as well as Jehovah. He forgot the first commandment. The opposite of this is that God is a jealous God and will not be one of many gods in our lives.

17:13 – Micah felt God would prosper him because he had a Levite as a priest. The positive discovery here is that God cannot be bought. Micah did not discern that he had made the Levite his priest rather than God's priest.

As we continue this study, we begin to gain understandings about the format of the book. The further we get in this book, the worse the conditions seem to be. We will have to watch to see if this is consistently true. This is the first chapter in which there was not a single, positive picture of God. There are negative pictures which when turned around reveal truths about our God.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18
THE DANITES ABUSED MICAH'S PRIEST
JUDGES 18:1 – 31

1. There are six paragraphs in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

18:1-6	
18:7-10	
18:11-13	
18:14-20	
18:21-26	
18:27-31	

2. In Judges 18:1-6, the Danites asked the Levite to inquire concerning their success.
- a. In 18:1, the tribe of Dan was looking for their inheritance in land.
 - (1). In this verse it says, “In those days there was no king in Israel.” What does this have to do with the rest of the verse?
 - (2). How can we account for the fact that the text says, “for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. In Judges 1:34, however, the men of Dan were unable to drive the Amorites out of their allotted land?
 - b. In 18:2, 3, Dan sent spies to search out their land.
 - (1). There is a problem in these verses.
 - (a). What is the problem?
 - (b). How can we explain this problem?
 - (2). How can we explain the fact that the spies recognized the Levites voice?
 - c. In 18:4, there are two problems with which we must deal.
 - (1). What are these problems?
 - (2). How can we explain these problems?
 - (3). In 17:9, this person referred to himself as a “Levite.” In this verse, and from this point on, he called himself a “priest.” What is the significance of this change?
 - d. In 18:5, 6, The spies asked the Levite to Inquire of God on their behalf.
 - (1). The spies did something wrong. What was it?
 - (2). Why did God answer their request even though they were disobedient?
3. In Judges 18:7-10, the Spies of Dan search out the land.
- a. In 18:7, The author tells what the spies found.

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- (1).How would you describe their report?
- (2).How does the author describe what the spies found?
- b. In 18:8, 9, the spies gave their report.
 - (1).What did they report to the people of Dan?
 - (2).What admonitions did they give?
- c. In 18:10 the spies said, "God has given it into your hand"
 - (1).Think about this a moment. Is there a problem you can discover here?
 - (2).How would you explain this?
4. In Judges 18:11-13, 600 soldiers left to attack Laish
 - a. In 18:11, 12, the 600 men left their homes.
 - (1).Why would they only take 600 soldiers for this engagement?
 - (2).What can we learn from these facts?
 - b. In 18:13, they stopped at the home of Micah. Why would they do this?
5. In 18:14-20, the soldiers took the Levite and the graven images.
 - a. In 18:14, the spy told the soldiers about Micah's home.
 - (1).What, if anything, was he suggesting?
 - (2).Study the verse. Why would he say this as he did?
 - b. In 18:15, the 600 soldiers came to the house of Micah. If you were Micah, how would you have felt when the soldiers greeted you?
 - c. In 18:16, it became clear that this was not a social call.
 - (1).What would have been the first clue?
 - (2).Now, in view of this verse, if you were Micah, how would you feel?
 - d. In 18:17, the five spies stole Micah's idols.
 - (1).In view of their mission, why would they do this?
 - (2).Read this verse from the perspective of the priest. Seeing both the disappearing idols and the 600-armed soldiers, how would you feel?
 - e. In 18:18, the priest confronted the five spies. How would you describe the question he put to them?
 - f. In 18:19, the five spies answered the priest's question.
 - (1).How would you describe their response?
 - (2).There is a double threat and a double invitation in this verse.
 - (a). What are the threats?
 - (b). What are the two invitations?
 - (3).The five spies asked the priest a question. On the basis of the text, what were they saying?
 - g. In 18:20, the priest went with the soldiers.
 - (1).There is a curious contrast between verses 19 and 20.
 - (a). What is the contrast?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18

- (b).How can we account for this?
 - (2).What does this tell you about the priest?
- 6. In Judges 18:21-26, Micah unsuccessfully chased after the soldiers.
 - a. In 18:21, the soldiers left the home of Micah.
 - (1).What strategic move did they make?
 - (2).Why did they make this move?
 - b. In 18:22, Micah's neighbors came to his defense.
 - (1).Why did they take so long to respond?
 - (2).Why did they go with Micah to chase after the soldiers?
 - c. In 18:23, Micah and his neighbors caught up with the soldiers.
 - (1).What was the response of the soldiers?
 - (2).What did the soldiers infer by their question?
 - d. In 18:24, Micah responded to the question of the soldiers.
 - (1).How would you describe Micah's emotions on the basis of this verse?
 - (2).What was he saying by the questions he asked?
 - c. In 18:25, the soldiers responded to Micah's emotional charge.
 - (1).In view of the fact that the soldiers stole Micah's idols and their response to him in 18:24, how would you describe their response to him in 18:25?
 - (2).What type of political relationship does this encounter reflect?
 - d. In 18:26, Micah reacted to the threat of the soldiers.
 - (1).What attitude is reflected in the actions of the soldiers?
 - (2).What was the cause of Micah's reaction?
 - (3).Describe Micah's feelings as pictured as pictured in this verse.
- 7. In Judges 18:27-31, the men of Dan conquered the land.
 - a. In 18:27, the soldiers moved from Micah's home to Laish.
 - (1).Why would the soldiers want to take the priest and the idols with them into battle?
 - (2).There is a confusing problem in this verse.
 - (a). What is this confusing problem?
 - (b).How can we explain their actions?
 - b. In 18:28, 29, the author explained part of the reason that Laish was defeated.
 - (1).Reread 18:27-29 very carefully. The word "they" appears four times in these verses. Identify the people referred to buy each use of the word.
 - (2).How does this help the interpretation?
 - c. In 18:30, the soldiers of Dan set up the idols they stole from Micah.
 - (1).In view of what God had done for them, how can we explain what they did in this verse?
 - (2).Read Judges 18:19 and then read 18:30.

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- (a). What problem do you observe?
- (b). How can we explain what happened?
- (3). What do you learn from the fact that Jonathan and his sons were priests in Dan "until the day of the captivity of the land"?
- d. In 18:31, the author gave us a time designation dealing with the time the people of Dan worshipped the idols they took from Micah.
 - (1). From a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, find the year concerning which the author was speaking.
 - (2). Compare this with the time designation the author used in 18:30
- 8. Review your study of this chapter. What did you find concerning the nature of God in the chapter?

LESSON 18: JUDGES 18:1 - 31

THE DANITES ABUSED MICAH'S PRIEST

There are six paragraphs in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Judges. There is a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

18:1-6	Danites Ask Priest to Ask God Concerning Future
18:7-10	Five Danites Spy Out Their Land
18:11-13	600 Danite Soldiers Come to Micah
18:14-20	Danites Took Priest and Graven Images
18:21-26	Micah Chased Danites Unsuccessfully
18:27-31	Danites Conquered Land and Set Up Graven Images

Judges 18:1-6 - Danites Ask God Concerning Future

In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel.
Judges 18:1

This is the second time the author has mentioned the fact that there was no king in Israel. Again, there had never been a king in Israel and would not be for many decades to come. The author repeated this shocking statement for purposes of strong emphasis. The statement was intended to convey the idea that there was no line of authority in the land whatsoever. This would be a very shocking statement for people in Israel because they were accustomed to having a very strong line of authority in the individual families. The author was saying that even this had broken down. Now, Israel was a people who lived in anarchy. This statement identified the social and spiritual condition of the people of Israel. It was not good.

The text does not give us any specific dates or lengths of time, but this has been at least 200 years after the people entered the land of Canaan. At this late date, the tribe of Dan had not even entered the land allotted to them. The text said, "Until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes." Before the death of Joshua, all of the tribes were told of the area of the land of promise that was set aside for them as a tribe. This was, also, true for the tribe of Dan. If you go back to Judges 1:34, you will note that the Danites knew exactly where their territory would be. It is not that they had not been told of their allotment. It was that they had not driven the enemy people out of their assigned territory.

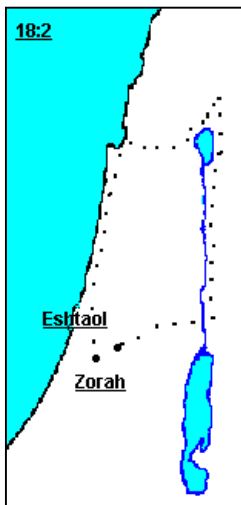
This means that for over 200 years, the Danites had been living in territory that belonged to other tribes. This would not set well with these other tribes because it deprived them of grazing land that they could use for their own flocks. The Danites had been a thorn in the side of their fellow Jewish tribes for over two centuries. That took a lot of patience.

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Another consequence of this situation had to do with the way people become comfortable in a new area. After 200 years, even the people of Dan would be loath to move after they and their forefathers had gotten used to the area where they now lived. Another facet of this situation is that the idolatrous people who had lived in the land had become accustomed to living there and were far less likely to be inclined to move away. The longer they lived there, the less likely they would be to want to move somewhere else. This means that immediately following the entrance into Israel, the Jews would have been far more willing to go and help their fellow tribes get rid of the pagan people who lived in the land. At the same time, the pagan people would be far less likely to see the Jewish captors leave their area to go and help the people of Dan without creating an uprising at one level or another.

The text states that at this time the tribe of Dan was seeking its own land. There was a growing discontent with seeing every other tribe living in their own land and they were not living in theirs. It made them feel a bit like refugees.

So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go, search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. Judges 18:2



Observe that the leaders of Dan sent five men to spy out their projected homeland. These men came from the area of Zorah and Eshtaol. The map will identify their locations. You may remember that this is the area from which Samson came. This was an area where the Philistines were strong and particularly fierce. On the map, you can see that there were two choices of direction that these five spies could take. They could go west to the Mediterranean coast and then go north to Carmel and across the plain of Megiddo and then north to the area which had been assigned to Dan. They could also go east to Ephraim and then north along either the east or west side of the Jordan river and on north to the area assigned to Dan. The route through Ephraim was much more direct, but more difficult to travel.

On their way through Ephraim, they came to the house of Micah at the time when they should stop for the night. The hospitality code of the Near East required that if a traveler came to your home, you must care for his food and shelter for at least three days.

When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there, and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?" Judges 18:3

This verse gives us a clue concerning why they stopped for the night with Micah rather than with some other neighbor. The text says, "they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite." This gives us a clue concerning the travels of the Levite. These men of Dan apparently knew the Levite well enough to distinguish his voice from the voices of others. This probably means that he had visited their area and had not found a place where

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he could find food and shelter. No one knows how many places this Levite had visited in search of a home. It could also mean that they recognized the trained voice of a Levite. Wording of the text suggests that they had known this particular Levite previously and were renewing an old acquaintance.

The five spies asked the Levite a series of questions:

- a. **"Who brought you here?"** Because he was a Levite, it was appropriate to ask this question. A Levite serving at the Jerusalem temple certainly would not be living this far away from the place of his service. As a Levite, he would have neither the funds nor the time to travel this substantial distance between the times he would be serving in Jerusalem.
- b. **"What are you doing in this place?"** This too was an appropriate question. As a Levite, he was available for no other vocation than a priest. As a Jerusalem priest, he would not be able to live this far north and still get back and forth from his home in order to be able to serve at the Jerusalem temple. This was not a city of refuge where Levites would live. No one traveled just for the fun of traveling.
- c. **"What do you have here?"** A more literal way to translate this part of the verse might be, "What to you here?" Whichever way you translate these words, the idea is clear. These men are confused about what brought the Levite to this place and what keeps him here. They were searching for his purpose and could not find it. Thus they asked, in confusion, What would bring you, a Levite, to this place?"

We must remember that these men are spies. They need to know everything they can discover about everything along the way. This situation, obviously, was unusual if not suspicious. A spy can never afford to be surprised. Asking questions is the best prevention from such a situation.

And he said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me, and I have become his priest." Judges 18:4

This is a perfect example of the selectivity of this author. The details of the Levite's answer were not significant to the message the author was trying to convey. He encapsulated it in the words "thus and so has Micah done to me."

The Levite was straightforward with his answer. He told them the truth. He did not even try to deceive them. This is important to know about him.

The Levite spoke of himself as being "hired." This is quite different from the means of support God directed for His servants. It is different in that there was no faith needed in order to be supported day by day. It is different in that the priest supported in God's way has no allegiance to another human being in order to maintain support. He is free to trust God for support and obey God without concern over how others interpret that obedience. That was extremely important when the levitical system was developed and was just as important as this Levite entered into an arrangement which conflicted with what God had in mind for him.

The Levite also said, "I have become his priest." There is no way to tell just how intentional this statement was. He was absolutely right. He had become a priest who belonged to Micah. He no longer served as a priest of God.

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And they said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous." Judges 18:5

There were occasions when people asked God what was going to happen, and He answered that request. Basically, however, the request of these Danite spies was an expression of their dealings with idolaters. In most every idolatrous culture there was a provision to seek to discover the future. If one can ask an oracle about the future, then no faith is required except faith in the answer you receive. We must remember, also, that the thing they were doing was obedience to the command of God, but about 200 years after the fact. This can hardly be considered obedience.

And the priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the LORD'S approval." Judges 18:6

In Judges 17:9, this man called himself a Levite. In this verse, and hereafter, he is called a priest. This is not a casual difference. A Levite is of the priestly family, and served as assistant to the priests. The priests, on the other hand, were the official worship leaders for the people. They served as the mediators between sinful people and a holy God. Though the Levites did not come from the priestly side of the Levitical family, he was now going to perform that function. The text used the title "priest" to identify his function rather than his family identity.

We know what the priest said, but the text never states that God gave this answer to the priest. You will remember that we previously commented on the fact that this Levite told them the truth about other things. This may well have been the reason they were able to trust in what he said.

By the same token, the text does not say that the Levite manufactured the answer he gave the spies. We can only assume that the answer did, in fact, come from God. If that is the case, then we should note that there are several expressions of mercy expressed here.

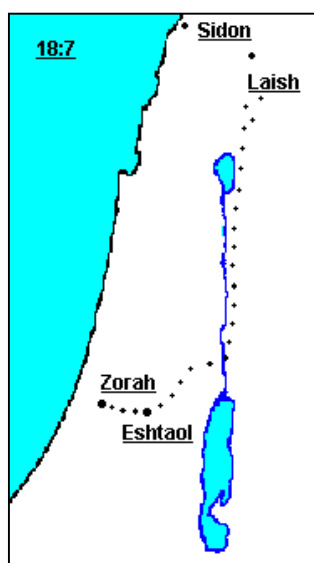
- a. Though the Danites had disobeyed God for two centuries, God still heard the request and answered them.
- b. Despite the fact that the Levite was ministering in a way that was unacceptable to the divine intention, despite the fact that he used graven images in worship; God apparently heard his request on behalf of the spies and answered their inquiry.
- c. This was the kind of inquiry that idolaters would make of their deity. Nevertheless, God answered the request.
- d. God promised to give them a prosperous journey despite their centuries long disobedience. Even in this book, which many feel has no expressions of mercy, the mercy of God continues to reveal itself over and over again.

Judges 18:7-10 - Five Danites Spy Out Their Land

Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were in it living in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land, and they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone. Judges 18:7

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On this map, you can see the route traveled by these five spies from Ephraim to the city of Laish. Notice that they did not go to the area on the Mediterranean coast, which had been prescribed for them.



The city of Laish was later renamed “Dan.” This is a trip of about three to four days, if you walk fast. The fact that there was rugged terrain in the area means that it might take even longer. The author described how the people of Laish lived.

a. **“Living in security”** – The word for “security” is “be-tach” (בְּטָח). The primary root of the word means “a place of refuge,” “a place of unworried safety.” It is the feeling of confidence one senses when there appears to be no threat to one’s safety. Some might call this security laxness. They felt no need for concern over the security of their situation.

b. **“After the manner of the Sidonians”** – This is an interesting description. People who live isolated lives do not need to maintain the good will of other groups around them. We see this repeatedly in the lives of the people who lived in the desert to the east of the Dead Sea. On the other hand, people who de-

pended upon commerce and trade were dependant upon the good will of those to whom they might sell or from whom they might buy. That was the situation of the Sidonians. They lived on the seacoast. It was in their best interest to remain aloof from all the political and military intrigue, rampant in the area. Because of this they were able to live without fear of attack.

c. **“Quiet and secure”** – This statement refers to the Sidonians, but it also describes the way the spies found the people of Laish. The word “quiet” is “shaqat” (שָׁקַט) and has nothing to do with the sound level. It is usually used in a figurative sense. It can be translated “in repose,” or “to have rest.” The presence of leisure was and is a symbol of freedom from oppression. That is exactly the idea the author was trying to convey.

The word “secure” is exactly the same word that was used when the author said they were “living in security.” The second use of this word is a way of adding strong emphasis to the first statement.

d. **“There was no ruler humiliating them for anything in the land.”** – People tend to think of danger and threats as coming from people outside one’s national group. There is a certain danger that is posed in this way. Particularly in that day, there was a very real threat to one’s sense of security that was brought about by those who had rule over them. This idea gave rise to the saying, “He may not always be right, but he is always the king.” The author expressed the fact that these people not only had freedom from external threat, but they were also free from the internal dangers posed by political individuals and groups.

e. **“They were far from the Sidonians”** – As indicated earlier, the Sidonians tried to maintain good relationships with everyone because of the commercial value this presented to them. By the same token, everyone was keenly aware that these people came from a band of people who were fearless in battle and unlike the Jewish people had no

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fear of the Mediterranean. They thought of the Sidonians much as people today think of astronauts – people who are far away and a different kind of human being. There was at least 50 to 75 miles distance between Laish and Sidon. This meant that Sidon, as powerful as they might be, was no threat to the people of Laish. On the other hand, because they were so far away, they could not be counted on for any help in case of attack. The people of Laish lived a long distance from Sidon and therefore felt no possible threat from these wealthy, powerful people.

- f. **“They had no dealings with anyone.”** – These were a people who were self-sufficient. They had no need to have commercial dealings with any outside group. That being the case, they never had to worry about having broken relationships with any group upon whom they might be dependent. This also meant that because of their distance from neighbors, there was no pressure on them to have mutual defense treaties with anyone. In most instances mutual defense treaties meant that you were going to be involved in military action over which you had no control and which you did not create.

The author used all of these descriptions to give us a vivid picture of just how comfortable and peaceful the people of Laish really were. The last thing they would have been concerned about was that they might be attacked. That is exactly the picture that the author was trying to paint.

When they came back to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers said to them, "What do you report?" Judges 18:8

Another expression of the selective reporting can be seen in the fact that there is no report of the return home of the spies. The way this verse is recorded suggests that the people of Dan were very excited to hear the report that these men brought back.

And they said, "Arise, and let us go up against them; for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And will you sit still? Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land." Judges 18:9

It is interesting that the spies first gave their recommendations and then gave the details of what they found. They reported that they should immediately go up against the city of Laish.

They followed this admonition with a brief picture of what they found. They said that the land of Laish was “very good.” The name “Laish” suggests an area that is reasonably flat and near a good water supply. Indeed, this is the source of the Jordan River. Though the headwaters of the Jordan are greatly enhanced by the runoff from Mt. Hermon, it finds its source in the area of Laish. To any group of people in that part of the world, it would be exciting to them to hear of a place with such a rich water supply.

The excitement of the spies is contagious. This is evident in their admonition, “And will you sit still?” This is a cry of disbelief. Knowing how great the land was and how unprotected it was, the spies could not believe that the people were no more excited about this than they were.

Observe what they said, “Do not delay to go, to enter, to possess the land.” They described a process. This process did not leave any room for possible defeat. It was like

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saying, we can go and take the land and never worry about the possibility that we will be thwarted.

"When you enter, you shall come to a secure people with a spacious land; for God has given it into your hand, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth." Judges 18:10

Having vented their pent-up emotions about what they had discovered, the spies then turned to give a fuller description of the land they had searched out. They described the land of Laish by several pieces of information:

- a. **"You shall come to a secure people"** – The spies were assuring their fellow Danites that these people were so secure that they were lax about their security. Any army would love to face this kind of a foe. When defenses are lax, the people can be surprised and easily defeated. That is exactly what this was designed to say to the people.
- b. **"A spacious land."** – For nearly 200 years, the Danites lived in a very small area with little in the way of accommodations. The very thought of living in an area that was spacious was more like a dream than reality. It was an area that was intended to provide for only a part of the tribe, but the whole tribe had to live there for a long time. They could only dream about how wonderful this might be. It was totally beyond their ability to imagine.
- c. **"God has given it into your hand"** – One wonders how the spies knew that God had given the land into their hands. It could be that they were convinced by what they saw in Laish. It could, also, be that they remembered what the Levite had told them at the house of Micah. The truth is that we just do not know the source of their confidence.
- d. **"There is no lack of anything that is on the earth."** These people had lived through a lot of crowded conditions. They knew a lot about lacking many things necessary in life. Now they were faced with the prospect of having everything they needed for the first time in their lives.

Put yourself in the place of these people. All of your life you had been forced to make-do with what you had. You had hope of having sufficiency someday in the future, but for their lifetime that had not been the case. Now the spies promise you that there would be no lack of anything you need to live a life of comfort and security. The joy and exhilaration of such a discovery would be almost more than you could contain.

Judges 18:11-13 - 600 Danite Soldiers Came to Micah

Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. Judges 18:11

This, of course, is a very small portion of the men of Dan. Numbers chapter 26 indicated that there were 64,000 men over 20 years of age in the tribe of Dan. This causes one to ask the question, Why would they choose the number 600? Why not 6,000? There are many possibilities, of course, but it appears that they were convinced that it would not take much to conquer the city. They were about to take the great risk of going to battle with an army too small for the task at hand.

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Notice, however, that the text does say, “six hundred men armed with weapons of war.” That is significant. During much of their history, the armies of Israel were seldom armed with weapons of war. More often than not they used knives designed for butchering or else farm implements as their weapons for battle.

And they went up and camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Therefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan to this day; behold, it is west of Kiriath-jearim. Judges 18:12

As you can see on the map, there are two locations mentioned in this verse. The places mentioned are as follows:

1. Kiriath-jearim which is located in the very northern part of Judah.
2. Mahaneh-dan is located just west of Kiriath-jearim and close enough that some have identified them as being the same place. That cannot be because of this verse, “it is west of Kiriath-jearim.”

In this area, when they went to the east, they were climbing into the foothills of the mountains, which, though low, were more difficult to traverse than the sea route.

They were going to take one of the two trade routes in that section of Israel. This route went east across the Jordan River and north to their destination. The other trade route went north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and then turned east through the valley of Megiddo, turning north to their destination. An army is always uneasy when they are unable to travel on flat land. The more uneven the terrain, the greater the possibility of being surprised and possibly devastated.

And they passed from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. Judges 18:13

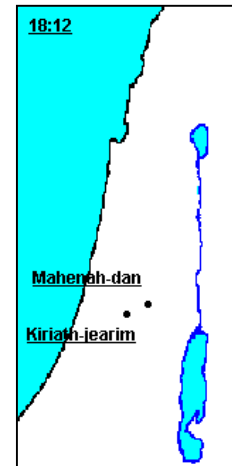
As we shall soon see, the five spies were among the 600 soldiers of Dan. It is not accidental that they ended up at the gate of Micah. This verse sounds uneventful enough, but this was some of the most difficult traveling they would do on their way to Laish. They had to want to go to Micah’s house in order to get there. This route was far too much more difficult to casually choose to go this way.

Judges 18:14-20 - Danites Took Priest and Graven Images

Then the five men who went to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their kinsmen, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." Judges 18:14

This is the first confirmation we have that the five spies were leading the troops. In this verse, the five spies told the soldiers of the articles of idolatrous worship that could be found in Micah’s house.

Notice the way the spies informed the soldiers of the contents of Micah’s house. “Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod and household idols and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore, consider what you should do.” We might be sur-



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prised at how respectfully the spies informed the soldiers of the contents of Micah's house. This probably suggests that they had to be very careful lest it appear that they were trying to take command away from designated officers. Certainly, they were doing more than merely passing on information to the soldiers. This was a very subtle, but compelling suggestion that they stop and get these items.

And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young man, the Levite, to the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare. Judges 18:15

It is clear that it did not take much persuasion to get the soldiers to make the detour. Observe that they asked, "him," probably Micah, about his welfare. This may seem to be deceptive. In one sense it was. In another sense it was not. It was required of traveler and host that they inquire about the other's welfare as a part of their greeting to each other. The deception was that this question was part of their assuring the host that they had come peacefully and no harm or loss would come to him. That, of course, was far from the truth.

And the six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the sons of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Judges 18:16

Put yourself in the place of Micah for a moment. You have 600 soldiers standing outside your house. You did not know that they were coming. These men are armed for battle. At the head of the band of soldiers you see the five spies who had visited with you earlier. This entire party represent a tribe different from your own. Now, the whole group is talking about coming into your house. What would you think? What would you do? That is the difficult spot in which Micah found himself.

Now the five men who went to spy out the land went up and entered there, and took the graven image and the ephod and household idols and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men armed with weapons of war. Judges 18:17

The five spies broke all the rules of Jewish etiquette. One should never enter a man's house without an invitation. The five spies went into the house and there is no evidence of an invitation. Being with the soldiers sometimes gives people airs that they would not otherwise exercise. Notice the things that the soldiers took:

- a. **Graven image**
- b. **The Ephod** – This is a vest-like garment worn over one's regular clothing. In the shoulders were two onyx stones with the names of the twelve tribes carved into them. This was worn by the High Priest when he served at the altar.
- c. **Household idols**
- d. **Molten image**

You will notice that the things that they stole from Micah's house all had to do with idol worship except the ephod, which was used by the Levite making him not only Micah's priest, but High Priest.

There is a contrast in this verse. The soldiers come out of Micah's house having stolen the items necessary for idol worship and the Levite is attempting to guard the very things

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that he should have been taking a stand against. The picture of the Levite standing with the 600 troops is a perfect picture of helplessness.

Everyone in this scene is guilty of disobedience. One begins to wonder, just how long will God put up with this terrible rebellion.

And when these went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" Judges 18:18

It is quite clear that the 600 troops took Micah and the Levite by surprise. The Levite's question was appropriate. He did not expect this and they did not tell him that they were going to take these things.

Even in idolatrous worship, these items were considered sacred. It is considered a desecration to steal these things. Though the words he spoke do not fully reveal his frame of mind, it is appropriate to think that he was frustrated and confused wondering what they thought they were doing. "What are you doing?" is not so much an appeal for information as it is an expression of frustration and perhaps a substantial amount of anger.

And they said to him, "Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" Judges 18:19

The soldier's response to the Levite came in the form of three instructions:

1. **"Be silent"** – In straight-forward language, they told the priest to "shut up!"
2. **"Put your hand to your mouth"** – This was a way of saying be very careful what you say, it could be detrimental to your health. These were common instructions when a person was about to enter the presence of a king. They were reminded to put their hand to their mouth. In other words weigh your words carefully, he could have you put to death.
3. **"Come with us"** – The words were a bit of an invitation, but the way in which they were spoken made them a command the Levite couldn't afford to refuse.
4. **"Be to us a father and a priest"** – Again, this is less an invitation than a command. It is certain that the Levite did not have the option of refusing their invitation. There is an irony here. They invited him to be a father to them. A father had full command over his family. Just the opposite was the case here. They were issuing the orders and he had better obey them promptly.

A priest was to be treated with respect because he was a representative of God. No Levite should be treated as he was.

The soldiers not only did wrong, they justified their actions. They asked him a question, "Is it better to be a priest for one man or for a whole tribe." One would hope to never have to answer that question. There is, however, an insinuation in the question. When they said, "for a whole tribe" they insinuated that when this military exercise was over that he could be the priest for the tribe of Dan. That, of course, was as wrong as being a priest for Micah and his family. It would appeal to the ambitions of a man who, in his chosen

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field, probably had no opportunity to ever become a High Priest in the normal run of things in Jerusalem.

These soldiers were armed and angry. They totally ignored the fact that they were doing something against God in the process.

And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image, and went among the people. Judges 18:20

In this verse, there is an insight into the character of the Levite. He did wrong, in the first place, by coming to Ephraim and being hired out. Faced with a crucial decision, he took the easy way out. He had made an agreement with Micah. Now, he received a better offer and as the text says, "his heart was glad." He was a Levite. He had been trained as a priest. He knew that the priestly family and all Israel were supposed to worship Jehovah alone. Still he was prepared to worship the graven images and be priest for those who did likewise. This is not surprising. He had become their priest, rather than God's. His allegiance had to be to those who cared for his needs rather than to God. When this happens, error is at the door.

Judges 18:21-26 - Micah Chased Danites Unsuccessfully

Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the livestock and the valuables in front of them. Judges 18:21

This is the first mention of the fact that there were little ones and livestock traveling with them on their way to Laish. It is possible that this is further evidence that they thought that it was going to be easy to take the city of Laish and so they brought their families and their animals with them. They would be all set to settle down in their new home area. This possibility is further supported by the fact that they brought all of their valuables with them.

Notice that they put their little ones, livestock and valuables in front of them. This was a strategic move. They did not know how Micah might react to what they had done. They had dealt with him in a high-handed way and he was not happy when they left. By placing all things valuable in front of them, they were in a much better position to protect them from Micah, should he decide to cause trouble for them. This was a common military maneuver in that day. They commonly would place their soldiers between the enemy and their valuables.

When they had gone some distance from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house assembled and overtook the sons of Dan. Judges 18:22

The words "when they had gone some distance from the house..." suggest that there was a substantial time-lapse before Micah did anything. This could probably be credited to the fact that he was so shocked at the turn of events. It also is possible that they waited just to make sure that there was no one left behind to do them even more harm.

Note that the neighbors assembled together to come to the aid of Micah. This was the mutual defense pact that everyone in that part of the world had with their near neighbors. Just the sheer number of soldiers should have told the neighbors and Micah that they did

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not have a chance to get back the things that the soldiers had stolen. Nevertheless, it was incumbent upon each of them to do whatever they could to get back what had been taken.

And they cried to the sons of Dan, who turned around and said to Micah, "What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?" Judges 18:23

The fact that they “cried to the sons of Dan” suggests that they were not trying to surprise them. In all probability, they were hoping to reason with them to get back what the soldiers had stolen. That, of course, was a lost cause.

The response of the soldiers from Dan was firm and harsh. It was as though the Danites could not believe that Micah and his neighbors would dare to come after them. It was clear to all of them that they did not have a chance against 600 soldiers. The statement, “What is the matter with you, that you have assembled together?” suggests that the Danites thought that Micah and his neighbors had lost their minds by trying to forcibly take the belongings back. It was a way of saying, “Do you have any idea what you are doing?”

This response gives us an insight into the thinking of the soldiers. They had not the slightest inclination to give up the priest and the idols that they had taken. It is as though they were trying to humor Micah and his neighbors lest they would have to kill them. There is a brash but secure sense of confidence in the words and actions of the soldiers. They did not want to fight Micah, but were more than prepared to do so if he insisted.

And he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and have gone away, and what do I have besides? So how can you say to me, 'What is the matter with you?'" Judges 18:24

If Micah came in a conciliatory way, the responses of the soldiers changed his mind and attitude. There is fire in his response. He was angry and defensive in his reply. They had charged him with not being to sharp, mentally. Now, Micah challenged their attitude. He said, in effect, “You have taken away everything I have and then say, “What is the matter with you?” It is like saying, “Your attack does not make sense.”

And the sons of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest fierce men fall upon you and you lose your life, with the lives of your household." Judges 18:25

The Danites did not dignify his outrage with an appropriate response. They rather threatened him in a harsh, but gentle way. It was harsh in that they threatened to kill him and his family. It was gentle in that they dismissed him rather than take out their wrath on him for his challenge.

So the sons of Dan went on their way; and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house. Judges 18:26

Throughout this entire confrontation, the Danites have exhibited a quiet confidence in their strength. At this point, they showed their greatest confidence. They just turned their backs on Micah and his neighbors and went on their way toward Laish.

There is a severe contrast in this verse. On the one hand you have this almost untouchable confidence on the part of the Danites. Then, again, you have Micah and his neighbors

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who realize that they were fortunate that the Danites didn't just kill them to get rid of them. In deep dejection, Micah accepted his humiliation and went back to his home. The text does not identify Micah's feelings, but it seems appropriate to think that he would wonder about this whole experience. He had been a rich man, now he was reduced to poverty. He could see his possessions, but could not take them back. Like every Jewish boy, he had been taught that right triumphs and wrong would be punished. He certainly thought that he was right, but it did not seem to be true for him at this point. His despair would be enveloping as he returned empty-handed, frustrated, confused and angry.

Judges 18:27-31 - Danites Conquered Land and Set Up Graven Images

Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword; and they burned the city with fire. Judges 18:27

This was a three or four day march for the troops. The last part of this journey was through the mountains. Indeed, they had to pass through the foothills of Mt. Hermon in order to get to the broad plain on which the city of Laish was located.

Observe that the men of Dan took the idols and the priest, which they had taken from Micah, and went to attack Laish. It is entirely possible that the reason that the soldiers wanted the priest and the idols was that they wanted to gain the protection of the idols as they went into battle. You may remember that the people in that part of the world believed that their gods would give them victory in battle. They wanted their gods with them just as Israel wanted the Ark with them when they fought the Philistines.

The author repeated the description of Laish he had used before – “quiet and secure.” This was for purposes of emphasis. It identified why it was so easy for the Danites to take the city.

There is a problem in this verse. The men of Dan brought their families and their herds with them because they were certain they could take the city and settle there themselves. In view of this fact, one wonders why they burned the city after they killed the people. There are several possible reasons. One of these is the fact that if the city was burned, the people who were related to the former occupants were less likely to attempt to get the place back in honor of their dead relatives. Second, in any battle in that day, it was considered to be a battle between the gods of the two nations involved. When one captured the city and burned it, they would understand this as a victory for their idol. Out of respect for the help their deity had provided they would get rid of every vestige of the control of the idol that was served by the previous owners.

And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-rehob. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it Judges 18:28

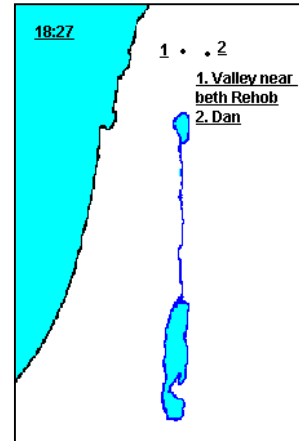
The author described the dilemma of the people of Laish. One of the reasons they had peace was that they were a long distance from anyone who might do them harm. By the same token, they were too far away from the Sidonians to get any help from them. By the time the Sidonians would arrive the city would be destroyed and burned and the people all

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killed. The people of Laish had no mutual defense treaties with anyone because there was no one close enough to help.

The people of Laish did the only thing they could. The ones who could, escaped to a nearby valley and built a new city there. They named the city “Beth-rehob” which means “house of the street.” We do not know why they gave the city this name. We do know that the city was still in existence at the time of David. At that time, the Ammonites got mercenary soldiers from Beth-rehob to fight against David.

It is surprising that the people who escaped from Laish went a short distance away to rebuild their city. This would seem strange because they would be very near to the people who had defeated them and would be liable to be treated to the same disfavor again. We must also include the fact that this new city has not yet been discovered. We only know that it is a short distance from the city of Laish.



And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. Judges 18:29

The author now turned his attention to the men of Dan who had destroyed the city by fire and had rebuilt it for themselves. They called the name of this city “Dan.” The author went to some extreme to make sure that we know that it was named for the father of their tribe. The author was very clear to point out that this was the former city of Laish. It was important to designate this since it was a way of celebrating the fact that they had destroyed the city of Laish and established it as a tribal city in Israel.

And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. Judges 18:30

The men of Dan did some strange things. First, they finally obeyed the command of God and drove the people out of their portion of land. At the same time, they disobeyed God and set about to worship idols and graven images that God had strictly forbidden.

There is a strange situation that unfolds in this verse. You will remember that in Judges 18:19, the men of Dan talked with the Levite about being the priest for the whole tribe of Dan. In a very short time, having conquered the city of Laish and rebuilding it as the city of Dan, the author informs us that the name of their priest was Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh.” There is some disagreement about who this man was. Some agree with the text that this was a man from the tribe of Manasseh and thus it could not be the Levite with whom they had talked about being the priest of Dan. Others believe that a better translation is that this is the older son of Moses. The problem with this understanding is that it has been a long time since the death of Moses and it is doubtful if his son were still alive. In fact, we cannot identify this priest properly. We can say with some certainty that this is not the Levite who was taken from the house of Micah. We also know

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that this priest and his sons after him continued to be the priests of Dan even during the time of David.

So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh. Judges 18:31

Though these Jewish people knew the first commandment, still they set up the graven images that they had stolen from Micah. They were knowingly disobedient to the command of the Lord concerning the worship of any other god.

The author mentioned that they worshipped the images stolen from Micah as long as the house of God was at Shiloh. The place of worship in Shiloh was the worship center for Israel until the Philistines destroyed it in about 1050 B. C. This was not a temporary venture into disobedience. This was a rebellion that lasted for years and years.

Conclusion

The name of God appears only three times in the entire eighteenth chapter of Judges. Still there is a positive message about the nature of God to be found here.

18:5 – God hears and answers prayer – The Danites asked the Levite to “inquire of God concerning their journey and mission. The name for God used in this verse is “Elohim.” As you know, this name emphasizes the omnipotence of God. More importantly, this name is used repeatedly in the Old Testament in situations where the mercy of God is being highlighted. That certainly is the case here.

18:6 – God is merciful – For decades, the Danites had been participating in idol worship in rejection of the command of God. In spite of this, they had the nerve to ask the Levite to “inquire of God” concerning the success of their mission. Despite this fact, they would continue in their idolatry for many decades to come. God heard and answered their prayer. That is the grace and mercy of God.

18:6 – God is faithful – When the men of Dan asked the Levite to inquire of the Lord for them, God told them that they would be successful. That is exactly what happened when they reached the city of Laish.

The name for God used in 18:6 is “Jehovah.” This name for God stresses the eternal changelessness of God. This name, however, is also used repeatedly in situations where the justice of God is being emphasized.

18:10 – God is in control of nations – When the spies returned home and gave their report, they said, “God has given it into your hand.” God is omnipotent. He delivers nations and peoples into the hands of those who love Him. Sometimes He delivers nations into the hands of His people who do not love and serve Him.

18:10 – God is patient and merciful – In spite of the fact that the people of Dan were rebelling by worshipping idols at the time of the military action, still God delivered Laish into their hands.

Again and again, the theme of the patient mercy and grace of God expressed itself in the lives of people who rebelled and disobeyed God knowingly. This was not an isolated incident, but carried on through many decades of the rebellion and disobedience of His people.

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19

THE LEVITE’S CONCUBINE WAS ABUSED

JUDGES 19:1 – 30

1. There are five paragraphs in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

19:1-9	
19:10-15	
19:16-21	
19:22-26	
19:27-30	

2. In Judges 19:1-9, a Levite went to retrieve his erring concubine.
- a. In 19:1, the author inconspicuously identified a problem.
 - (1). What was the problem?
 - (2). What does this tell us?
 - b. In 19:2, the author gave us a picture of the moral decline of the land.
 - (1). What pictures did he give us?
 - (2). Why was such a situation possible?
 - c. In 19:3, the Levite went to Bethlehem to bring back his concubine.
 - (1). What is there in this verse that gives you a clue concerning the Levite’s attitude?
 - (2). In the opening verses of this chapter, it speaks of this person as a “concubine.” In this verse, however, the author spoke of her as a “girl.” What is the significance of this change?
 - d. In 19:4, the father-in-law detained them for three days. What, if anything, does this tell you?
 - e. In 19:5, the father-in-law detained his son-in-law another day.
 - (1). Put yourself in the Levite’s position. What would you do?
 - (2). Look carefully at what the concubine’s father said. On a scale of 1-10, how sincere would you judge him to be?
 - f. In 19:6, the father detained them further.
 - (1). Why would he do that?
 - (2). Why wouldn’t the Levite just insist on going home?
 - g. In 19:7, the father detained them yet again.
 - (1). Put yourself in the father’s position. What possible reasons could you have for doing this?

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- (2). Put yourself in the Levite's position. How would you feel?
- h. In 19:8, the father once more urged them to stay.
 - (1). There is an impossible situation in this verse. What is it?
 - (2). What does this tell you?
- i. In 19:9, the father again detained them. What was the father doing with all these delays?
- 3. In Judges 19:10-15, the Levite spent the night in Gibeah.
 - a. In 19:10, the Levite started home.
 - (1). Why could he refuse the invitation this time, but had been unable to do so previously?
 - (2). The author took special care to describe the Levite's group. Why?
 - b. In 19:11, the servant urged the Levite to spend the night in Jebus. Why would he want to do this?
 - c. In 19:12, the Levite refused to stop in Jebus.
 - (1). Why wouldn't he stop there?
 - (2). Why would he want to stop in Gibeah?
 - d. In 19:13, the Levite chose to stop in Gibeah.
 - (1). Why would the Levite say "Gibeah or Ramah"?
 - (2). How realistic was it to consider going to Ramah?
 - e. In 19:14, the author described a serious problem.
 - (1). What was the problem?
 - (2). The author mentioned the fact that Gibeah belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Why was this important?
 - f. In 19:15, the author described their entrance into Gibeah. How would you describe their dilemma?
- 4. In Judges 19:16-21, an elderly man took them into his home.
 - a. In 19:16, the author described the old man.
 - (1). Read this verse again. What information did the author give us about this man?
 - (2). Why was this information important?
 - b. In 19:17, the old man questioned the Levite.
 - (1). Why would he do this.
 - (2). There is a contrast between 19:15 and 19:17.
 - (a). What contrast do you see?
 - (b). Make a chart to show the differences in this contrast.
 - c. In 19:18, the Levite answered the old man.
 - (1). Compare 19:16 with 19:18. What did you discover?
 - (2). What pain does the Levite express as he answered the old man's questions?
 - d. In 19:19, the Levite expressed a level of emotion.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 19

- (1). What was his emotional expression?
 - (2). How would you say this in your own words?
 - e. In 19:20, the old man welcomed them. There is a contrast between the old man and the men of Gibeah. How would you describe that contrast?
 - f. In 19:21, there is a hint concerning the old man's financial situation. What is that hint?
5. In Judges 19:22-26, the men of Gibeah abused the Levite's concubine.
- a. In 19:22, some men of Gibeah beat on the old man's door.
 - (1). What did they want?
 - (2). What can we learn from this description?
 - b. In 19:23, the old man pleaded with these men not to do as they had stated. What was the basis of his pleading?
 - c. In 19:24, the old man made an alternative suggestion.
 - (1). What was it?
 - (2). Describe your emotions as you read this verse.
 - (3). Why was the old man so concerned about the man; so unconcerned about the two women?
 - d. In 19:25, the village men rejected the offer of the old man.
 - (1). Who gave the concubine to the village men?
 - (2). What questions went through your mind as you read this verse?
 - e. In 19:26, the author described the condition of the concubine. What was her condition?
6. In Judges 19:27-30, The Levite responded to the death of his concubine.
- a. In 19:27, the Levite found his concubine at the doorstep.
 - (1). Read this verse carefully. Where was the Levite while his concubine was being raped and killed?
 - (2). Put yourself in the place of the Levite. What would you feel when the author wrote, "When her master arose in the morning and opened the door of the house and went out to go on his way..."?
 - b. In 19:28, the Levite found his concubine.
 - (1). What did he say to her?
 - (2). How would you describe him at that moment?
 - (3). How would you describe his actions when the author said, "the man arose and went to his home"?
 - c. In 19:29, the Levite cut up his concubine.
 - (1). What did the Levite do?
 - (2). Why would he make 12 pieces?
 - (3). What emotional expression do you find on the part of the Levite?
 - d. In 19:30, the author recorded the reaction of the people.

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- (1). What was their reaction?
 - (2). What demand did they make?
7. Review the chapter. What does it tell you about God?

LESSON 19: JUDGES 19:1 – 30

THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE WAS ABUSED

There are five paragraphs in the nineteenth chapter of Judges. A summary for each paragraph appears on the following table.

19:1-9	The Levite Went to Retrieve His Erring Concubine
19:10-15	Levite Spent the Night in Gibeah
19:16-21	Elderly Man Took Levite Into His Home
19:22-26	Levite's Concubine Abused By Gibeah's Men
19:27-30	Levite Cut Dead Concubine in 12 Pieces

Judges 19:1-9 – The Levite Went to Retrieve His Erring Concubine

Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah. Judges 19:1

This is at least the second time the author has mentioned that there was no king in Israel. In fact there had never been a king in Israel. This was a way of stressing the fact that there was anarchy in Israel at this time.

The Levite lived in the northwest hill country of Ephraim. We do not know how he came to take a concubine from Bethlehem. We know that there were priestly families who lived in the Bethlehem area. If a Levite took a wife, he must take her from another Levitical family. She could not come from any of the other eleven tribes. A concubine was a secondary wife. This often happened if the preferred wife was unable to bear children. For a Levite, however, a primary or secondary wife would be required to come from the tribe of Levi. We must remember that it is possible that this concubine was the daughter of a Levitical family who lived in Bethlehem.

But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father's house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months. Judges 19:2

This was strange, and somewhat unusual. If a wife were unfaithful, she would be stoned. This would be even more probable if she were a concubine or secondary wife. She would never be allowed to go back to her father's house. We must remember, however, that this is a description of events in Israel when there was anarchy. A divorced woman could never go back to her father's house because she would not be welcomed. A concubine would be even less likely to be welcomed in her father's house.

Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So she brought him in to her father's house, and when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him. Judges 19:3

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This woman was gone from her home for four months. This was unbelievable. If a woman stayed away for four months, she would never be sought. Nevertheless, this is what happened.

The Levite, having been abandoned four months, went to his concubine's father's home to "speak tenderly to her." This is difficult to understand. If he cared for her that much, why didn't he have her as his first wife? Again, why would he wait for four months before going to bring her home. We don't know, but that is what the text says.

If she had been his preferred wife, he would not have had to "speak tenderly to her" to get her to come back with him. He would have just taken her home. This woman is not his first or legal wife. He must attempt to attract her to himself. We do not know all the details of this arrangement. We do know that his intention was to bring her back to his home.

It appears that she left on foot because he took his servant and a pair of donkeys with him when he set out for her father's home in Bethlehem. This suggests that he was doing everything possible to win her affection again.

The author said, "And when the girl's father saw him, he was glad to meet him." This gives us several pieces of information. The text spoke of the concubine as a "girl." The grammatical situation here is a bit delicate. The word for "girl" is "naarah" (נַעֲרָה) which means a girl, a maid from infancy to adolescence. It refers to a very young girl, but one who is of marriageable age. We should keep in mind that they thought of a girl as being of marriageable age when she was 12 years and one day old.

It is apparent that the girl's father had never met this man. This is not difficult to understand when we remember that there had never been negotiations for the marriage of this girl. This was the very first encounter between these two men.

The text says, "he was glad to meet him." That is an understatement. The father would be very glad to meet the Levite. He was probably afraid that the Levite would not come. He would not want to have to care for her for the rest of her life. In this case, "glad to meet him" translates into "what a relief." Of course, we must remember that in most instances, she would not have been welcomed at her father's house. This may grow out of the fact that her father may well have been a priest himself.

And his father-in-law, the girl's father, detained him; and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there. Judges 19:4

There is an interesting turn in this verse. The author spoke of the girl's father as "his father-in-law." In Judges 19:1, however, the author spoke of this girl as a "concubine." The word for concubine is "pilegish" (פִּילֶגֶשׁ): The word means a wife of secondary position.

The shock of the story continued. In former times, if a priestly family's daughter became a concubine and then she abandoned her spouse, she would be unwelcome in her father's house no matter what the conditions might be. In most instances, when a girl married or lived with a man, her father's responsibility ended. The father would look upon her as a stranger. She would never think of going home again. It is different in this case.

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Observe that the text says, "they ate and drank and lodged there." The law of hospitality required that if a stranger came to your home you were required to provide good food and shelter for at least three days. After three days, the traveler's presence was looked upon with suspicion. We have a saying, "fish and company smell the same after three days."

The detention of a guest had no necessary meaning. It may mean that the father really appreciated his guest. It, also, may mean that he was keeping the social amenities. It could mean that he wanted to make sure that the Levite took the girl along with him when he left. There is no way to establish his intent.

Now it came about on the fourth day that they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; and the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Sustain yourself with a piece of bread, and afterward you may go." Judges 19:5

Social custom required that the guest be prepared to leave on the fourth day. We do not know why he prepared to leave on the fourth day, but keeping the law of hospitality seems a good possibility. The fact that he got up early suggests that he intended to leave that day. The truth is that sometimes people appeared to be preparing to leave hoping that their host would invite them to stay longer.

We need to remember a feature of that culture that was in the favor of the Levite. It was considered impolite and rude to leave a place of hospitality without being "sent away" or "sent on your way" by your host. If you left anyway, you ran the risk of reaping the wrath of the host. If this happened he and his friends would come after you because you were unappreciative of his hospitality. The Levite was in an awkward situation. He wanted to leave, but the father-in-law made it clear that he was not giving his blessing. The Levite had little option but to stay.

The father-in-law said, "sustain yourself with a piece of bread." It was far more than that. If the Levite agreed to stay for something to eat, it would be clear that he would not leave that day. There is no doubt the father wanted them to stay. If the father-in-law had no sons, he might have wanted them to stay indefinitely. It would be a great help to him, especially when he was older. It was the custom to urge guests to stay, even if it was more than time for them to go. We should not frown at this. We have the same custom, but seldom admit it.

The father spoke illogically. These people would eat before sun-up. They could easily eat on the road. Breakfast was nothing more than a piece of bread. If a person were going to travel, nothing would detain them. They could only travel until about 3:00 in the afternoon. They must then find a village and a home to stay the night because the nights were very cold and it was not always safe to spend the night out in the open. All of this made an early departure an absolute necessity. The father would not have said this unless he intended to persuade them to stay another full day.

The Levite was in a serious bind. It was bad manners and dangerous to leave without being sent away. This would reflect badly on his host in the community. It would be a public humiliation that his guests did not enjoy his hospitality. This situation was most awkward for the Levite. The Levite wanted to leave. He was not free to leave without being sent on his way. The father-in-law was not willing to send him away.

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So both of them sat down and ate and drank together; and the girl's father said to the man, "Please be willing to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." Judges 19:6

The Levite did the only thing he could do, he stayed to eat. They might just as well have unpacked the donkeys. They were going nowhere today. The girl's father was very gracious. He said "please." The father left the decision, a non-decision, up to his son-in-law. He wanted to give more hospitality to his guest than the guest could use. The girl's father urged them "to be merry." This suggests that the father was going to throw a party. The neighbors would be involved. If the Levite refused, the father would be shamed in the community. What could the Levite do? This is exactly the kind of pressure the father-in-law wanted to place on both the Levite and the concubine.

Then the man arose to go, but his father-in-law urged him so that he spent the night there again. Judges 19:7

The text does not deal with the etiquette involved. We wonder if the Levite rose to go out of cultural necessity? He may have been pretending that he must go so that the father could urge him more intensely to stay. It appears that the Levite really wanted and needed to go.

The father further complicated the whole situation. He begged the Levite not to go, but to spend the night. The Levite was again in a bind. He should go. He could not leave unless the father-in-law sent him away. He had to stay another night. Again, we do not know, for certain, why the father-in-law was so intent on detaining them. Could it be that the father wanted them to stay permanently?

And on the fifth day he arose to go early in the morning, and the girl's father said, "Please sustain yourself, and wait until afternoon"; so both of them ate. Judges 19:8

At this point, it seems clear that the father-in-law did not want the Levite to leave at all. The Levite desperately wanted to leave, but custom tied his hands.

Read the verse again. The father-in-law urged a foolish thing on the couple. He urged them to stay until afternoon. That would never be done. By afternoon, he would need to look for a place to spend the night. Everyone involved knew that this was the case. Motives were beginning to be clear if they were not previously. The father prevailed and they stayed to eat breakfast.

When the man arose to go along with his concubine and servant, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold now, the day has drawn to a close; please spend the night. Lo, the day is coming to an end; spend the night here that your heart may be merry. Then tomorrow you may arise early for your journey so that you may go home." Judges 19:9

After breakfast, the Levite rose to go on his journey. All three were ready to travel. The father was master of the obvious. He had insisted that they stay until the afternoon. He was keenly aware of the fact that they could not travel in the afternoon and would have to stay until the morning, again. Obviously, this is what he had in mind. Notice that the father said what he had said each night, "Stay the night and leave in the morning." By this

time, it was clear that the father's words and actions were not the same, though it is not clear what his real intent was.

Judges 19:10-15 – Levite Spent Night in Gibeah

But the man was not willing to spend the night, so he arose and departed and came to a place opposite Jebus that is, Jerusalem. And there were with him a pair of saddled donkeys; his concubine also was with him. Judges 19:10

The use of the word “but” indicates that a contrast is forthcoming. The contrast is between the Levite's response to his father-in-law's past urging for them to stay and the response that was about to unfold.

The Levite made a dangerous and difficult stand. Though it was socially unacceptable, he was determined to leave. He left the house. There was no mention of his being sent on his way. The text does not mention it, but it is very clear that the Levite would not be welcome in that house again as long as he lived.

The Levite, his concubine and his servant traveled as far as Jerusalem. This distance is not very long. One can easily walk it in an hour or so. This tells us just how late it was when they left. The mention of “Jebus” tells us just how early it was in their travels. Jerusalem was originally called “Jebus.” At this time it was a pagan stronghold. There was no Jewish colony in the city. This is part of the reason that there were so many Jews in Bethlehem.

The author mentions, again, that the Levite had two donkeys, his concubine and his servant. This tells us at least two things. Not many people in the community would want to take in a group that large. The mention of the fact that he had the two donkeys with him reminds us that he was in grave danger of being held up because this would tell people that this was a man of some means. The Levite was clearly in a bind. He needed a place to stay, but the size and opulence of the group would make it difficult for him to find a place to stay in the city.

When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, "Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." Judges 19:11

As we said earlier, “Jebus” was the early name for the city of Jerusalem. The use of this name comes from the fact that the “Jebusites” lived there at that time. The text does not tell us why the servant wanted to turn in and stay in Jerusalem. It is possible that he was a Jebusite. It may have been that he just wanted to find a place to stay before it got dark. The truth is that we do not know.

However, his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah." Judges 19:12

The Levite would not want to go into a pagan city. It would make him unclean. Thus it was not acceptable for him to do that. He might well have been afraid that he would be taken advantage of because he was a Jew staying in a Jebusite community. Again, it could be that he just wanted to cover a few more miles before stopping for the night. He had already delayed a few days because of the urging of his father-in-law. We must remember

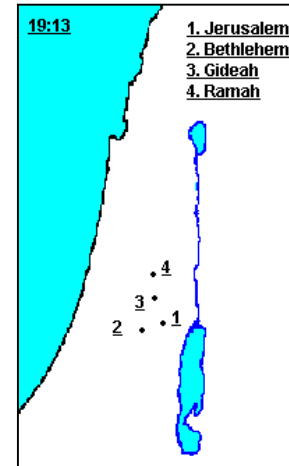
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that he came from Bethlehem, which was only a few miles away. He would know all the stories of the things that the Jebusites did to strangers.

On this map we are dealing with four cities:

1. Bethlehem
2. Jebus
3. Gibeah
4. Ramah

Notice on the map just how far Gibeah was from Jebus. It was only six miles. This seems like a very short distance for us. It was for them, however, nearly a half-day walk. At least part of his reasoning had to be because he had already been delayed several days from returning home. When they had this conversation, they had only traveled about six miles. This was not very far for a day's travel.



And he said to his servant, "Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah or Ramah." Judges 19:13

The fact that he only wanted to cover six more miles suggests that a larger part of his reason to continue traveling was that he did not want to stay in a gentile city. This would render him unclean. Being unclean did not just deal with being forbidden to worship. It was something that devout Jews would avoid at all cost. When he made the announcement, neither his concubine nor the servant would object any more. His word was law. The Levite mentioned the possibility that they might go as far as Ramah. This was clearly unrealistic. It was already time to find a place for the night. They would have traveled a long distance in the dark if they had traveled another 12 miles.

So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. Judges 19:14

This verse tells us that it turned dark and they had not yet found a place to stay the night. There were no streetlights in the towns much less the countryside. It would be hard to find anyone outside his house or tent at night. The chances of finding someone to invite them into their home were extremely slim. Though he was a Levite, his speech would identify him as a man from Judah. There was little love lost between Judah and the Jebusites or Benjamites. This was an ancient grudge that would not quickly or easily change. Because of these fears, there was great danger to be found on the street in the dark.

And they turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night. Judges 19:15

It would be considered normal, in that culture, for a traveler to go to the center of the village and wait to be invited into a home. This is how you let a villager know you needed shelter. The law of hospitality would require a citizen to take a traveler into his home and provide food and shelter for three days. It would be considered rude to go to a home and request hospitality. He would, therefore, be forced to sit in the village square until someone noticed him and invited him to stay the night in his home. The fact that there were

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grudges between the Jebusites and people of Judah would make it probable that people would make sure that they did not notice the man sitting in the village center. In most instances, people were delighted to provide shelter and food for travelers. In this instance, however, no one volunteered to receive them. In such a case, the traveler could spend the night exposed to the cold of the night sleeping in the village center. This was not safe or comfortable.

Judges 19:16-21 – Elderly Man Took Levite Into His House

Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites. Judges 19:16

Observe that the author emphasized the fact that this old man, who invited the Levite, was from the hill country of Ephraim, though he lived in Benjamin. The fact that he was old and came from another tribe suggests that he was a servant rather than a free man. The emphasis on the fact that the men of the place were Benjamites was quite intentional. These people did not have a good reputation among the other tribes. The author was just about to give some more information that would strengthen that reputation. This verse gives us an insight into the way the people of this area treated the aged servants. This man was coming in from the fields. You will remember that it was already dark. There is no doubt that this suggests that they mistreated their aged servants.

And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?" Judges 19:17

There is a contrast in this verse between the old man from Ephraim and the men of Gibeah in Benjamin.

THE OLD MAN	THE MEN OF GIBEAH
He saw the Levite.	They never let on they saw the Levite.
He invited the three to his home.	No invitation was offered.
He obeyed the law of hospitality	Not concerned about law of hospitality
He came from Ephraim.	They rejected Ephraimites.

Observe that the old man asked the Levite two questions.

- Where are you going?
- Where do you come from?

This may seem strange or inquisitive, but it is not. It was expected that people would ask these questions to determine how they might help the traveler. He was being a responsible citizen when he asked how he might be of help to the Levite.

And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, for I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah.

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But I am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house. Judges 19:18

The answer of the Levite was honest, but devastating. Because of their national dress, everyone would know that they were both from Ephraim.

The Levite concluded his response with a devastating statement, “no man will take me into his house.” The law of hospitality made it mandatory to take such a traveler into one's home. No one did that. This tells you something about the people of Gibeah. The Levite was saying that the people are not sensitive to the needs of travelers despite the law.

"Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything." Judges 19:19

His careful recitation of the provisions and the ones for whom these would suffice was a way of emphasizing the insensitivity of the people of this city. It is like saying, “It is not going to cost anyone anything.” This statement only increases the indictment against the people of the city.

And the old man said, "Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square." Judges 19:20

Their greeting, “shalom” was also their bidding farewell and their blessing upon people whom they wish to bless. That was the intent here. There is a contrast here between the old man and the other men of Gibeah. The old man did not want the Levite and his people to stay in the village square. The men of Gibeah would not take him into their houses. The old man was right; the men of Gibeah were quite wrong. The old man saw the failure of hospitality as a shame upon the city. The men of Gibeah saw this as protecting them from inconvenience.

So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank. Judges 19:21

This verse is evidence that the old man was caring for all the needs of his guests, even their animals. Notice that it does not say that he washed their feet. It says “they washed their feet.” The fact that they washed their own feet suggests that the man was poor. Had he been rich, a servant would have washed their feet. It would have been appropriate for the old man to wash their feet. He was cordial, but not given to amenities. The washing of the feet was necessary because they had dirt roads and this made their feet very dirty. Add to this the fact that they did not wear sox and their shoes were only sandals.

The old man also gave them food and drink. He also gave them wine to drink and they drank heartily. He gave them his best.

Judges 19:22-26 - Levite's Concubine Abused by Gibeah's Men

While they were making merry, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him." Judges 19:22

There are several statements in this verse that merit our more careful attention:

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- a. **“While they were making merry”** – This suggests that they drank heartily and the old man did not hold back on his provision for his guests in spite of his limited means.
- b. **“The men of the city”** – At this particular time, the city of Gibeah was populated by people from the tribe of Benjamin. They were Jews, but they treated the fellow Jews, from Ephraim, like strangers.
- c. **“Certain worthless fellows”** – The author has made it clear that these were not the upstanding leaders of the community. This was the element that embarrassed everyone else.
- d. **“Surrounded the house”** – This makes it clear that their intent was not noble. They were determined to get to the guests in the old man's house.
- e. **“Pounding on the door”** – This means to beat on the door until it almost breaks down. It gives us a glimpse into the violent nature of their activities.
- f. **“Bring out the man”** – This was a serious demand that the old man could not fulfill. According to the law of hospitality, when a guest came into your house, you were responsible for his safety so long as he remained under your roof. This put the old man in a compromising position. If he did not obey their demand, they would kill him and he knew it. On the other hand, if he obeyed their demand his neighbors would be required to punish him for not defending his guests. He was required to defend his guests with his own life if necessary.
- g. **“That we may have relations with him”** – This was the same word that described sexual relations between man and wife. This was a demand for homosexual relations. We must keep in mind that these men were Jews. This activity would be totally unacceptable to any observant Jewish person. This gives us a glimpse of just how involved they were in the pagan religion. Many times the sexual orgies of idolatry involved both heterosexual and homosexual activity.

Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly. Judges 19:23

The old man went out to talk with the city-troublemakers. Notice how he pleaded with them. He said “please.” He spoke in gentle terms, but urgently. He said, “Do not act so wickedly. Do not commit this act of folly.” There is a conflict of moral values in this verse. The old man and probably others, saw this as a very wicked thing that they wanted to do. The men of Gibeah, on the other hand, saw this as a very desirable thing to do.

- h. **“Since this man has come into my house.”** The old man has referred to the law of hospitality which would require him to defend the guests with his life. When he took the people into his house, he became totally responsible for their welfare. In pleading for the safety of his guests, the old man was pleading for his own life.

"Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man." Judges 19:24

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We cringe just to read this verse. We must keep in mind that the Bible does not condone such thinking and acting. Again, we must remind ourselves that though the Bible reports such atrocities, it does not condone them. This was a Jewish community that had become involved in the worship of idols.

Such treatment of women was normal and acceptable in an idolatrous society. It is still so. The people in that city would have understood the old man making such an offer.

From our point of view, it would be more acceptable to take the man's life than to abuse the women. Pagan morals, unfortunately, took just the opposite position. Our own culture is not too different. The exploitation of women is publicly decried, but culturally commonplace.

Observe what the old man said to the men concerning his virgin daughter and the concubine. He invited these men to ravish these women. He told them to "do whatever you wish." He gave them a moral blank check. The treatment of women, no matter where you see it, is a dependable moral barometer of any culture. A righteous society will protect the women. An unrighteous society will take advantage of women and abuse them. The New Testament, of course, demands that Christian men treat women with great respect.

But the men would not listen to him, so the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them. And they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. Judges 19:25

The word "but" tells us that a serious contrast is opening up. The author is contrasting what the man said with the way the men of the city would act. The old man offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine. The men of the city would have nothing to do with his offer. As a result the Levite brought his concubine out to the men. Interestingly, nothing is said about the old man's virgin daughter. The bisexual men of the city raped and abused the concubine all night long. Only with the dawn did they release her.

As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master was, until full daylight. Judges 19:26

This verse gives us an indication of just how badly the woman was treated. She fell down at the doorstep of the man's house. She did not have enough strength to even come into the house. The fact is that she was in such terrible condition that she died.

Judges 19:27-30 – Levite Cut Dead Concubine in 12 Pieces

When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold. Judges 19:27

The question immediately comes to mind, "Where was this concubine's Levite? Why wasn't he doing something to defend her or attempt to help her? The text tells the story, "When her master arose in the morning..." He had gone to bed! What an indictment! This is totally beyond our ability to comprehend. He was a Levite and he slept while his concubine was being humiliated and killed.

And he said to her, "Get up and let us go," but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home. Judges 19:28

THE LEVITE'S CONCUBINE WAS ABUSED

It does not say that he opened the door to see where she was. He opened the door to “go on his way.” This gives us a painful insight into the decay of the moral fabric in Israel. There are even greater depths to his callousness. He saw her lying on the floor, obviously in desperate condition. He did not try to see what was wrong. He did not even check to see if she was alive. He just told her to get up and get ready to go.

His second expression of callousness is in the fact that there is no report of his sorrow over her plight and condition. He just placed her on the donkey and went home. There is no doubt that he did this because he was afraid that if he did anything but leave, he would be in as much danger as she had been. That, however, is all the more reason that he should at least discover what had happened. This whole episode wrenches at our very being. How could people do such things?!

*When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.
Judges 19:29*

One thing that grabs our attention in all of this is that there appears to be no emotional expression at all on the part of the Levite. Where did he get the strength to cut her body into twelve pieces. He did not even give her a proper burial.

If he cut the body into twelve pieces and sent the parts to each of the tribes, then he must have sent one part of her body to the tribe of Benjamin. It was his way of asking for their judgment on what had happened. We must remember that we have been reminded at least twice that there was no king in Israel at this time. It appears that he was concerned for justice for himself, not for her life. He had lost his concubine, now the men of Gibeah must pay.

And it came about that all who saw it said, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!" Judges 19:30

Everyone who saw the different pieces of the concubine's body expressed more emotion than the Levite did. Everyone agreed on the depth of the tragedy. There is bitter pain in the words, “Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. There was a united call for judgment. This is what happens when anarchy is the form of control exercised by the people. Again, the statement, “there was no king in Israel...” was more than a catch-phrase. It was evidence of the fact that there was no authority in the land. This was the only thing the Levite could do to bring these people to justice. The whole nation was called upon to pass judgment upon the men of Gibeah.

Conclusion

This is a chapter filled with tragedy, brutality and insensitivity. More so than any other chapter, this has caused us to wrench with pain and discomfort because of the ability of a human being to desecrate another human being.

In light of this summary, it is not surprising to realize that the name of God, in any form, does not appear even once in this chapter. About the only thing one can say this chapter lifts up about God is the unimaginable divine ability to stay His hand from wiping

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out the whole nation of Israel. Otherwise, the chapter is consumed with people and their ability to be inhuman to each other. This is a picture of what people can expect when they attempt to live their lives refusing to follow Him.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20
THE BENJAMITES DEFEATED –
HARBORED TWO MURDERERS

JUDGES 20:1 – 48

1. There are eight paragraphs that make up the content of Judges chapter 20. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

20:1-7	
20:8-11	
20:12-16	
20:17, 18	
20:19-23	
20:24-28	
20:29-35	
20:36 – 48	

2. In Judges 20:1-7, all Israel gathered at Mizpeh.
- a. In 20:1, the author used three geographical designations:
 - (1). What are these geographical designations?
 - (2). What do these designations stand for?
 - (3). How would you describe the author's intent in the words, "The congregation assembled as one man to the Lord"?
 - (4). Why did they gather at Mizpeh rather than in Gibeah?
 - b. In 20:2, leaders and soldiers gathered.
 - (1). Read this verse carefully.
 - (2). What is indicated by the fact that they came prepared for war?
 - (3). What is the significance of the fact that they brought 400,000 troops?
 - c. In 20:3, the hearing got under way.
 - (1). How would the Benjamites hear about this gathering?
 - (2). If you were a Benjamite, how would you feel?
 - d. In 20:4, 5, The Levite told his story.
 - (1). In verse four, the text speaks of the murdered woman as both the "wife" and the "concubine" of the Levite. How can we explain this?
 - (2). The Levite said, "They intended to kill me." The previous story does not indicate this. How would he know that?
 - (3). What, if anything, did the Levite omit as he retold the story?

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- e. In 20:6, the Levite admitted that he cut up the body.
 - (1). There is a problem with this action. What is the problem?
 - (2). What reason did the Levite give for his actions?
- f. In 20:7, the Levite gave a call for action.
 - (1). What did he request?
 - (2). What did he really want?
- 3. In Judges 20:8-11, the eleven tribes prepared for battle
 - a. In 20:8, the people responded to the Levite.
 - (1). What was their response?
 - (2). What did it mean?
 - (3). In this verse, the people spoke of both their “tents” and their “houses.” What is the intent of this?
 - b. In 20:9, they made plans for battle.
 - (1). Where is the report of their decision to attack Gibeah?
 - (2). Why would they make their decision “by lot”?
 - c. In 20:10, they chose the size of their army.
 - (1). How big was their army?
 - (2). Why 10% from each group?
 - (3). What purpose did they affirm?
 - d. In 20:11, the author restated the unity of their decision. What is the purpose of this restatement?
- 4. In Judges 20:12-16, Benjamin refused to hand over the guilty men.
 - a. In 20:12, the tribes went throughout Benjamin asking about the crime. In this verse there are several assumptions.
 - (1). What are the assumptions?
 - (2). What did they really ask?
 - b. In 20:13, the men of Israel issued their request.
 - (1). What was their request?
 - (2). What was their announced intent?
 - (3). What was Benjamin’s response?
 - (4). What does this say about the men of Benjamin?
 - c. In 20:14, the Benjamites gathered men for battle.
 - (1). What was the significance of this move?
 - (2). What is the problem with their decision?
 - d. In 20:15, the author reported the size of the Benjamite forces.
 - (1). How large was their army?
 - (2). How does this compare with the army of Israel?
 - (3). Why was their number so small?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20

- e. In 20:16, the author highlights a special interest in the Benjamite ranks.
 - (1). What is this specialty?
 - (2). What is the significance of the emphasis on “left-handed”?
- 5. In Judges 20:17, 18, the men of Israel sought the Lord concerning the battle.
 - a. In 20:17, the author described the 400,000 soldiers of Israel in two ways:
 - (1). What are they?
 - (2). What does this say about Benjamin’s decision to go into battle?
 - b. In 20:18, Israel sought God’s guidance.
 - (1). Why would they go to Bethel to pray?
 - (2). What does this say about Israel?
 - (3). What does the answer say about God?
- 6. In Judges 20:19-23, the author reported Benjamin’s victory over Israel.
 - a. In 20:19, the author reported Israel’s preparation for battle. What did they do?
 - b. In 20:20, the author reported that “Israel arrayed for battle.” What does this mean?
 - c. In 20:21, the author reported the results of the battle.
 - (1). What was the result?
 - (2). If you were a Benjamite soldier, what affect would this have on you?
 - (3). If you were an Israelite soldier, what affect would this have on you?
 - e. In 20:22, the author described Israel’s response to this defeat. How did they respond?
 - f. In 20:23, the army of Israel wept before the Lord.
 - (1). What does this tell us?
 - (2). How can we account for their previous defeat when they did what God asked of them?
- 7. In Judges 20:24-28, Benjamin defeated Israel a second time.
 - a. In 20:24, 25, the second battle was enjoined.
 - (1). What was the result of this encounter?
 - (2). If you were a soldier in Israel, how would you feel?
 - (3). If you were a soldier in Benjamin, how would you feel?
 - b. In 20:26, the author described the reaction in Israel
 - (1). What was that reaction?
 - (2). What did the people of Israel do? Why?
 - (3). What does this tell us about Israel?
 - c. In 20:27, the author described the next move for Israel.
 - (1). Why did they go to Bethel?
 - (2). Put yourself into this scene. What would you be feeling at this time?
 - d. In 20:28, Phinehas prayed before the ark.
 - (1). What was his request?

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- (2). What was God's reply?
- (3). If you were a leader in Israel, how would you feel at this point?
- 8. In Judges 20:29-35, Jehovah dealt with the Benjamites
 - a. In 20:29, Israel changed their tactics in battle. What did they do? Why did they do this?
 - b. In 20:30, the third battle was set.
 - (1). In this verse it says, "as at other times." Was this true?
 - (2). In what ways did this encounter differ from the previous two?
 - (3). What does this tell us?
 - c. In 20:31, the Benjamites came to do battle a third time.
 - (1). The author used the words, "as at other times." What does he mean by this?
 - (2). The author mentioned "about thirty men of Israel." What is the significance of this information?
 - d. In 20:32, there is a contrast between the statements of Israel and Benjamin.
 - (1). What is the contrast?
 - (2). What does this contrast mean?
 - (3). What information is confirmed by the statement of Israel?
 - (4). How would you describe Israel's attitude?
 - e. In 20:33, 34, Israel's battle plan became evident. Read these verses carefully.
 - (1). What do these verses tell you about the army of Benjamin?
 - (2). The author gives us a hint in the words, "Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them." What did he mean?
 - (3). How did the author describe the conditions for Benjamin?
 - f. In 20:35, the author described Israel's victory over Benjamin.
 - (1). There is an apparent contradiction in this verse.
 - (a). What is the apparent contradiction?
 - (b). How can we account for this?
 - (2). Compare verses 15 and 35. How many Benjamite soldiers were left after this defeat?
- 9. In Judges 20:36-48, The Israelites burned Gibeah.
 - a. In 20:36, 37, Benjamin realized that they had been trapped.
 - (1). How would they know this?
 - (2). What do these verses say about the relationship within the Israelite army?
 - b. In 20:38, the city of Gibeah was torched.
 - (1). How would this affect the Israelite soldiers?
 - (2). How would this affect the Benjamite soldiers?
 - c. In 20:39, marks the turning point in the battle.
 - (1). What was the turning point?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 20

- (2). There is a contrast in this verse. What is the contrast?
- d. In 20:40, 41, The Benjamites realized what had happened.
- (1). How did the Israelites react?
- (2). How did the Benjamites react?
- e. In 20:42, the author described how the trap was sprung. Explain this in your own words.
- f. In 20:43, the author used two word pictures to describe how Israel destroyed the Benjamites.
- (1). Explain these two word pictures.
- (2). What evidence of motivation can you see in this verse?
- g. In 20:44, the author identified the losses of Benjamin.
- (1). The author referred to the dead soldiers as “valiant warriors.” How would you describe what this means?
- (2). What is the author’s emphasis in this description?
- h. In 20:45, the author described the reaction of the rest of the Benjamite army.
- (1). What was their reaction?
- (2). How many Benjamite soldiers were left at this point? (In order to answer this question, reread verses 15,16,35, 44 and 45.)
- i. In 20:46, the author summarized the losses of Benjamin.
- (1). Check the author’s addition. Does your accounting match that of the author?
- (2). There is a problem that becomes evident in this verse.
- (a). What is the problem?
- (b). How can we deal with this problem?
- (3). The author used two word pictures to describe the Benjamite soldiers.
- (a). What are these descriptions?
- (b). What does he mean by their use?
- j. In 20:47, 48, the author accounted for some of the soldiers who did not die.
- (1). Why would they flee toward the wilderness?
- (2). Why didn’t the soldiers of Israel pursue them?
- (3). In verse 48, the author described the Israelite dealing with the cities.
- (a). What did they do?
- (b). Why would they do that?
10. Review the chapter to discover what it says about God.

LESSON 20: JUDGES 20:1 - 48

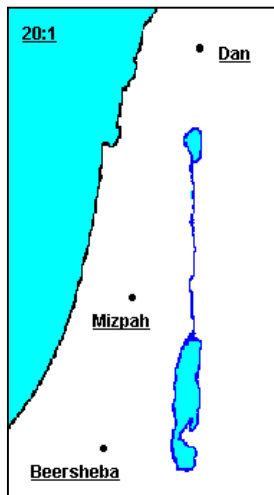
THE BENJAMITES DEFEATED - HARBORED TWO MURDERERS

Eight paragraphs make up the content of Judges chapter 20. A summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

20:1-7	All Israel Gathered at Mizpah
20:8-11	Israel Prepared for War Against Benjamin
20:12-16	Benjamin Refused to Hand Over the Guilty
20:17, 18	Israel Seeks God Concerning Battle
20:19-23	Benjamin Won First Battle Against Israel
20:24-28	Benjamin Won Second Battle Against Israel
20:29-35	Jehovah Smote Benjamites
20:36-48	Gibeah Burned; 25,000 Benjamites Killed

Judges 20:1-7 - All Israel Gathered at Mizpah

Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah.
Judges 20:1



This verse is a geographical statement that every person in all Israel would immediately understand. It was a common way to describe the geography of the land. Dan, as you know, is one of the northernmost places in Israel. Beersheba, on the other hand, was one of the most southerly places in the land. The third geographical location was the territory to the east of the Jordan River. It was generally called Gilead.

The people from all Israel gathered in Mizpah that is on the northernmost boundary of the tribe of Benjamin. One cannot say that this was done to intimidate, but it certainly had that effect. Secondly, it is only a very few miles from Gibeah, the seat of the horrendous crime.

Observe the way the author described the atmosphere of the gathering, “the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD.” There are two separate pictures in this sentence.

- a. **“As one man”** – This is an unusual picture of unity. There was no divergence of opinion. Everyone agreed that there was a task to be done and they were prepared to do it.

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- b. **“To the LORD”** – Israel had been rebellious and disobedient on many occasions, but that was not their stature at this time. God was the center of their purpose. They did not just come to gain revenge. They came because this was as much a crime against God as it was against the people of Israel. From our perspective, they were coming out against Benjamin. From their perspective, they were coming “to the LORD.” It was an affirmation of what they believed and of their commitment to be obedient in this matter.

One might ask the question, Why did they not gather at Gibeah when that was the city that had been guilty of such atrocities? The text is silent on this matter. You will notice, however, that Mizpah was not far from Gibeah. This suggests that Mizpah was to be used as a staging area in their preparation to move on Gibeah. All of this suggests that most of the people who came were convinced, in advance, concerning what needed to be done.

And the chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000-foot soldiers who drew the sword.
Judges 20:2

There are some interesting dynamics in this verse. Notice that the leaders “took their stand.” This is a way of saying that though this was an awkward situation fraught with political dangers, still they took a place of leadership with high visibility.

Notice, also, that they brought with them 400,000 soldiers. This says, convincingly, that they did not come to make a decision. The decision was already made. They came to carry out what they believed before they came.

There is absolutely no doubt that the 400,000 soldiers of the eleven tribes could far outnumber the little tribe of Benjamin. It was clear to anyone in Benjamin who cared to notice that the other tribes were vastly superior in size to the meager forces of Benjamin. This was a position of great pride for the leaders in Israel. Thus it was understandable that the leaders of the tribes took prominent places in the assembly of the people of God.

Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah. And the sons of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this wickedness take place?" *Judges 20:3*

It is interesting that the text says, “the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.” This is interesting since a casual view of the map clearly shows that you must go south to get to Gibeah from nearly every place in Israel. There are two possible explanations.

1. It could say that they went “up to Mizpah” because it was in the mountains and higher than most of the surrounding area.
2. In Scripture, when people were doing good things the reference to “going up” was repeatedly used. We do not know if that is the case here.

As usual, rumors traveled faster than the people did. The Benjamites got wind of the fact that all Israel was gathering against them. If you look at the last part of the sentence, you will note that it appears that the leaders of the eleven tribes were talking with the leaders of Benjamin. We cannot say for certain that this happened, but it appears that way.

This is a bit like a hearing in the nation’s capital. They demanded of the leaders of Benjamin, “tell us how this took place.” It was time to deal directly with the problem.

THE BENJAMITES DEFEATED – HARBORED TWO MURDERERS

So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. Judges 20:4, 5

Instead of the Benjamites answering, the Levite gave his own testimony. You will observe that it refers to the Levite as “the husband of the woman.” The text speaks of this woman as both his wife and his concubine. The accurate information is that she was his second or subsidiary wife. This was usually an indication that the first wife was barren.

The Levite’s report was accurate. It was neither embellished by anger nor diminished by fear. He told the truth. He pointed the accusing finger at a Jewish crowd. He also gives us some information that the text had not previously provided. He said, “They intended to kill me.” We know that this was sometimes what happened. In religious orgies, the victim was sometimes sacrificed to the goddess of fertility. The text does not say what happened. It would not be surprising, however, if this proved to be true. There is one thing that he did not tell them. There is no mention of the cold, callous way in which he dealt with what happened to his wife/concubine.

The Levite said, “They ravished my concubine so that she died.” That being the case, the people involved should be condemned to die. Stoning was the punishment reserved for people guilty of this crime.

"And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. Judges 20:6

The Levite acknowledged that he was the one who cut up the body and sent it throughout all Israel. In the strictest sense, the cutting up of the body was thought of as desecration of the body of the dead. Interestingly enough, nothing is said about this crime.

The Levite explained his reason for this shocking action. He had sustained a great loss. He pointed out that these men had committed a lewd and disgraceful act among their people. The wording of this statement is interesting.

- a. The word “lewd” is “zimmah” (זִמָּה). This identifies "a heinous crime," "a wicked crime," "some grossly dishonorable act," "something vile."
- b. The word “disgraceful” is “nebalah” (נִבְלָה). The word means “a wicked crime,” some grossly dishonorable act,” “something vile.” This was the way he evaluated what had happened to his family. One can easily understand why he would say such a thing.

“Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here.” Judges 20:7

There is little doubt that the Levite did not want advice and counsel. This was his way of bringing his plight before the leaders of the Jewish community. He had passed judgment upon the man who was responsible for these terrible deeds. He wanted revenge, but this was the way to go about that in Israel. He was just one man; he could do nothing against all the men of Gibeah.

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Judges 20:8-11 – Israel Prepared for War Against Gibeah.

Then all the people arose as one man, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. Judges 20:8

This is the strongest possible support that anyone could possibly receive. When it says, “all the people rose as one man,” it is a way of saying that they all gave their ascent. Standing was an expression of their commitment. They did not literally mean that they would not rest. This was a big campaign and would take a substantial amount of time. The response was unanimous. It meant that they would not go home until justice had been done.

Observe that in this verse speaks of their “tents” as well as their “houses.” The men of Israel who had come to this meeting had homes back in the territory of their particular tribes. They were staying in tents while they were here. This gives us the indication that these men were staying in military type surroundings. The message was simple, “We will not rest until justice has been done. We give you our word.”

"But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up against it by lot. Judges 20:9

The decision to attack Gibeah had already been made. They had already decided that the duties would be assigned, by lot. When the Scriptures talk about making decisions “by lot,” it described a way of determining the will of God. It happened at least 70 times in the Old Testament and at least once in the New Testament. In Proverbs 16:33, the author indicates that God controls the outcome of this early means of determining God’s will. This is a bit troublesome to some of us, but it was not a new procedure for them. You may remember that when they entered Canaan there was a drawing of lots to decide the order in which they would enter and also the part of the land they were to receive. They felt that this was one way God identified His will for the people. These people would go to battle against Gibeah.

"And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish them for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel." Judges 20:10

As you read the chapter, it sounds as though these things happened one after the other on the same day. That, of course, was not the case. We cannot be certain just how long this whole process took, but it was not instantaneous. They had already decided that they would take ten percent of the men from each company. This was a way to make sure that all the soldiers and all the casualties did not come from the same tribe or area. This ten percent of the soldiers was to care for the supply of food. This is a very high number to be set aside for that purpose. There is some confusion in the way the author reported these numbers. It is not clear if the army that fought against the Benjamites was 40,000 men or 360,000 men. Frankly, the latter seems the most plausible. As you read, you cannot help but think that these people thought that this was going to be an easy battle.

These people also identified their purpose. They were to punish the Benjamites for all the disgraceful acts that had been committed in Israel. There is a serious problem with this

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situation. The men of Benjamin did not do this disgraceful thing. This tragedy was perpetrated by the men of Gibeah. That was just one small village in the tribe. It became a tribal responsibility when the men of the tribe refused to turn over the guilty men to be punished. In that decision, the tribe was saying that the acts of the men of Gibeah were acceptable. We must also keep in mind that the men of Benjamin already had a poor reputation. They were also known for their idolatry and for their obstinacy. No one was surprised that the men of the tribe were not cooperative after such a tragedy had been perpetrated. We must also keep in mind that if Israel had not taken a stand, they too would have been responsible for the sins of the men of Gibeah.

Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man. Judges 20:11

The author wanted to emphasize again that this was not a sharply divided decision. All the men of Israel were in agreement that this must be punished. They were all convinced that Benjamin had to pay and they were willing to be a part of that army. It is one thing to say this should be done. It is quite another to say it must be done and I will be a part of that army to do the job.

The other side of this is, as was indicated earlier, there is evidence in the text that these people did not think that this would be a difficult campaign and they did not expect to see a large number of casualties.

Judges 20:12-16 – Benjamin Refused to Hand Over the Guilty

Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? Judges 20:12

Having completed all the preparations for battle, the men of Israel decided to attempt to get the people of Benjamin to reason. One might wonder why they made all these preparations for war before they attempted to reason with the men of Benjamin. It is clear that they thought that they would have to do battle with Benjamin. It was militarily important to be ready for battle before they attempted to negotiate. It would be possible for the men of Benjamin to surprise them with an attack as soon as the negotiations broke down unless they already were completely ready for battle. Again, if the Benjamites saw that the men of Israel were already prepared for battle, it might help them to become more conciliatory.

When the negotiations started, the men of Israel had 400,000 soldiers ready for battle and standing on the border of Benjamin. That would give any tribe pause in the decision-making. It was clear that they already had a plan for war. People knew what their task would be in the battle. Having displayed their strength and preparedness, they went throughout the whole tribe trying to elicit support to deal with the issue without shedding blood. This was a good idea, even though it was doomed to failure because of the men of Benjamin.

Observe their approach. They started out by asking, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you?" The men of Israel assumed that this was an accepted fact. They did not discuss it at all. The men of Gibeah were assumed to be guilty. No one asked if this was true. They assumed that the statement was true and insisted that Benjamin defend their situation. The Benjamites, even if they had wanted to defend the actions of one of

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their own, were faced with an indefensible situation. There was no way to justify what had happened.

"Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. Judges 20:13

The words "now then" indicate a change in the direction of the story. The men from the eleven tribes of Israel did not come to negotiate. They came to get the guilty and punish them. The men of Israel demanded that the Benjamites deliver up the guilty men to be put to death.

Notice how the men of Israel described the guilty men:

"Wickedness" (from verse 12) – This word is "ra" (רָעָה) and means "wretchedness," "wickedness which causes intense grief."

"Worthless fellows" – In the Hebrew, one might translate this "sons of worthlessness." The word for "worthlessness" is "beliyaal" (בְּלִיַּאל) and means "wickedness," and is sometimes translated "belial." It is primarily a picture of ungodliness.

"Ungodly."

The men of Israel had two things in mind:

- a. They wanted to punish the evil men.
- b. They wanted to purge evil from the midst of Israel. They remembered what happened when they allowed evil to be within the camp and among the people.

The men of Benjamin responded to the caustic accusations of the men of Israel by refusing to listen. This is more than a disagreement. They were saying that what the men did was not disgraceful. They were saying that it was all right to do this. For them, it was not a terrible sin that had to be rooted out of Israel. Essentially, they were taking a stand against the law of God as much as they were against the men of Israel. The men of Benjamin not only took part in the pagan worship; they took a stand against the God of Israel. This whole scene had to be destroyed.

And the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. Judges 20:14

Again, it sounds as though all these things took place on a sunny afternoon. The truth is that this took a great deal of time. This was not just a casual decision by the Benjamites. They were prepared to defend their decision by going to battle against all Israel. This was surprising. Benjamin was a small tribe. Numerically, they did not stand a chance against all the men of Israel. Still, that was their commitment.

And from the cities on that day the sons of Benjamin were numbered, 26,000 men who draw the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah who were numbered, 700 choice men. Judges 20:15

Now it was Benjamin's turn to go through their tribe and search out the men of war. They were able to raise 26,700 men. Gibeah was not large. They were only able to bring 700 able soldiers to the battle. This was nothing against the 360,000 fighting men that Israel

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brought. This is because 10% of their fighting force, or 40,000 men were set apart for supplies. This is very little against the 360,000 men Israel brought to the fray. Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. Judges 20:16

This verse highlights an uncommon situation. The men of Benjamin had one special weapon going for them. They had 700 left-handed soldiers who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. This is amazing. These 700 men were sharpshooters of the first order. This would be a shocking announcement to Jewish people. Virtually no one was left-handed in that day. Their cultural situation held that the left hand was used exclusively for personal hygiene. Essentially they did nothing else with the left hand. To think of a left-handed marksman was beyond their comprehension. Here, however, the author talked about 700 top marksmen who were left-handed and could hit a hair with a small stone. This was remarkable in both ways. Even with these skilled soldiers, their position was critical at best. That did not deter them from preparing for battle.

Judges 20:17, 18 – Israel Sought God Concerning Battle

Then the men of Israel besides Benjamin were numbered, 400,000 men who draw the sword; all these were men of war. Judges 20:17

In this verse, the author mentioned, again, that Israel had brought 400,000 fighting men to fight against Benjamin. It was not just that there were that many soldiers. These men were trained soldiers. They had experience in battle and were prepared to do battle again. These were Israel's crack troops. The repetition of this information was their way of placing special emphasis on these facts. This was absolutely necessary because it was so shocking that Benjamin would decide to go up against all Israel when they were so completely outnumbered.

It was not as though Benjamin had all the best troops in Israel. The best troops were in Judah when they went into the land of Canaan and that continued to be the case, right up to this point.

Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God, and said, "Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?" Then the LORD said, "Judah shall go up first." Judges 20:18

It was clear, now, that there was going to be a battle between the two armies. This verse sounds as though all 400,000 soldiers from Israel went up to Bethel to pray. This may seem to be an unusual battle plan. They were very close to their outnumbered enemy. The leaders then took them at least a days journey, 15 miles, to the north to the city of Bethel. Think of the logistics of taking 400,000 men and all the supplies 15 miles to pray and then bringing them back to the place where the battle would take place.

One wonders, why would they choose to go to Bethel? This is a trip of about 15 miles. Bethel was the main place of worship for all Israel. This was an important decision and they wanted to consult with God concerning what should be done.

The Lord answered their question. You may remember that the men of Israel did not ask God if they should go against the men of Bethlehem. It was clear to them that it should be done. They simply needed directions as to how it should be done. The Lord an-

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swered their questions. From this, it appears that God was in favor of what Israel was about to do.

Look at their question again. It tells us something about the men of Israel. It tells us that they are certain that they are going to be involved in battle. They are prepared to do battle. They also know that it is important for them to discover God's will for their battle. Israel wanted God to direct not only the battle, but also the way that they went into battle. God was the director of their engagement and they sought His direction for even the smallest detail of their involvement.

Judges 20:19-23 – Benjamin Won the First Battle Against Israel

So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah. Judges 20:19

This sounds as though it happened almost immediately after God told them which tribe should go first. That was not the case. We must remember that they still had a full day's journey to travel before they got back to Gibeah. Also, in most instances, there was a considerable amount of set-up work that had to be done before they were prepared to do battle with the men of Gibeah. To "camp against" a certain place was to be prepared to do battle with them.

And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah. Judges 20:20

Observe that though the battle took place at Gibeah, the battle was against Benjamin. The text says that they "arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah." This means that they formed a long battle line facing the men of Benjamin. They would have several of these lines one behind another, but their basic battle strategy was to line up and move against the enemy like a wave. This was a very costly maneuver in terms of men lost, but it was the best way they knew to fight.

Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel. Judges 20:21

This had to be the greatest possible shock for the soldiers from Judah. No one would have thought that the men from the tribe of Benjamin would be able to rout the army of Israel that was 400,000 strong. Nevertheless, that is exactly what happened. This casualty list was more than five percent of the huge army of Israel. We must remember, also, that the tribe of Judah was the leader. This probably meant that most of the losses came from their ranks.

Think of the effect this would have on the two armies. The Benjamites would be ecstatic. This would be a victory that was far beyond their highest hopes. They would be encouraged to believe that they could destroy the entire army of 400,000 men despite the fact that they were outnumbered fifteen to one. On the other hand, Israel would be so shocked that they would be demoralized. Even though they far outnumbered the army of Benjamin, still they would be fearful that they were unable to do anything to deter them.

But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day. Judges 20:22

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The word “but” suggests that a strong contrast is coming. That is true. In verse 21, the author described a demoralizing defeat. In verse 22, however, the author tells us that they men of Israel “encouraged themselves.” The word “encouraged” is “chazaq” (חָזַק) and means “to be strong and courageous,” “to strengthen and repair,” “to prepare oneself to behave valiantly.” This is the kind of thing a football coach must do when his team is far behind the opposition at half time. It involves telling them what they were doing wrong and then convincing them that they can, indeed, win the battle.

It sounds as though they could just go out and line up for battle. That was not quite the case. Notice that they prepared for battle in the same place where they had fought the day before. This means that there were at least 22,000 or more bodies that would be in the way. These would have to be moved out of the way so that there would be room for the soldiers to fight.

And the sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him." Judges 20:23

No mention is made of it here, but many of these soldiers of Israel came from communities and tribes where the people of Israel worshipped the gods of the gentiles. They were disobedient, but expected God to deliver them and vanquish their enemies.

Look at this verse again. It contains some hints about the frame of mind in the army of Israel. The way this verse is written, it appears that there is an element of confession here. Granted, most of them came from communities and tribes that had disobeyed God concerning the worship of idols, still they wanted to be obedient to God concerning this engagement. There is also another sense apparent in Israel. Notice the question they asked God. “Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?” It was in their power to do away with the tribe of Benjamin. Should they do that? There is ambivalence here. They wanted to deal with the terrible sin of Benjamin. They also did not want to destroy one of the twelve tribes. They also were prepared to return to battle even though they had suffered terrible losses and humiliation at the hands of their weaker brother Benjamin.

There is an insight here into the nature of God. The soldiers of Israel came from tribes that knew that they were to drive out the people of the land. Nevertheless, they did not drive out the gentile inhabitants. They moved into the land with them and eventually adopted their beliefs and intermarried with them. All of this was wrong and they knew it. Despite this disobedience, they came to ask God what they should do and how they should do it. Nevertheless, God answered their prayer and granted them His mercy and blessing.

Judges 20:24-28 – Benjamin Won a Second Battle Against Israel

Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day. Judges 20:24

The tribes from which these soldiers came had a long history of having disobeyed God. Still, when God gave them what seemed to be a confusing command, they obeyed even though it seemed to be a hazardous thing for them to do.

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Put yourself in their situation for a moment. You would be shocked to realize that though your army outnumbered the men of Benjamin at least fifteen to one, Still the Benjamites killed thousands of your troops and you had to yield in battle. Now God tells you to go back and attack them again. How would you feel? One suspects that there were a number of people in this army of Israel who felt exactly as we would. They must have felt that this was not a wise move on the part of their superior officers. Still, they obeyed and did exactly as the officers commanded them.

And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword. Judges 20:25

This would be more shocking to the soldiers of Israel than their previous defeat. The army of Israel was many times larger than the army mustered by the Benjamites. Still the small army of Benjamin killed 18,000 more of the army of Israel.

Put yourself in the place of the soldiers again. You were completely convinced that this may have happened the first time, but it certainly would not be repeated. Now the outnumbered Benjamite army has killed another 18,000 of your troops. Altogether, one-tenth of your army has been killed by an army that should not have been able to prevail even once. The shock and frustration of this loss would have been almost more than you could bear.

Notice that the author concluded the verse with the words, “All these drew the sword.” This suggests that these were trained soldiers. They were not farmers and shepherds who had been given weapons and sent into battle. They were well trained in the art of warfare. Nevertheless, 18,000 of them died at the hands of the sinful Benjamites.

Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. Judges 20:26

The information about Israel’s trip to Bethel gives us some additional information. Notice what these people did:

- a. **They wept** – The word for “wept” is “bawkaw” (בָּכָה) and means “to bemoan,” “to bewail,” “to mourn intensely.” This is extreme sorrow. These people were crying with great intensity. It is sorrow to the point of being out of control.
- b. **They fasted until evening** – Fasting was a symbol of great sorrow. It was also a symbol of extreme desire. They wanted to know what God was doing and what God wanted them to do to the extent that they would pray and refuse to take time to eat. Fasting does not twist God’s arm to do what He would otherwise not be willing to do. It expresses an intense desire that God would show Himself strong on behalf of His people.
- c. **They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings** – These are offerings that are to be totally consumed. They are sin offerings. In most instances, part of the sacrifice could be used for the sustenance of the priests. This sacrifice becomes unclean on behalf of a people made unclean by their sin.

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This is quite interesting. These people had been involved in disobedience for decades and now they turn to God in their danger and turmoil. This sounds strangely familiar.

And the sons of Israel inquired of the LORD for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, Judges 20:27

Again, the guilty men of Israel came before the LORD to inquire concerning what they should do in this disaster. In spite of their sin and disobedience, they asked God what they should do.

The use of the word “for” suggests a reason is forthcoming. The author said, “For the Ark of the Covenant of God was there in those days.” This suggests that the reason they went to Bethel was that this was the place of residence for the visible presence of God among His people Israel.

and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron's son, stood before it to minister in those days, saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." Judges 20:28

There is hesitation in the words of Phinehas as he approached the LORD to discover His will for His people. This is most apparent in the words “yet again.” It is as though he said, “We have gone against them twice and lost one tenth of our army. Is it really your will that we go against them again?”

In Phinehas’ petition for guidance, there is evidence of a willingness to give up the battle as a lost cause. This gives us a slight insight into the emotional response of Israel to the twin defeats at the hands of the men of Benjamin.

We, also, should remember that when we think of the ministry of the priests, we think of their taking the blood and sprinkling it upon the altar to purge the people of their sins. We seldom if ever think of their ministry of petitioning God for guidance concerning what they should do. This, however, is a vital part of the priestly ministry.

God spoke to Phinehas concerning the direction they should take. God’s message would be an even greater shock than the twin defeats Israel suffered at the hands of the men of Benjamin. The soldiers of Israel were confused to say the least. They felt they were acting on behalf of God, but still they were defeated and suffered severe losses in the battles against the tribe of Benjamin with their smaller army.

The response of God raises some questions. If God was going to destroy the men of Benjamin in the long run, then why does He allow the army of Benjamin to inflict such severe losses on the army of Israel before that happens? Israel always suffered from thinking that they were the ones who won the victory. They always seemed unable to understand that it was God who gave them the victory. Though the text does not speak to the issue, it may be that God wanted them to see that they could not do this on their own. They needed His help. We can only guess concerning this issue.

Judges 20:29-35 – Jehovah Smote the Benjamites

So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. Judges 20:29

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For whatever reason, the army of Israel treated the army of Benjamin like a real adversary for the first time. In the two previous engagements, it appears that they did not really take the Benjamites seriously. The result was that Israel really was not prepared to fight.

Now, Israel was treating the Benjamites like a real foe. They set a trap for the Benjamites just as they would for any other tribe or nation. The ambush was a very effective weapon of war. They would be able to devastate an enemy without a large contingent of soldiers and with a minimum of casualties. That was very important at this junction.

And the sons of Israel went up against the sons of Benjamin on the third day and arrayed themselves against Gibeah, as at other times. Judges 20:30

The preparation for battle appeared to be exactly the same as it had been on the two other encounters. That, however was not the case. Notice that the author said, “As at other times.” This was a strategy of entrapment. The presentation of the troops was not what it appeared to be.

And the sons of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city, and they began to strike and kill some of the people, as at other times, on the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah, and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. Judges 20:31

It is easy to see how this trap would work very well. The Benjamites had seen Israel withdraw in defeat on the two previous encounters. It would not seem strange to see this happen again. Therefore, the Benjamites were not cautious enough and fell into the trap.

The Benjamites made the mistake of thinking that this was just a repeat of the two previous victories. Notice how the author emphasizes this fact. He said, “They began to strike and kill some of the people **as at other times**.” It is quite clear that the men of Benjamin thought that this was just a repeat of the two previous encounters.

Observe that this battle took place on the highway. This was an easy place to chase the enemy, but it was a very limited battlefield. An open field was always far better for doing battle than a road would be. A road was a good place to chase down your enemy. On the other hand, if the battle took a turn for the worse, it was a good place for the enemy to chase you.

There is a contrast in this verse. It speaks of the men of Benjamin doing battle on the road. It then describes the location of the men of Israel as being 30 men in the field. In this statement we discover that there were two advantages for Israel. They were in the best place to do battle – the field. They were hiding in the field. This gave them the element of surprise that was very important in battle.

*And the sons of Benjamin said, "They are struck down before us, as at the first."
But the sons of Israel said, "Let us flee that we may draw them away from the city to the highways." Judges 20:32*

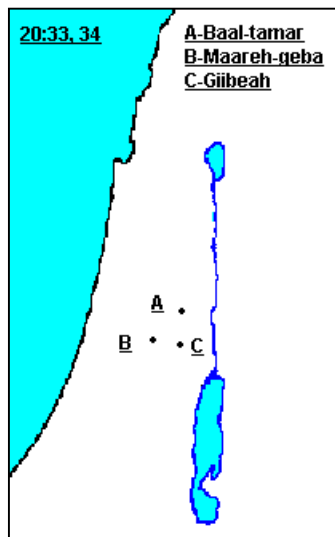
There is a stark contrast concerning the understanding of what was happening. The Benjamites looked at the situation and concluded that the Israelites were fleeing in defeat just as they had done on two previous occasions. Israel, on the other hand, was completely in control. They were retreating, but the attitude of retreat was not present. They retreated with a purpose – they were drawing Benjamin out so that they could be liquidated.

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The picture that you have here is a double contrast. Israel was retreating, but at the same time there was a confidence in their midst that all was well. On the other hand, Benjamin was advancing, confident that they were going to massacre the forces of Israel. The problem with this attitude was that they did not know of their impending doom that would shortly open before them.

Then all the men of Israel arose from their place and arrayed themselves at Baal-tamar; and the men of Israel in ambush broke out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba. When ten thousand choice men from all Israel came against Gibeah, the battle became fierce; but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them. Judges 20:33, 34

Notice the name of the city where the men of Israel took their stand – Baal-tamar. It was common for people to include the name of the god they served in the name of their city. That was the case here. The people in this area were busily involved in the worship of Baal and his consort Astorah.



Observe the closing statement concerning Benjamin, “but Benjamin did not know that disaster was close to them.” One of the dangers of apparent success is that it leads to overconfidence. If they had not been overly optimistic, they would have been alert to the possibility of being trapped by this apparent retreat.

Notice that there are three different locations mentioned in these two verses. On the map you can see the probable location of each one. We say “probable location” because we are not certain where they are located. These sites have not been excavated as yet. The indicated locations are reasonable choices for the three.

As you study this map, you can see that the Benjamites would be trapped between the three forces. That was the great fear of every army in that day. By the way they were deployed, the soldiers of Israel successfully encircled the soldiers of Benjamin.

And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel, so that the sons of Israel destroyed 25,100 men of Benjamin that day, all who draw the sword. Judges 20:35

Observe that it was the LORD who struck the soldiers of Benjamin. This does not mean that the soldiers of Israel did nothing. It is that God enabled them to conquer the soldiers of Benjamin. What a contrast between this third encounter and the two previous battles. In the two previous encounters, Israel was routed and ten percent of their army was killed. In this battle, however, the men of Israel killed 25,100 men of Benjamin. You may remember in our discussions of Judges 20:15, the total army of Benjamin was 26,700 men. With 25,100 now dead, there were only 1,600 soldiers left in the army of Benjamin.

The author has again presented two pictures of Benjamin:

- a. They are facing a foe that for the first time is demonstrating its huge potential.

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- b. There was the presence of imminent disaster that they were totally unable to observe. It took them by complete surprise.

Again, the author used the words, “all who draw the sword.” This was a way to identify men who were trained soldiers. It is not just that 25,100 men died. It is that the tribe of Benjamin lost 25,100 trained soldiers who were well prepared for battle. This statement emphasizes just how great was the victory that God gave to Israel.

Judges 20:36-48 – Gibeah Burned; 25,100 Benjamites Killed

So the sons of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. When the men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah, Judges 20:36

The text does not inform us concerning how the Benjamites discovered that they had been trapped. By whatever means, the Benjamites discovered that they had been ambushed. In this, they knew that though the trap had not yet been sprung, still they were a defeated army. It was only a matter of time until the battle would be over and they would have lost.

This verse gives us a glimpse into the army of Israel. This army attempted a very dangerous maneuver. It only worked because the soldiers of Israel who appeared to be retreating had great trust in the soldiers who were in ambush. A retreating army is always at great risk. The advantage is always with the advancing army simply because it is easier and safer to walk forward than it is to walk backwards or to walk forward looking back over your shoulder.

the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah; the men in ambush also deployed and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. Judges 20:37

While the men of Israel retreated before the Benjamites, the forces which had been in hiding near Gibeah hurried into the city to destroy it. This maneuver accomplished two things:

- a. It effectively cut off the Benjamites place of retreat. They now had no place to go. They either had to win against Israel or be totally destroyed.
- b. This blow devastated them. Their wives and children were in that city. It was demoralizing to see the town go up in smoke. They knew that their families were now either killed or taken captive. Either one would demoralize the entire army.

The author said, “...struck all the city with the edge of the sword.” This is a way of saying that the people in the city were all killed. This would be a devastating blow that would be hard to describe.

Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. Judges 20:38

This verse makes it clear that the men of Israel wanted the Benjamites to see the smoke and know that their city was burning to the ground. This was a calculated move to work on the minds of the men of Benjamin. It would tell the men of Benjamin that they may have won the skirmishes so far, but they had just lost the war. There is an insight here. At this point, the men of Israel could see a sign that the men of Benjamin could not see. The men of Israel could see the smoke and knew that their fellow soldiers had done the job they

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were supposed to do. This was a source of encouragement to them. On the other hand, the men of Benjamin could not see the smoke. They were functioning as though they were invincible when in fact they had been defeated and did not know it.

Then the men of Israel turned in the battle, and Benjamin began to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel, for they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle." Judges 20:39

This would seem strange to the men of Benjamin. They would wonder why the men of Israel would do such a thing. It did not make sense for men who had been defeated twice to turn and attack the very army who had defeated them twice within the week. It would seem like suicide to the men of Benjamin. This was only because the men of Benjamin could not see what had happened. This was the reason that the men of Benjamin thought, “surely they are defeated before us, as in the first battle.” This suggests that the men of Benjamin prepared to kill as many as they had killed before and perhaps more.

But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven. Judges 20:40

What a shock this would be to the men of Benjamin! By using the word “behold,” the author made an attempt to convey the idea of shock and surprise that would grip the hearts of the men of Benjamin. Put yourself in the place of these Benjamite soldiers. You are feeling smug and victorious for a third time. Everything seems to be going your way. Suddenly, everything seemed to fall apart at once. The Benjamite soldiers would be confused and filled with fear. The appearance of the cloud of smoke would convince these soldiers that their city was gone and with it all their family and possessions.

Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. Judges 20:41

The word “terrified” is “bahal” (בָּהַל) and means “to inwardly tremble.” It is “to be beside oneself with anxiety and devastating fear.” The author has engaged in a bit of understatement. Their worst fears were unfolding before their eyes, but they could do nothing about it.

You may have noticed that there seems to be a bit of confusion concerning the precise chain of events that took place on this day. If you look carefully at the text, it is as though the same thing happened twice. The truth is that the text gives us a very accurate picture of the emotional state of affairs that took place that day in the area. This is a picture of the total panic that accompanies the discovery that you are going to die.

The men of Benjamin, at the beginning of this verse, expected the soldiers of Israel to be fleeing in panic. Suddenly, the men of Israel turn to defend themselves and this totally surprised the men of Benjamin. It is almost as though they would say, “Why are you turning around to fight, you are supposed to be fleeing for your life?”

Therefore, they turned their backs before the men of Israel toward the direction of the wilderness, but the battle overtook them while those who came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst of them. Judges 20:42

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When a soldier turned his back on his enemy, it was clear that he was defeated and he was going to die. The text indicates that the men of Benjamin turned their back to the wilderness. This means that they turned toward the west with their backs toward the Jordan River.

The use of the word “but” indicates a contrast is in process. The men of Benjamin fled to protect their lives, but the soldiers of Israel caught up with them. Death was imminent.

There is another problem described in this verse for the men of Benjamin. As one contingent of soldiers chased the men of Benjamin, the soldiers who had torched the cities turned and attacked the Benjamites. These men fled from one foe and were killed by another.

They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. Judges 20:43

As we observed on the map at verse 33, 34, the soldiers of Israel were deployed in such a way that they could surround the men of Benjamin with ease. An army caught in such a situation was in deep trouble.

The author indicated that the men of Israel pursued the Benjamites “without rest.” This is more than just necessary military action. There is a personal element to this pursuit. The soldiers of Israel remembered two engagements in which they lost nearly forty thousand of their countrymen. There is an element of revenge that is very strong.

If this is true, and it appears that it is, a question comes to mind. How could God, as indicated in verse 27, be party to this action when one of the clear motives is revenge? The text does not speak to this issue. If God waited until people operated only with pure motives, He would do nothing in conjunction with any of us. The scriptures are full of illustrations where God worked through people despite the fact that they operated with less than pure motives.

Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. Judges 20:44

This is the first indication of the size of the Benjamite forces. We only know how many died. We do not know how many were involved in the fight.

The author described these 18,000 Benjamite soldiers as “valiant warriors.” This is made up of two Hebrew words that are helpful here.

- a. “Enowsh” (עָוֵשׁ) describes a man in the flower, the full vigor of his life.
- b. “Chayil” (חַיִּל) describes a person of great power and valor.

As you study these definitions, you note that they both stress the idea of great strength. This is the Hebrew way of emphasizing an idea by repetition with a slightly different direction.

The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them. Judges 20:45

Rock of Rimmon is located in a very mountainous area just two miles north of the city of Ai and about ten miles east of the city of Bethel. It is easy to see why the Benjamites

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would flee here. It is most difficult to capture people once they are safely into the mountains. There are many places to hide and the pursuer is at great risk of surprise once he commits himself to such a search. It is also easy to understand why the men of Israel could only kill 2,000 of these Benjamites.

So all of Benjamin who fell that day were 25,000 men who draw the sword; all these were valiant warriors. Judges 20:46

This is a summary statement concerning this battle. We tend to read such a verse and move on. We need to stop and think a minute. Twenty five thousand men of Benjamin died that day. Benjamin was not a large tribe. They did not have a vast heritage of land. If 25,000 died, this would remove a sizeable number of their men. It would seriously jeopardize the ability of the tribe to sustain itself in the next generation.

We need to look at the reporting of the author concerning the casualties of Benjamin.

- In verse 15, the author said there were 26,700 men in the army of Benjamin.
- In verse 35, the author said that 25,100 Benjamites were killed.
- Now in verse 46 the author said that 25,000 died on this day.
- This is 50,100 if each report describes separate encounters.

To some, this would be evidence of an error in the author's reporting. Another possibility is that the people of Benjamin recruited even more men when their losses became evident. There is no way to confirm or deny this possibility. More than specific numbers, the author was trying to convey just how devastating this battle was to the little tribe of Benjamin.

The author described these men in two ways:

- “Men who draw the sword”** – This is a way to identify the fact that these were trained soldiers who were valiant men and outstanding soldiers.
- “Valiant warriors”** – These are the same two words we described in verse 44.

Again, the author has used repetition to emphasize just how brave and strong these soldiers were. Their capture was not because they were weak or unskilled. God delivered these brave skilled soldiers into the hands of the men of Israel. The author used this repetition to place strong emphasis on this fact.

But 600 men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they remained at the rock of Rimmon four months. Judges 20:47

In this verse, the author gives us a bit of further information. Six hundred of these Benjamites were able to escape and flee into the mountains to the rock of Rimmon. These 600 soldiers could stay in this mountainous area indefinitely. The fact that they stayed in this area for four months is not at all surprising.

The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found. Judges 20:48

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The men of Israel knew that when the Benjamites got into these mountains the chances of finding them without being killed themselves was very slim. It is not surprising that the soldiers of Israel left and went back to the area where the rest of their army was located.

The author used three different pictures to describe the carnage of the soldiers of Israel.

- a. **“Struck them with the edge of the sword”** – This is a way of saying that the soldiers of Israel killed everyone in the city. There were no survivors to take captive.
- b. **“Both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found”** – The soldiers of Israel were not interested in booty. They killed all the people and all the animals. There was nothing left with which to start life over again. It wouldn’t matter, however, because the people were all put to death as the soldiers returned to their base.
- c. **“They also set on fire all the cities which they found”** – The soldiers wanted to make sure that the cities could not be occupied again very soon. By burning the city, they seriously inhibited any plans people might have for moving back into the area.

The author has already told us of 18,000 soldiers being killed. Though the text does not identify the exact number, the author was trying to give us a picture of just how devastating this was for the Benjamites. This was a devastating for them to say the least.

Conclusion

Though this chapter is one tragic scene after another, still there are some pictures of God that are important for our awareness.

20:1 – God will hear our cry even though we have rebelled against Him in disobedience.

20:2 – God did not reject Israel even though they had not been faithful to their covenant with him.

20:18 – Jehovah guides His people when they seek His wisdom.

20:23 – God’s help and guidance do not insure ease and safety.

20:23 – God hears our cry of anguish.

20:23 – God continues to guide us even when we fail to trust Him.

20:26 – God forgives and restores when we fail and confess our wrong-doing.

20:28 – God controls nations and armies. He delivered the army of Benjamin into the hands of Israel.

20:35 – God struck the men of Benjamin before Israel, but the soldiers of Israel still had to win the battle and claim the victory.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 21

WIVES FOR THE BENJAMITES

JUDGES 21:1 – 25

1. There are four paragraphs in the twenty-first chapter of the book of Judges. On the following table, write a brief summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

21:1-7	
21:8-12	
21:13-15	
21:16-25	

2. In Judges 21:1-7, the author described the provision of wives for Benjamites.
 - a. In 21:1, there is a seeming inconsistency in the vow the men of Israel took. What was inconsistent about it?
 - b. In 21:2, the people of Israel came to Bethel to pray.
 - (1). Why would they go to Bethel?
 - (2). Why would the people of Israel be so concerned about the fact that there were no wives for the men of Benjamin?
 - c. In 21:3, the author described the burden of Israel's prayer. What was it?
 - d. In 21:4, the people of Israel built an altar in Bethel, where there was already an altar to God. Why would they do this?
 - e. In 21:5, the men of Israel asked concerning the ones who had not come up to the assembly to the Lord. What difference would that make?
 - f. In 21:6, 7, you can sense deep concern on the part of the people of Israel for the Benjamites. There is something strange about this concern.
 - (1). What is it?
 - (2). How can we explain this situation?
3. In Judges 21:8-12, Israel pursued the idea of those who did not come to the assembly.
 - a. The author mentioned a second time, in 21:8, that some people did not come to the assembly in Mizpah. What makes this fact so important?
 - b. In 21:9, the author mentioned the fact that no one came to the assembly from Jabesh-gilead. Can you think of any reason why the men of Jabesh-gilead would not come?
 - c. In 21:10, Israel sent a large army to destroy Jabesh-gilead. The battle with Benjamin was finished. Why would it be necessary to do this?
 - d. Make a comparison of 21:11 with 21:5.
 - (1). What did you discover?

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- (2). How important would this be?
- e. In 21:12, the men of Israel brought the 400 virgins from Jabesh-gilead to be wives for the Benjamites.
 - (1). What problem can you discover with this decision?
 - (2). Why would the men of Israel bring the virgins to Shiloh rather than send the Benjamites to Jabesh-gilead?
- 4. In Judges 21:13, the men of Benjamin were given the virgins from Jabesh-gilead as wives.
 - a. In 21:13, Israel sent a message to the Benjamites.
 - (1). Why would it be necessary for the whole congregation of Israel to send this message?
 - (2). The text says that the people of Israel proclaimed peace to the Benjamites. What would the purpose of this be?
 - (3). Read this verse carefully, at least twice.
 - (a). What emotional tone do you sense?
 - (b). What would Israel hope to gain by this?
 - b. In 21:14, there is a problem.
 - (1). What is it?
 - (2). What makes this so crucial?
 - c. In 21:15, there is a seeming inconsistency.
 - (1). What is it?
 - (2). How can you explain it?
- 5. In Judges 21:16-25, the people of Israel devise a plan to find more wives for Benjamin.
 - a. In 21:16, the men of Israel struggle to find wives for the men of Benjamin.
 - (1). How would you describe the concern of Israel?
 - (2). In view of Israel's determination to destroy the cities and people of Benjamin, why would they now be so concerned?
 - b. In 21:17, 18, Israel struggled again over this problem.
 - (1). How would you describe the emotion expressed in these verses?
 - (2). What does this have to say about the men of Israel?
 - c. In 21:19, the men of Israel planned a solution to the problem of Benjamin.
 - (1). Compare this solution with their vow as recorded in 21:5. What did you discover?
 - (2). Is this solution reasonable and appropriate?
 - d. In 21:20, 21, instructions were given to the men of Benjamin.
 - (1). What were the instructions?
 - (2). There is a potential problem with the instructions.
 - (a). What is the potential problem?
 - (b). How would you explain this to a new believer?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 21

- e. In 21:22, the men of Israel seek to reassure the men of Benjamin.
 - (1). What problem do the men of Israel anticipate with this solution?
 - (2). If you were one of the men of Israel, how could you square this statement to Benjamin with the vow you took at Mizpah?
 - f. In 21:23, the sons of Benjamin did as they were instructed.
 - (1). The men of Benjamin went back to their cities. That being the case, how can we explain Israel destroying the cities and burning them?
 - (2). What does this say about the men of Israel?
 - g. In 21:24, the men of Israel went home. What does this say about this whole episode?
 - h. Read verses 24 and 25 together.
 - (1). What did you discover about the makeup of the verses?
 - (2). There are two statements in verse 25.
 - (a). What are these statements?
 - (b). What was the author trying to say.
6. Review chapter 21 to discover what this chapter has to say about the nature and character of God.

LESSON 21: JUDGES 21:1 – 25

WIVES FOR THE BENJAMITES

There are four paragraphs in the twenty-first chapter of the book of Judges. A brief summary of each paragraph appears on the following table.

21:1-7	Problem – No Wives for The Benjamites
21:8-12	Problem – Jabesh-gilead Didn't Come for Battle
21:13-15	Benjamin Given Virgins From Jabesh-gilead
21:16-25	Trick To Get More Wives for Benjamin

Judges 21:1-7 – Problem – No Wives for The Benjamites

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage." Judges 21:1

This vow was part of their preparation to go to war against Benjamin. Benjamin had done such evil that the rest of the tribes vowed that they would not intermarry with them. This is interesting since they were already intermarried with the pagan nations among whom they lived. The idea behind this vow was that to intermarry with any family, there had to be an accepting relationship between them. This was Israel's way of identifying just how terrible they considered this situation to be. Under normal circumstances, this would be a difficulty, but not insurmountable. But with Israel having burned the cities of Benjamin and killed the inhabitants, there were no young women for the men of Benjamin to take for their wives. Unless some way was found for the men of Benjamin to receive brides, the tribe would cease to exist.

This created a different problem. The men of Israel wanted to punish Benjamin, but it was in their own best interest to preserve all 12 tribes. In order to do that, they would have to help Benjamin find wives. This was nearly impossible since they had taken a vow not to give their daughters to the Benjamites. God would only be pleased and obeyed if they intermarried only within the twelve tribes of Israel. We must keep in mind that God was the third party in any vow made by a Jewish person. It was, therefore, unacceptable for them to change their vow or fail to keep it.

So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. Judges 21:2

The people came to Bethel because this was the place where Israel worshipped when they first came into the land. The people of Israel sinned and disobeyed God repeatedly concerning intermarrying with the pagan nations. Still, when they were troubled, they hurried to Bethel to ask God what to do. This tells us something about the people and about God. It tells us that the people knew that they should be worshipping God alone and that He could and would meet their needs. This tells us that the people did not mind using this knowledge as an escape hatch when they were in trouble. It also tells us that God was

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longsuffering with Israel and forgave them their sins. God helped them even though He knew that they would serve the gods of the Philistines, again.

The text says that they “sat there before God until evening and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.” This was not just a quickie prayer. They sat before the Lord all day. Sitting before the Lord was one of their ways of praying. They had learned that it was good for them to just sit in God’s presence and wait upon Him.

The intensity of their prayer is revealed in the words, “and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.” This was an intense sorrow to them. The words “wept bitterly” are interesting. In the Hebrew, it might be translated “and wept a great weeping.” The word “weeping” is “bakah” (בָּכָה) which is much more than simply shedding tears. It means, “to bemoan,” “to mourn.” Indeed, it was used to describe the feelings of family when the father died. It may seem strange that they would have such a consuming sorrow over one whom they had just defeated in battle. We will deal with this issue in the next few verses.

And they said, "Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel?" Judges 21:3

In the prayer of the people, they referred to God as “LORD God.” In the Hebrew, this is “Jehovah Elohim.” Repeatedly, Old Testament authors used this combined name for God to identify Him as the “merciful judge.” Naturally, either name would have been sufficient to identify God, but the combined names gives an indication of the intensity of their desire. The addition of the words “of Israel” makes the identification very personal for them. He was their God, though it was not always obvious by the way they served Him.

This verse reveals the burden of their sorrow. They are not less distressed with the thing that the men of Gibeah did and that Benjamin supported. They were deeply concerned because this would mean the end of one of the twelve tribes. It had to do with the covenant that they had with God. God had chosen Israel, all twelve tribes, to be His people. Should one of them perish, and that because of the terrible crime that had been committed, it would have serious implications concerning their covenant with God. As it happens so often in tragedy, people ask the question, “why?” Very often, there is no answer to the question, “why?” In this case, however, there is an obvious answer. It is simply because Benjamin supported a horrendous crime against God and His people. The result of Benjamin’s sin is that there is a punishment that is experienced, to some degree, by all Israel. This gives us an insight into the nature of sin and its consequences.

And it came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Judges 21:4

One might think that this meant that there was no altar at Bethel for them to make their sacrifices. That was not the case. On several occasions, Israel built an altar for two reasons:

- a. They wanted to make a sacrifice.
- b. It was also a way to especially mark this event and place. This altar would remain in that place. Whenever they returned to Bethel, they would see this altar and be reminded of what had happened and how God had helped them in their time of distress.

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Observe that the offerings that they made were burnt offerings and peace offerings. These were offerings that were characteristically made when people wanted to confess their sins. No part of this offering would be given to the priest. It was called a burnt offering because the entire sacrifice would be burnt up. None of it would be eaten. They were keenly aware of the fact that the people of Benjamin had sinned grievously. They wanted to restore Benjamin, and in so doing, restore all twelve tribes in the relationship of the covenant.

Then the sons of Israel said, "Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the LORD?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death." Judges 21:5

In this verse, we are given another glimpse into the events that took place when they were about to go to battle against Benjamin. They felt the need for some guarantee that every tribe would come to pray and participate in the campaign against Benjamin. They decided that they would impose a sentence of death upon anyone who refused to take part in this agreement.

This situation, of course, again, made it impossible for them to provide wives for the men of Benjamin. They have turned their attention to see if there is another way that they can be of help to Benjamin. They decided to check to see if there was anyone who refused to come to pray. In one sense, this was a compromise of their oath. The possibility of substituting marriage of their daughters to Benjamites was not considered as an alternative to the death sentence. Clearly, the men of Israel are trying to find a way to make the best of an impossible situation.

And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. Judges 21:6

This may be very hard to understand. Normally, people do not get that concerned about the needs of their conquered enemies. When the text says, "The sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin," Israel was not less offended by the sin that Benjamin had sanctioned. Israel's distress over this terrible evil was constant. It did not change. Israel had compassion on Benjamin because this meant that the tribe would die out and this would be a detriment to them as much as to the tribe of Benjamin.

Observe the way the men of Israel spoke. They spoke of this as if it had already taken place. It is as though Benjamin had already been cut off from the rest of the covenant people.

"What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the LORD not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?" Judges 21:7

As you read this verse, it appears that the leaders of Israel had taken this problem as their own problem. They felt compelled to solve the problem on behalf of Benjamin. This is the struggle they engaged in as they sought a solution for the troubles of Benjamin. The dilemma they faced is clear. They felt a sincere need to come to the aid of Benjamin. Secondly, they knew that they had taken an irrevocable oath before God that they would not give their daughters to the Benjamites.

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Judges 21:8-12 – Problem – Jabesh-gilead Didn't Come for Battle

And they said, "What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the LORD at Mizpah?" And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. Judges 21:8

There are two parts to the search for wives for the people who had not come to Bethel.

- a. They had agreed that anyone who did not come to Mizpah would be put to death. They felt the need to bring punishment.
- b. A person who had not come to Bethel would be the only one who had not taken the oath before God to refuse to give his daughter to the Benjamites. If they could find a group of significant size that had not been at Mizpah, then they would have found a solution to their dilemma.

When they realized that no one had come from Jabesh-gilead, they knew that the problem was solved.

For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there. Judges 21:9

The thing that brought their solution to mind was the fact that when the people were counted, at Mizpah, not a person from Jabesh-gilead was found. We do not know why this was true. The people of Jabesh-gilead were not neighbors to the Benjamites. This city was located in the tribe of Manasseh. Benjamin was at least a two-day walk south and west of their borders.

And the congregation sent 12,000 of the valiant warriors there, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. Judges 21:10

Certainly, the men of Israel would be angry with the men of Jabesh-gilead for not coming to pray and to fight. The text gives us no indication of just how angry the men of Israel were with the men of Jabesh-gilead. The fact that Israel sent 12,000 valiant warriors to destroy the city and its surroundings is not indicative of their anger. Had the men of Israel not sent the men and destroyed the area, then they would have violated a vow that they made with Jehovah. That was the motivation for their actions.

Notice that this verse indicates that it was not only the men who had refused to obey the command to come and fight that were killed. The women and children were also killed. This is a way of not only destroying the city, but also making sure that it was not rebuilt to flourish again.

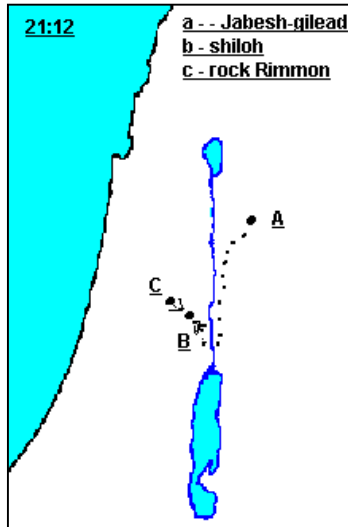
"And this is the thing that you shall do: you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man." Judges 21:11

If you compare verse ten with verse eleven, you will notice that the men of Israel made a small change in the commands that were given to the army. In verse ten, the text reads, "with the women and the little ones." In verse eleven, however, the instructions read, "every woman who has lain with a man." This is an accommodation in order to find wives for the men of Benjamin who did not have wives.

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We should note that though this action wiped out the city of Jabesh-gilead, it was repopulated soon afterward. When you come to I Samuel chapter 11, the text speaks of Jabesh-gilead as being populated again and under siege.

And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. Judges 21:12



Certainly it was good news that they found 400 young virgins in the city of Jabesh-gilead. There are some that might ask, just how would they know that these young women were virgins? There are at least two answers to this question:

a. Most young girls were married between the ages of 12 and 14 years of age. Indeed, a girl was of marriageable age when she was eleven years and one day old. If a girl was less than fifteen years of age, she could be assumed to be a virgin unless she was already married.

b. In that culture, all virgins wore a specific kind of dress that would identify them immediately as unmarried and sexually inexperienced.

The text indicates that these 400 young virgins were taken from Jabesh-gilead to Shiloh. This is a trip of about 40 miles. This would be a trip of about 3 days and much of the time they would be traveling through low mountain ranges

The question comes to mind, why not leave the young virgins at home and have the men come to them? This is a good question. There are a couple of ingredients in the answer:

1. If the men of Benjamin went to Jabesh-gilead, they would have to travel through the territory of other Jewish tribes. There were already bad feelings between them. This would only increase these tensions.
2. The young virgins would ultimately have to make this trip anyway because they would be living in the territory of Benjamin. This would facilitate that end.
3. In the next verse, you will see that the men of Benjamin were at the rock of Rimmon. This place is identified on the previous map. This indicates that the young women were brought roughly three fourths of the way to the place where the men were located.

Judges 21:13-15 – Benjamin Given Virgins from Jabesh-gilead

Then the whole congregation sent word and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. Judges 21:13

If you read this verse carefully, you will sense a tone of apprehension. This is not surprising. The Benjamites had done a terrible thing. They knew it and everyone else reminded them of the fact. Observe that the text says, “then the whole congregation sent word...” It

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was not enough for the leaders of Israel to send this message. It took the word of the whole congregation to convince the men of Benjamin.

The word for “spoke”: is “dabar” (דָּבַר) and means “to speak eloquently.” It was not that they sent word that there would be no danger to them. The people of all Israel spoke convincingly with the Benjamites convincing them that all was well for them and that they would indeed receive a bride to preserve their heritage.

The word “proclaimed” is (קָרָה) and means “to speak persuasively.” This is more than an announcement. It is to let the men of Benjamin know, in a convincing way, that there is no danger for them, but there are wives for them.

And Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them. Judges 21:14

We do not know how the people of Israel convinced the men of Benjamin, but whatever was said was effective. The men of Benjamin returned after the people of Israel spoke to them.

The men of Israel kept their word and gave wives to the Benjamites from the virgins of Jabesh-gilead. This was both good and bad news. It was good news in that 400 men received a wife. It was bad news in that there were not enough virgins to provide for every man who had no wife. At least for these men, things were as bad as they were before the 400 virgins were brought to Shiloh.

And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. Judges 21:15

This verse records the reaction of the people of Israel over the dilemma of some of the men of Benjamin. The text says that they were “sorry.” The word “sorry” is “nacham” (נָחַם) and literally means “to breathe strongly,” “to sigh,” “to be extremely sorry,” “to comfort,” “to repent.” The idea of the author was that the people of Israel were so touched by the grief of the Benjamites that they felt sorry that it had been necessary for them to take the drastic measures that were necessitated by the sin of Benjamin. There is a deep level of compassion on the part of the people of Israel even though Benjamin did not deserve it.

The author gave us another glimpse into the actions of God. He said, “The LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel.” Previously, the text indicated that it was the men of Israel who had killed the people of Benjamin. Here the author said that the LORD did it. The author was correct in both instances. It was indeed the action of God, but the men of Israel carried it out. The message about God is that He carries out His judgment, but sometimes uses people, both His people and His enemies to accomplish the necessary punishment. This message appears over and over in the book of Judges. It is interesting that the author used the name for God, which focuses upon His justice – Jehovah.

Judges 21:16-25 – Trick To Get More Wives for Benjamites

Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" Judges 21:16

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As you read this verse, it is clear that the elders of the congregation had taken responsibility for the provision of wives for the men of Benjamin. They were confronted with a serious dilemma. The women of Benjamin had all been destroyed. Now there were no other wives to be given to the Benjamites. The men of Israel had been able to get 400 wives by taking the virgins from Jabesh-gilead, but there were no other cities like Jabesh-gilead from which to take wives for the Benjamites. It was clear to them that this was a serious bind.

And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be blotted out from Israel. "But we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, "Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin." Judges 21:17, 18

These two verses sharply express the dilemma that faced the men of Israel. Observe that they did not say, "We would like to provide wives for the Benjamites. They said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin." This was not a negotiable idea. It had to be done. At the same time, they said that they could not give wives to the Benjamites because they had placed a curse on anyone who did so. In Israel, an oath always involved the presence and involvement of God. To fail to keep an oath was to fail to do as one promised before God.

So they said, "Behold, there is a feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah." Judges 21:19

As they struggled with their dilemma, they were reminded of the fact that each year there was a religious feast in the area of Bethel.

And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. Judges 21:20, 21

Shiloh was located in the land of the Ephraimites. Though the men of Israel suggested this plan to the Benjamites, they knew that this may be in keeping with the letter of the law, but it certainly violated the spirit of it. Nevertheless, it was the only possible way for the tribe of Benjamin to be rescued from extinction. The men of Israel not only made this plan possible, they even gave the Benjamites instructions as to how they could make this work.

Everyone knew that the young maidens would come outside the city and take part in a ritual dance. The men of Israel were recommending that the men of Benjamin each capture his bride as they came out to perform in the ritual dances.

It should be noted that in a literal sense, the men of Israel did not violate their vow. The men of Ephraim did not offer to give their daughters as wives to the men of Benjamin. The father of these virgins entered into no wedding contract. If they had, it would have been considered good reason to put them to death. Now, however, these men had nothing to do with their daughters being given to the Benjamites. Instead, the Benjamites took the

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brides and gave them to their soldiers. Literally, no one acted in conflict with their oath to each other and to God.

"And it shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, 'Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.'" Judges 21:22

The men of Israel talked with the Benjamites concerning the events that would take place when the men of Ephraim came to them complaining about the loss of their daughters to the Benjamites. The men of Israel counted on the fact that they were able to say that they did not take the virgins and the men of Ephraim did not give their daughters in marriage. In this respect, no one violated the oath, though the purpose of the vow was clearly violated. The men of Israel counted on this fact to convince the Benjamites to take part in this slightly different carrying out of the terms of the vow. The fathers of these virgins could know of a certainty that they had not violated their vow to the Lord.

And the sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away. And they went and returned to their inheritance, and rebuilt the cities and lived in them. Judges 21:23

This is probably the only place in the Old Testament where a daughter of Israel was taken in marriage without a marriage agreement. Again, this may not be in conflict with the spirit of the law, but it was most certainly in conflict with the letter of their agreement and oath that they took before the LORD.

Observe that when the men of Benjamin came out of hiding to carry away their wives, they went back to their own land. In the land of Benjamin, they rebuilt the cities that had been destroyed by the men of Israel. In this way, the cities of the Benjamites were repopulated and remained so until the times of Samuel and the kings.

Observe also that the text states that the Benjamites returned to their inheritance. In most instances, an inheritance involved more than a tract of land. Their flocks were a major part of their inheritance. This does not mean that this was overlooked. We must remember, however, that when the men of Israel captured each city and village, they destroyed it and burnt it to the ground. There was nothing left to return to in the land. Nevertheless, the men of Benjamin did return and rebuilt the city from the ground up.

And the sons of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and each one of them went out from there to his inheritance. Judges 21:24

This verse indicates that the task of the occupation troops was complete and they were now going to go home to their wives and families. They had no interest in bringing further pain and problem to the tribe of Benjamin. The men of Israel wanted only the best for Benjamin. This does not mean that the men of Israel had forgotten what Benjamin had done. This, again, was not because they were so magnanimous. They were well aware of the fact that it was as much in their best interest for Benjamin to survive as it was for the people of Benjamin.

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Judges 21:25

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As you read this verse carefully, you will note that it represents a serious change of direction:

- a. Verse 24 – deals with the completion of Israel making it possible for Benjamites to have wives.
- b. Verse 25 – is a summary statement about the whole book. It begins with the fact that there was “no king in Israel.”

This is about as sharp a change in focus as it is possible to get.

As indicated earlier, this is not the first time this sentence has been used in the book. You will also find it in 17:6. The first part of the statement is also found in 18:1 and 19:1. We have seen several examples of this type of repetition in the Scriptures. In Psalm 136, for instance, the words “For his lovingkindness is everlasting” appears in each of the 26 verses of the Psalm. The major focus of that Psalm is to emphasize this single idea.

There are two parts to the statement in 21:25. We will look at them separately:

- a. **“In those days there was no king in Israel”** – This is an interesting statement. There had never been a king in the entire history of the people of Israel. It was not a time when there had been a king, but for a short time no king ruled. No Jewish king ever sat on a throne in Israel up until this time. That time would come, but it had not up until now.

This being the case, one must ask what the author meant when he said, “In those days there was no king in Israel...” In that era, the “king” was the universal symbol of power and authority. The author’s statement is a way of saying that during this era, Israel lived in a vacuum of authority.

- b. **“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”** – There is more than one way one might interpret this statement.
 - (1). Everyone in Israel was motivated by the desire to do what was right. People differed concerning what was “right.” This is a most unlikely possibility.
 - (2). With no central authority to assert control, everyone did whatever he wanted to do. This is anarchy. It is the most likely possibility of the author’s intentions.

Conclusion

This is the climax of the book of Judges. Therefore, the message about God will be crucial to an understanding of the entire book.

21:2 – In the time of trouble, even disobedient people can come to God for help. He hears prayer. This is a beautiful example of the prevenient grace of God.

21:15 – It was the Lord who “made a breach in the tribes of Israel.” This suggests that God was involved, though the people carried out the battle.

The emphasis, here, takes the form of a contrast. The book ends with the statement that there is no king in Israel. At the same time, in this final chapter, the emphasis on the nature of God is that He is in control of even what appears to be the tragedies of life.

THE CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY OF JUDGES

The book of Judges is an historical book that tells the story of Israel's entrance into the land of promise following their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. This, however, is not the purpose of the book. Look carefully at your study of the book. The author begins the book by describing God's blessing - Israel's entrance into the land of promise. This is followed by Israel's rebellion - the refusal to drive out the inhabitants as God commanded. The balance of the book describes what happens when God's people rebel against His will. Their punishment was that they received what they wanted - they did not want to drive the enemy out so God allowed them to stay and become a thorn in Israel's side. In the chapters of the book, there is a repeated cycle in the relationship between God and Israel. The ingredients of the cycle are as follows:

1. Israel rebelled.
2. God punished Israel for their rebellion by delivering them into the hands of the people that they should have driven out.
3. Israel cried to God for help.
4. God delivered the repentant people.
5. Israel was restored to peace and God's presence.
6. Israel again rebelled.
7. God punished Israel by giving them into the hands of their enemy.
8. The cycle continues through Israel's history.

Observe that as the cycle of rebellion and repentance continues, the conditions in Israel grow increasingly worse until the end of the book describes anarchy in careful detail - "...everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

It is interesting to note that in general, the number of times God is mentioned in the book gradually declines until in some chapters God is not mentioned at all. This parallels the increasing rebellion and debauchery of the people.

As you study the text, you will notice that there are two parallel streams that run throughout the story:

- a. There is a picture of God.
- b. There is a picture of how people think and act.

As you read through the book, you discover a number of pieces of information about God.

1. God is powerful - 9
2. God is merciful - 7
3. God punishes disobedience - 6
4. God is faithful - 5
5. God is the deliverer of His people - 5
6. God is with His people - 4
7. God guides His people - 4
8. God communicates with His people - 2

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9. God is omniscient - 2
10. God can be angered by people's sin - 2
11. God is to be worshipped - 2
12. God can be forsaken - 1
13. God is the ruler - 1
14. God is the judge - 1
15. God is personal to His people - 1
16. God is provident to His people - 1
17. God tests His people - 1

If you read through the Hebrew text, you will notice that there are four different names used for God:

- a. **Jehovah** - (This name focuses on the fact God is eternal. It is used in contexts where justice is being described.) - It was used 149 times in Judges
- b. **Elohim** - (This name focuses on the omnipotence of God and is used in contexts where the mercy of God is being described.) - It was used 4 times in Judges.
- c. **El** - (This name for God means the mighty one) - it was used 5 times in Judges.
- d. **Adonai** - (This name focuses on God as Lord or Master) - It was used 5 times in Judges.

On a few occasions the name "the Lord God" (Jehovah-Elohim) is used. This is significant. The name LORD stresses the fact that God is eternal and is used in situations where judgment is being meted out. The name "God" stresses the fact that God is omnipotent and the name is used in situations where the mercy of God is involved.

The name "Jehovah" is usually translated "LORD" in English translations. The name "Elohim" is usually translated "God" in English translations of the Bible. The fact that the name "Jehovah" is used a majority of the time, makes it clear that God is involved in judging the rebellion of His people as well as their enemies. The fact that the name "God" is used repeatedly suggests that the author has focused on the fact that in the midst of God's punishment of His rebellious people there is mercy, restoration and deliverance for His erring people.

As previously indicated, the second major theme has to do with the people involved.

The most obvious piece of information about the people is that they are disobedient. They are punished for their wrongdoing, but they do not learn. They needed a leader to lead them to obedience to God's commands. As soon as their leader died, they reverted to their disobedient ways. This happened repeatedly through the experiences recorded in the book.

It is interesting to note that the gravity of the disobedience recorded in the book gradually increases to the point that toward the end of the book the only way to describe the kinds of events that take place is to identify them as debauchery.

THE CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY OF JUDGES

People are fickle. These people served God as long as Joshua lived. However, just as soon as he died, they became involved in the sinful acts of idolatry that they had been taught to shun. This did not happen once, but time after time.

People have the capacity to communicate with God. This is the good news. The bad news is that they seldom do this unless they are in trouble and are pleading for God to immediately get them out of a situation they created for themselves.

People have a short memory. They forget what happened the last time they rebelled against the instructions of their God. They forget the many ways that God had blessed them and cared for their needs. People are inherently selfish. They look after their own concerns no matter what it may do to or for others. Different tribes had trouble trying to remember that they were supposed to drive the enemies out of the land. They had trouble remembering that they were to come to the aid of each other in dealing with their enemies. The fact that other tribes were in battle with their common enemies did not move them to come to the aid of those tribes. The people had a difficult time trusting God. Barak would only go into battle if Deborah, God's representative, went with him. Gideon had a difficult time believing that God could possibly want him to lead Israel into battle against their enemies and win. Even with the fleece, he still had difficulty believing. This is not too difficult for us to understand. We have no difficulty believing that God can do the miraculous. We have a very difficult time believing that God will in fact do these miracles in our times and for us.

As indicated in the introduction, some people have difficulty reading the book of Judges because of the problems they encounter there. Chief among these is the fact that there is so much killing and God is involved in it.

We have difficulty trying to remember that these nations, whom God asked Israel to drive out with His help, were the self-declared enemies of God and His people. They were bent upon defeating God and destroying His people. This book describes spiritual warfare.

Other people have difficulty understanding that God could deliver His people into the hands of their enemies knowing that they would suffer tremendously. The truth of the text is that God did, in fact, deliver them into the hands of their enemies. It is also true that they suffered a great deal in that process. One of the discoveries of this book is that God considered the restoration of His people to fellowship and service with Him more important than life and comfort.

The thing that is not as clear is the reason that God did this. It was not that He was getting even with Israel. It was not that His anger was out of control. Notice that each time God delivered Israel into the hands of their enemies, Israel immediately turned to God seeking His help and promising to serve Him again. God exposed them to difficulty in order to bring them back to Himself so that He could shower them with greater blessings again. Rather than being an act of unkindness, God was really showing Israel the greatness of His mercy and love for them. This, in fact, is the key to the entire book.

This book presents a picture of God as patiently working with a rebellious people to draw them back to Himself. God is changeless. Therefore, what God did for Israel, He will do again in our lives. He will allow difficulties to come our way, but only as a way to bring

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us back. His patience is beyond comprehension; His mercy without measure. We can count on this to be our experience as well. Our merciful God does not change.