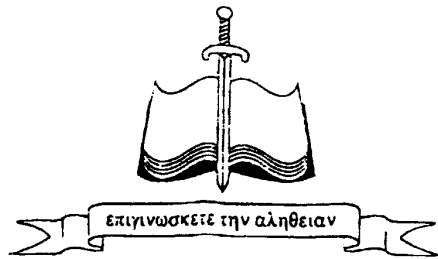


EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



LIVES OF THE JUDGES

**(Mixed Leadership Profiles –
What to Do and what not to do)**

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INTRODUCTION

“Righteousness exults a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” **Proverbs 14:34.**

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you.....I will go and return to my place until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek me early. Come and let us return to the Lord, for he has torn, and he will heal us. He has smitten and he will bind us up.”
Hosea 4:6, 5:15 – 6:1.

The book of Judges covers the 200 years from the death of Joshua around 1370 BC through until around 1170 BC when Samuel is born, and the first book of Samuel picks up the story from there. It covers a time when the people were alternating between serving the Lord and playing with the religious and moral paganism of their neighbours. The people have not obeyed the last words of Joshua, and are sliding regularly into sin so easily that it becomes their most common habit. The neighbouring pagans have the upper hand spiritually, and few Israelites hold the truth with any spiritual power and practise it. Those people who do walk with the Lord stand out like beacons in a dark night.

The texts to write over this book are **Matthew 5:13-16, and 6:22-25**, for this book reminds us that even in the darkest places we can let the Holy Spirit empower and lead us, and we can let the light of God’s presence shine out into the darkness. We can always be the Lord’s servants and serve Him in spirit and in truth. The good news of this book is that there are always people who will do this! God’s biblically grounded leaders are his called people for every crisis. This is our role before the Lord, to serve Him, and proclaim/shine out His truth to all who will hear.

Ezekiel 3:4-11. *“4. And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.*

5. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel;

6. Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee.

7. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard hearted.

8. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads.

9. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

10. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears.

11. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

Matthew 5:13-16, 6:22-26. *“13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

6:22. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

This period of time during which the Judges are called out is a dark one indeed, but there is always a small believing remnant of God’s people who remain true and keep the real faith alive. The called out leaders are to mobilize the few that remain faithful, feed them the truth, and lead them in the light of the Word and the truth and power of God. Judges is a book that reminds us that a very small remnant indeed can save their nation, and that revival can start anywhere, and that God will often use the most unlikely individuals to deliver and lead His people.

The Judges are themselves a mixed bunch, and few come through the stories of their deeds with their character intact. They are weak and flawed men and women, but they give their energy and at times their lives for the Lord’s people, to deliver them from their enemies. It is a story of people who “stand in the gap” and are ready to be used by the Lord in any way they can be to help the Lord’s people. None are national leaders as Moses and Joshua had been, as each leads only a portion of the nation, and each one is quietly compared to Moses and Joshua by the way their stories are told. There is none who stands out as a man or woman worthy to lead the entire nation until the last Judge arrives, Samuel the Prophet and Priest.

To date the events of the book we need to remember that the “Sea Peoples” (Philistines) arrive in force around 1200 BC, and so reference to them will normally indicate a late story, while reference to the Canaanite and Midianite peoples will indicate an earlier time. The book is organized for a teaching purpose, and so there is not necessarily a simple chronological sequence here, as a first reading appears to indicate. Some of the events described are occurring in one part of the land, while another may be happening somewhere else at the same time, or just a year or so later.

The times of “peace” described here are very localized and relative, and that is the key point the writer is making. The only thing the people do **NOT** have through this 200 years is real shalom (peace), because they are not walking with God. **John 14:27, Romans 8:6, Ephesians 4:3, 1 Peter 5:10-14.**

Isaiah 57:20-21. “20. *But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*
21. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*”

Ezekiel 13:10-16. “10. *Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar:*

11. *Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it.*

12. *Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?*

13. *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury; and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and*

great hailstones in my fury to consume it.

14. *So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.*

15. *Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar, and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it;*

16. *To wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord GOD.*”

The book is written, with these very early stories organized, by a later prophet (possibly Samuel, although it may be a later prophet like Nathan in the reign of David) and it reflects the prophetic, or spirit centred, viewpoint of life. It makes clear what happens when “each man decides what is good in his own eyes”, rather than following the Word of God. It certainly appears to be a defence of the need for a strong and godly king like David. Judges 21:25. It is a didactic book; written with a teaching purpose, with its stories chosen to underline the principles that the prophets wanted the people to understand. It is not the propaganda for David, but the truth of God, and its truths apply to our generation today!

The first key principle is that any compromise with paganism is always deadly to those involved. The second principle is that absolute divine standards of morality keep a nation safe, but relativistic standards of morality and spirituality will always lead a people down hill to disaster. The third principle is akin to the second law of thermodynamics. It teaches that if spiritual growth and obedience to the Lord does not continue actively in a people, then they will decay and decline steadily towards destruction and judgment. The fourth principle teaches us that God always has His faithful people in any dark time, and that divinely appointed and anointed leadership is the best guarantee of safety for any group of people.

This book strongly teaches cause and effect; if morality is lost, then the effect will be judgment. It reminds us that sin never stays still in the life of the unrepentant sinner; it always grows and propels that person towards greater sins and more evil actions. There are only two paths for mankind; the broad way of evil that leads to destruction, or the narrow way of truth that leads to eternal life. **Matthew 7:13-14.** We are called to walk the “narrow/constrained” mountain path with Jesus beside us, and the Holy Spirit within us, not the “broad/smooth/gently sloping” way that leads to moral and personal destruction. All easy paths always lead downhill!

It is a book in which the battles of the Angelic Conflict are centre stage. It teaches strongly that this world is not a neutral place where anything goes and there are no consequences for sins, but an ordered universe that is made and controlled by a holy God. Mankind can come to terms with this reality and be blessed by God through their holy obedience to His Plan, or they can go after their own hearts and be destroyed. It is a book about the **ever present need for spiritual revival and holiness in the hearts of all the Lord’s servants.**

It reminds us that the malice of Satan towards mankind never sleeps, and his persistent hatred of mankind is focused upon the destruction of all who stand for God and His will. It is also the reminder that the malice of the enemy is well controlled by the power and plan of God working out through those who obey the Lord. **1 John 4:4.**

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Part 1. Introduction to the Time Period of the Judges

1. The Condition of the Nation after the death of Joshua. The limited victories gained by the tribes to win back what is lost again by then. Chapter 1.
2. God steps into history and delivers a needed revelation. God’s words through the Angel of the Lord to the people just before Joshua’s death. Chapter 2.

Part 2. The Actions of the Various Judges

3. Othniel the Judge – deliverance from Mesopotamian Armies. Chapter 3:1-11.
4. Ehud and Shamgar deliver them from the Moabites and first Philistine attacks. Chapter 3:12-31.
5. Deborah and Barak deliver them from the Canaanite resurgence. Chapters 4 – 5.
6. Gideon delivers from the Midianites. Chapters 6 – 8:32.
7. Civil War breaks out and the people are delivered by the work of Abimelech, Tola, and Jair. Chapters 8:33 – 10:5.
8. The Philistines and Ammonites attack in force and the affected tribes are delivered by Jephthah, Ibzan, and Abdon. Chapters 10:6 – 12:15.
9. Samson brings hope against the Philistines. Chapters 13 – 16.

Part 3. The Results of National Apostasy

10. False Temples and false gods abound. Chapters 17-18.
11. Sexual Immorality destroys marriage and the family. Chapter 19.
12. Anarchy rules in the nation. Chapters 20-21.

CHAPTER 1

JUDGES 1:1-36

“1 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? 2 And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.3 And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. 4 And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. 5 And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. 7 And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died. 8 Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire. 9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. 10 And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi. 11 And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher: 12 And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. 14 And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou? 15 And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs. 16 And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. 17 And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. 19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. 20 And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak. 21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day. 22 And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. 23 And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) 24 And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy. 25 And when he shewed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family. 26 And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day. 27 Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. 28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. 29 Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. 30 Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. 31 Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: 32 But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out. 33 Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them. 34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: 35 But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in

Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. 36 And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward.”

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 7. The Israelites eldership must have gathered at some point after Joshua’s death and requested of the Lord clear direction forward in their relationship with the Canaanites. They would have presented themselves to Shiloh, to the High Priest Phinehas, at the door of the tabernacle. They ask who amongst the tribes is to take the leadership in the battle front. The answer comes back clearly that it is Judah that is to lead the new series of battles against the Canaanites.

There has been an uneasy peace of sorts for nearly thirty years now and a new generation of warriors is to meet their enemy in battle, led by the men who were young in the army at the time of the initial conquest battles. The new Armies of the tribes will have the right mix of older men in their fifties and sixties who are all veterans of hard battles, and the majority of the army who will be new and fresh, unused to the rigors of hand to hand warfare.

The form of guidance may have been by casting lots, or by means of Urim and Thummim. Exodus 28:30. These stones may have been special coloured stones that were used to discern the will of God. At this distance we do not know exactly how they worked and the speculation of later writers isn’t really helpful. Having received divine guidance the tribal armies launch their attack immediately.

It is instant obedience to the commands of God that the Lord seeks from us as He did from His people. There are times for waiting upon the Lord, when there is no clarity to move forward, but when we have direction it is sinful not to advance forward. Prayer is crucial but prayer alone can be sinful, when we remain on our knees, when the Lord has ordered us to stand upon our feet, and advance, and only pray as we move forward in obedience. As noted below it may be that after the death of Joshua the Canaanites have launched a series of attacks, and so definite and resolute Israelite counter attack is required immediately to either restore the “balance of power”, or overwhelm and push back the enemy. It is the second option that is the Lord’s will every time!

The initial action occurs in the lands of Judah and Simeon which stretches into the Negev, and the main battle is at Bezek, where ten “thousand” (elephs=groups) of the enemy are slain. Once again, as noted before in the books of Exodus, Numbers and Joshua, we must be careful of the meaning at this time of the term translated “thousands” (Hebrew – Eleph) in our English Bibles. It refers to a separate family/clan grouping and may mean anything from a dozen to a thousand. The key point is that Judah obeys the Lord and attacks the enemy, and their faith in action is rewarded with victory. More of the promised land is able to be held, or is retaken by them.

A key enemy leader that has emerged over the last thirty years, Adonibezek, is taken. Although he escapes the battle, he is later captured and the enemy’s opportunity to organize and attack Israel is diminished significantly. It is an early reminder that the Israelite’s slackness through the previous thirty years in not attacking the enemy has allowed them to regroup, reoccupy parts of the land, and prepare to counter attack Israel.

Remember, that this world remains the “devil’s world” of operation until the Lord returns, and that means that the enemy’s quietness does not signify victory, only that he is re-organizing. **Prayer meetings must be intensified when spiritually nothing much appears to be happening in the local area, for quiet times are times of enemy preparation for massive counter attack.** We bring prayer down to protect the church before and during our battles for the souls of the lost. We do not slacken off our prayer work, and must always be waiting upon the Lord for the clear orders as to what to do and when.

The treatment of Adonibezek and his delivery to Jerusalem is strange indeed, but must have been related to a boast he made about what he would do to Israelites after he had defeated them, and possibly what he did to others he had captured before. The cutting off of the thumb and the big toe stopped a man ever being a soldier or running again, yet meant they were still capable of basic manual work. It was to remove the warrior, and was practised by the Greeks also. He is apparently left to die a natural death in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. This was not the capital city of Judah, but on the border of the territory of Judah-Benjamin. This city of Jerusalem was still in Canaanite hands and it may be that he had abused these Canaanites by this means and so he is delivered to his own people for punishment and prison.

The delivery of this man to this city (which we will discover in the next verses was taken by Judah and burned, then rebuilt) must have by this point lost significance. Possibly he was a sign to the other Canaanite remnant in the central region of what their fate will be if they stood against Israel’s God. He may also have some relationship to Adonizedek, the previous Canaanite king of Jerusalem. Joshua 10:1ff, He appears to acknowledge the justice of God in his treatment, and his words hint at his being cruel to seventy rulers of the Canaanites and Perizzites before, and may indicate he has come to faith in God through defeat. This may explain his being left alive, where Joshua’s example was to kill any captured king and hang his body at the door of his burned city. Joshua 8:29, 10:26.

Verses 8 – 11. The city of Jerusalem will remain in pagan hands and have to be re-captured by David many years later, but at this point the city did fall to the tribe of Judah and they settled some people there. At some point they lost it again and the Jebusites very quickly re fortified it and held it for 200 more years against the Israelites. It is a reminder of the chaos of this period, where towns would be captured then lost again with possibly only months between

the events. Jerusalem was such a pagan city in the later years of the Judges that Israelites didn't even dare to stay there in an inn on a journey. Judges 19:11-12, 2 Samuel 5:6-10.

Having destroyed the fortifications of Jerusalem the armies of Judah and Simeon headed west and south and re-took the places that Joshua had pacified thirty years before. The two cities mentioned specifically are Hebron and Debir, places that Joshua had defeated before, but had clearly been re-infiltrated and rebuilt by the Canaanites and had resisted the men of Judah until this time. Hebron is a real surprise to us, as it was Caleb's land and the expectation from Joshua's day is that he had secured it firmly, but it was later lost, to be retaken again. Joshua 10:36-39, 11:21-22, 14:6-15.

Clearly the Anakim giants had been killed, but the Canaanites may have held onto some of the cities with Israelites settled all around them. This stand off, rather than real peace had lasted for thirty years. It is a reminder that the numbers of the Israelites are not in the hundreds of thousands, but the thousands only. They do not have enough men to fully capture and hold the land and have to settle the hills and wait until populations build to be able to launch this final assault. At the same time the Canaanites have been building up numbers also, and so it is no settled thing that the Israelites will win.

This is a hard fought series of battles. The three men named as being leaders of the Canaanites may be Anakim, as some have argued, although the book of Joshua is precise that they were all killed thirty years before. My suspicion is that they are the resurgent leaders of the Canaanites, just as Adonibezek was further south. There is another more sinister explanation for the retaking of Hebron and Debir that I will return to below after discussion on verses 27-36.

Verses 12 – 15. Now Caleb is as old as Joshua, and we are dealing with time now just after Joshua's death, so Caleb is at least 110 at this time! He is still apparently having children around ninety, and one attractive girl of his has been born in these last years and is now of marriageable age, and Caleb will offer her as the bonus prize to the man who recaptures the city of Debir. This city has been important to him for 30 years and he values the son in law that brings the enemy down. Othniel, the first judge of this period is the mighty man who recaptures the city and brings it firmly into the family.

Caleb's daughter of his old age, Achsah, is a smart and able young woman. She has become experienced as a farmer and knows that the south facing land here needs springs of water to be fertile year round. She requests of her father Caleb that he grant her as a wedding present the springs she will need to fully farm the area around Debir without any disputes with neighbouring cities. This is granted to her.

Caleb is not doing the fighting now, but he is still riding about supervising the battles at 110 years of age. This is a tough and fit and healthy older man! He is truly blessed with great life, with 40 years as a slave, 40 years wandering and fighting, and around 30 years as a farmer, and father, and grand-father. Remember that the ages here are to be taken seriously, and not excused away, for the oldest men and women last century were in their 120s when they died, and they kept good health through their hundreds and were active until just before their deaths. The oldest recorded man in English history was Thomas Parr at over 156 years of age, and he is buried in Westminster Abbey, so you can visit his grave and see the evidence engraved upon the tomb, and even read his post-mortem report by Dr Harvey MD, FRS.

Verse 16. Moses Midianite (Kenite) brother in law, Hobab, was faithful to Moses and the people of Israel all through the wandering period, even when the Israelites had to fight the Midianites. His family has stayed with the Israelites all the way and were living in the "city of palms", which is probably around Jericho. Around this time they move up into the Shephelah and settle amongst the people of Judah. They requested and were settled in the drier southern lands of Judah south of Arad, overlooking the southern end of the Dead Sea. Exodus 2:18, Numbers 10:29-32. They are pastoral land dwellers and so the more marginal lands suit their still nomadic life style. They don't seek a city, but an area to roam in, and they are granted this area in response to Moses promise seventy years earlier.

Verses 17 – 21. The armies of Judah and Simeon keep moving and fighting. They moved next on the city of Zephath and destroy it utterly. This was called Hormah beforehand. It was to the south west of Arad and its people would have threatened the Kenites, so the threat is removed by Judah-Simeon from their allies before they settle in the land to the north east. The armies of Judah and Simeon then enter the coastal plain and fight directly with Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, each of which is a significant fortress at that time and later.

Judah has victory, but not the numbers of people to settle the plain and hold it against the enemy. The valley and plain dwelling Canaanites have metal covered chariots and these heavy forces are proving too powerful for Judah and they cannot be beaten in open battle by them. The many cities of their assigned region that they don't have to fight to regain is testimony to their success in settling much of their land, but these well fortified strongholds have been thorns in their sides for 30 years and will continue to be so. The Gaza Strip seems a long way from their lands in the hills, yet it was a major trading centre on the coastal road and control of it and the other two cities further north would give them access to trading routes and trading concessions that would have made them wealthy, but they failed to hold these places for long.

The coastal strip was very important to Egypt for it's trade with the northern Hittite empire of Mesopotamia, and within twenty years of this time the Egyptian armies will sweep back and retake control over all these coastal cities, and later will grant them to the "Sea Peoples" to hold on Egypt's behalf. Even the modern people of Gaza in 2022 are Egyptian, not "Palestinian", as their form/dialect of Arabic proves. The modern people of Gaza are descendants of the Egyptian settlers placed there to control trade and for defence by the Egyptian and Ottoman Caliphs in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The writer of Judges repeats his words concerning Jerusalem, for the surrounding areas of the Jebusites old stronghold were still settled by them, and even though the city of Jerusalem was taken, it was afterwards lost, and the writer records that the Jebusites lived amongst the Israelites right through to his own day. This comment is probably written around 1050 BC, and may indicate the date of final assembly of the stories that make up Judges.

Verses 22 – 26. The taking of Beth-el is dealt with here, for it had apparently held out against Israel and was a centre of ancestral significance to them from patriarchal days. Its king had fallen to Joshua, but the enemy have now returned in strength and they now hold their town again, although no king is mentioned now. Joshua 12:16. The sons of Joseph sent out a spying mission to Beth-el (Luz) to discover its weak points.

Out of the city they notice a man coming alone, and they seize him and turn him into a traitor to his own people. To save his own life and the lives of his family he tells the spies from Israel about the weak points of the city and the direction of attack that will quickly win the city for Israel. The spies report this to their army, and the man hides within his house and awaits the attack.

The whole situation here reminds us that the Israelite forces are small and need all the help they can get to seize these strong points. Their army is numbered in the hundreds and possibly a few thousand if tribes combine, not the numbers in the English Bibles which mistranslate the term “eleph” as thousands. The Israelite army destroys all the people except this man and his immediate family. He then moves north into Hittite territory and builds a new town there that he calls Luz also. He is an example of the self centred people you can meet in any ministry – who will serve for a time and then leave for “pleasanter” more relaxed pastures.

One wonders as we read these stories how such a man lived with himself after such a betrayal that left all his old friends and neighbours dead and him alone, with his family, alive. This man was not like Rahab, who changed her faith and rejected the paganism and evils of her people, and joined the faith and community of Israel. This man simply saves his own skin! It is a reminder of the base level of human nature in some, and the greatness of others. When people face a challenge they show what is within them, and this man values only the things around him, but does not see the issues of eternal life. He rebuilds a city now lost, but Rahab made a new family and it led to eternal blessing. Matthew 1:5, Luke 9:25. Be very careful around people who indicate the “fruit” of total self centeredness for they are capable of great evil.

Verses 27 – 36. The summary of the other tribe’s action is now given. It is brief, possibly because records were not kept, or possibly those records did not survive the destruction of the tabernacle at Shiloh during the early years of Samuel. 1 Samuel 4-5. Manasseh had major difficulties in clearing out the Canaanites from their walled towns in their fertile territory. The towns of Bethshean, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo are mentioned. Kings of these towns are mentioned in the list of Joshua’s conquests, but clearly their deaths did not open the door to the total removal of their people and thirty years later they are back in strength. Joshua 12:20.

A number of the towns mentioned above were assigned to the Levites, and some as cities of refuge for man-slayers. For thirty years these places have possibly been unavailable for Levite settlement and could not have functioned fully in any spiritual capacity. It may be that because the Lord had dedicated these cities to spiritual work that Satan used all his powers to return the Canaanites to them. Certainly the Angelic Conflict is in full swing at this time of Israel’s history. The Amarna Letters from Egypt of this period report many of the attacks we read about here, and will be the cause for Egyptian intervention in great force in the years after 1350 BC, but from 1400 – 1350 BC the Egyptians ignore Canaan.

What has happened through these thirty years is not made clear by the writer. It may be that the Israelites settled these areas but then lost them to resurgent Canaanite forces and now they are retaken, or they may not have been held at all. We simply don’t know for sure, although the fact that they were assigned to the Levites makes it likely that they were available for those families to move in there at the time of Joshua’s assignment of them.

Joshua 21 records Hebron, Debir, Gezer, Taanach, ...etc as cities given to the Levites which had either never been taken, or were lost subsequently back to the Canaanites. I personally cannot see Joshua assigning cities to the Levites that were still under active Canaanite control, so my suspicion is that they were retaken in battles, or by stealth, by the Canaanites in subsequent years. It reminds us that these were dangerous and difficult times and that the enemy, not having been beaten thoroughly in Joshua’s day, was able to creep back into these towns and slaughter the Israelite settlers at some later point. It is a reminder that in our own day all “taken ground” can be lost by lack of prayerfulness and systematic bible study and empty churches a few years after a “revival” testify to the fact.

A great deal of carnage has occurred through the years that we have no information on, and it may be that the major Canaanite resurgence occurred just after the death of Joshua, as the death of a great leader was often the signal for the raising of rebellion amongst his enemies. This may explain the urgent meeting of the tribal councils after Joshua’s death to seek guidance as to what to do with their enemies who have resurged and retaken some of their old strongholds. It may also explain why the seizure of Beth-el required a spy/traitor within it to facilitate its re-capture.

If this town was originally seized in the days of Joshua and settled by Israelites, then they would not need spies to tell them it’s weaknesses for the people who had lived there and then fled from the city would know them. However if the resurgent Canaanites slaughtered all the Israelite settlers when they took back their city, then the army setting about re-capturing the city would need new information, for all their people who knew it were dead! There is a great deal of tragedy behind these verses, and it reminds us that lack of prayer-vigilance creates carnage for your spiritual family.

This may explain the situation we read of here, but the facts on the page are only tantalizing hints at the terrible things that may have happened on the death of Joshua. If my suspicions here are correct it may be that Caleb has lost large numbers of family members to the Canaanite forces that recaptured Hebron and Debir. This may account for his offer of his young daughter to the best soldier, as he knows the people need a really powerful military leader to stop this carnage happening again.

The truth of these times was the truth, sadly, of on going compromise and these last verses hint at the incomplete nature of the victories of this next generation of warriors. The tribe of Asher lived “amongst the Canaanites” and others brought the enemy to tribute, but did not destroy their towns, and so allowed them to rebuild strength, and they expanded their pagan populations faster than the Israelites. The Amorites on the coastal lands assigned to the tribe of Dan forced the Danites into the hills and wouldn’t allow them to come onto the flat lands or fertile valleys. The tribes of Joseph however defeated them and these powerful pagans became tribute payers to Joseph.

The Amorites still held the coast however and would do so until the Egyptians arrived back around 1350BC. The Amorites would then serve the Egyptians again as guards of Egyptian interest in the trade routes, and so keep their limited sovereignty over their cities until the “Sea Peoples” (Philistines) arrival around 1200. At this time the Egyptians sold the Amorites out, and gave their cities to the Philistines who simply slaughtered the Amorites and took their cities for themselves, and then themselves served the Egyptians as their guards for the coastal trade routes.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Compromise with evil people brings temporary peace, but it is a peace during which time the enemy simply rebuilds his strength, the more thoroughly to destroy you later. Evil is to be destroyed so that it cannot stand again. All systems of law and governance that do not recognise this will see the evil resurge later and it’s destructive power will be terrible. Satan’s malice does not cool towards mankind, and his people do not mellow with age.
2. What is seized from the enemy must be held by the Lord’s people with prayerful alertness. The populations of the towns retaken here may all have perished due to their lack of vigilance or lack of preparedness to fight their enemies. They did not have their armour on, and did not set their watches in the night. They relaxed in the midst of the devil’s world and so became his victims. Let us be spiritually alert to the evils of the enemy and stand against Him in all ways we can. Ephesians 6:10-18.
3. The Israelites get victory when they seek the Lord’s plan again. There have been significant losses that are glossed over in the narrative, but the people do not weep and wail over these deaths, they calmly seek the Lord’s face that the losses might stop. Their spirit is right and they go on the offensive immediately and obediently. They are not completely successful, but they do win back the cities where their people have been slaughtered. They are limited to the hills and this is all they can at this point hold, for they lost the opportunity 30 years before and now the seizure of the whole land must wait until the days of the kings to have the numbers to achieve the results.

They are obedient and they see the Lord’s words proved true, but they also have to face the cost of their earlier inadequate obedience. Let us remember that inadequate obedience can be as dangerous as disobedience at times. Let us set our faces to obey the Lord in all things.

Reflection on the concept of our being “SALT” upon the earth

1. Salt is a preserver and speaks of eternal life.
2. Salt is a seasoner and speaks of the richness of life designed by God for every believer.
3. Salt is the antithesis of leaven. Leaven corrupts, salt preserves.
4. The believer on earth is the salt of the earth in Matthew 5:13. Salt is an unseen preserver.
5. Since believers living in nations are often the reason for the preservation of the nations, when people turn away from God, nations are destroyed.
6. The salt of the covenant - when a contract was drawn up in the ancient world both parties ate salt to seal the contract. The eating of salt depicts receiving salvation.
7. In the ancient world, if your guest ate salt with you, you guaranteed to protect him from harm while he was with you.

REMNANT

The following steps are to be taken when choosing to be among the remnant.

1. Make a clear understanding of God's Word the priority - 1 Timothy 1:3-6, 4:6-16
2. Develop power in intercessory prayer which is exemplified in the ministry of Elijah - 1 Timothy 2:1-5
3. Stir up, develop and exercise your spiritual gift - 2 Timothy 1:6-7, 13,14, 2:15
4. Pursue purification and sanctification - 2 Timothy 2:19-22
5. Prepare for and expect persecution. 2 Timothy 3:10-12
6. Develop endurance, spiritually, mentally and physically - 2 Timothy 2:1-3, 4:5
7. Live expectantly in the light of eternity - 2 Timothy 4:8

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

When we need God to step into history in a dramatic way through angels or direct revelation, then the Lord God will step into history. We can relax in our path through life with the Lord, for all that is needed will be provided. God has a plan and that plan has been in operation from eternity past, and that plan will work out. Every Woman and Man is challenged to hear the Word of the Lord, and through it discover the Plan of the Lord, and so walk the Path of the Lord for their life.

The "Angel of Jehovah" is the pre-incarnate Christ, and His arrival at some time before the death of Joshua is a turning point in the revelation of God to His people Israel. He comes to warn the people to hold fast their true faith or face the consequences that Moses spoke of, and that He had them call aloud on the slopes of Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim. Deuteronomy 27:1-13, Joshua 8:30-34.

The Angel of Jehovah will come later again to the Judge Gideon in the dark days that result from the people's ignoring of these words recorded here. The Angel of the Lord reminds the people of the words of Moses (Deuteronomy 27-32); that any religious compromise with paganism will bring judgment upon them, and that worship of the idols of the enemy is not a "small thing", but a joining of themselves to evil that will bring judgment upon the nation as it originally brought it upon the Canaanites. Exodus 23:20-33.

JUDGES 2:1-23

2:1 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. **2** And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? **3** Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. **4** And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. **5** And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD. **6** And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. **7** And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel. **8** And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. **9** And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. **10** And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. **11** And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: **12** And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. **13** And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. **14** And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. **15** Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. **16** Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. **17** And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. **18** And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. **19** And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in

following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. **20** And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; **21** I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: **22** That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. **23** Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

REFLECTIONS

Verse 1. This figure who comes up from the direction of the old camp at Gilgal is the Lord of Glory Himself, in the form of the "Angel of the Lord". It was at Gilgal that the Manna ceased and the cloud of fire and pillar of smoke, that represented the Lord lifted from the camp for the last time. From this last place where the visible presence of God had been seen the Lord walks up the road to Bochim (close by to Shiloh) where the elders of Israel have gathered. It may have been at a time of national feast; possibly at either Passover-Unleavened Bread, or Tabernacles, these two being the two main times the entire nation was to gather together each year. Or it may have been at a special meeting of elders after Joshua's speech, but before his death. At all such times the people would leave and go back to the land "given to them".

Joshua isn't mentioned here being spoken to, and the only possible explanation for this is that he is now so old and ill that he is unable to attend this meeting. They apparently are meeting to discuss the crisis they face with the Canaanites, and they are possibly blaming each other for the problems they face, rather than accepting the national responsibility for what they need to see is the beginning of the Lord's judgment upon them. The Lord had last personally appeared to Joshua at Gilgal, and before that to Balaam to warn him of judgment if he persisted in his lust fuelled actions, and before that to Moses to advise him of his plan to deliver the land of Canaan to the Israelites.

The Israelites had the promise of God that the Angel of the Lord would go before them and secure their victory in their battles to seize the land. They had failed to fully apply faith in action and so they had failed to call on and use the power of the Angel of the Lord. Exodus 3:2, 23:20-23, 32:34, 33:2, Numbers 22:22-35, Joshua 5:8-15. He comes with a last warning to the older soldiers, members of the last generation who marched with Joshua's Army.

It is quite appropriate that the Angel of the Lord now comes to deliver their judgment for not following through on what He had revealed to Joshua twenty to thirty years before, to Moses fifty to seventy years before, and to Balaam some twenty plus years before. Now, we do not have an exact time frame for the Angel of the Lord coming to speak with them. It may be the writer does not have the exact time noted in the manuscripts before him. It appears from verses 6-9 below, to be while Joshua is still alive, and may have been some time after his last meeting with the people, Joshua 23-24; it is not absolutely clear, but the writers specific mention of Joshua's death after this indicates this event has occurred before.

The Angel of the Lord makes it very clear that blessing depends upon obedience. All the people had to do was believe in and apply the words of the Lord, and this meant to apply their faith into life. Had they done that, they would have been alright, but they failed to do so. God has a purpose in all He does, and He had brought the Israelites up from Egypt to deliver them the land of Canaan, and God has kept His words, but the people have not believed the Lord and kept their promises made to God at Sinai and all the other places they made a commitment to obey the Mosaic law. They have erred through acceptance of the paganism of their neighbours and their refusal to destroy the enemy totally.

Verses 2 – 5. The instructions from Exodus 23 were very specific regarding any form of compromise or "deals" with the Canaanites and others in the land. The Canaanites were totally morally corrupt peoples and no deals were to be made with them, for the Lord had judged them and they were all to be destroyed. The only specific exceptions were those who had been led to salvation by the revelation of God's power to them; Rahab and her family, and the Gibeonites were in this category. Exodus 23:20-33, 34:10-17, Numbers 33:52-56, Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 16-26, 12:1-7, 20:15-18.

The instructions had been so specific and repeated so often, and yet had been ignored so thoroughly. I believe the Angel of the Lord's message here was delivered, not before the people initially separated to their lands, (around the time of Joshua 18ff) but after many years in the land (possibly after the events of Joshua 23, but before those of 24). The words of the Angel are a reminder to us all that the warnings and instructions of God's Word are of no value unless they are heard, understood, believed, and obeyed. Any breaking of this chain of action will lead to failure. God's people are still under the orders here relative to paganism; we are always to be separate from all paganism. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18.**

Not only were they to make no treaties with these evil people, they were also to destroy every vestige of the paganism they practised lest any surviving fragment be used to entice the weak back into its dark paths. The pagan religions are Satan's main tool to destroy rebellious or foolish men and women. Religion is always satanic, for it is man's attempts to deal with God outside of God's designated path. Religion begins with Cain's murder of Abel, and it continues to be a tool to deceive men into thinking they can meet God in another way to the one HE has directed is right. Genesis 4:1-12, Isaiah 43:11, Acts 4:12, 16:30-31.

Let us take any vestiges of the paganism of our own past and destroy it's "high places" in our own lives. Any stronghold of satanic viewpoint is to be cast down and any objects associated with paganism ought to be destroyed so that they

cannot be a temptation to anyone else. We are called to obedience, not hypocrisy. Our deeds must follow up on our words in these things. **Jeremiah 2:4-5, 3:12-15, 7:21-28, 1 Peter 4:17-19.**

The disobedience of the Israelites in not wiping out the Canaanites led to the Lord allowing them to remain as testing agents of the devil amongst them. Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:6-13. The Canaanites became daily tests to the holiness and commitment of the Israelites. Their religion and their immoral practises were to be a thorn in the side of the Israelites; a constant temptation to sin and evil that would destroy all who weakened and followed them as their ancestors had on the plains of Moab. Numbers 25.

The result of giving in to temptation was the judgment of the Lord upon all the generations that followed the pagans. Psalms 106:34-48. God will still judge His people when they give way and follow after paganism. Hebrews 12:1-15. He will discipline us to bring us back to the path of holiness, where spiritual power can flow again, and we can serve the Lord again, as we were designed to.

The Angel of the Lord spoke to the leaders of the people and the response at the time was great sadness, for they all secretly knew that many in Israel had already followed after the gods of the pagans, and they now knew clearly that the reason for the losses they had already suffered was this fact alone. This passage may be a clue to the fact that the enemy have resurged back to seize control of towns again, and possibly numerous massacres by the Canaanites of Israelites have occurred around the time of the death of Joshua. The weeping here suggests that the Angel comes up to the tabernacle at Shiloh late in Joshua's life.

The people of the towns that had to be retaken in chapter 1 have suffered terribly and probably all have been murdered, and here we may find out why. These people had turned to idolatry through the last twenty to thirty years and have paid the terrible price for it. It is no wonder that the elders of the nation weep for them and for themselves, and then set their hearts to attack the enemy with renewed vigour. It is especially sad to reflect upon Caleb's family in this matter, for it would appear that two of his choice towns had fallen prey to the enemy as a result of religious compromise by his own extended family members. It is a reminder that a godly father is no guarantee to godly children and grand-children, for each generation must obey the Lord to secure their own blessing.

The place where they meet, close by the tabernacle at Shiloh is renamed Bochim, which means "weepers". There is a time for "godly sorrow" and for weeping for the lost, and for the disobedience of the past. We must be careful however of being led anywhere by our emotions, for they do not guarantee that the things felt are correct, or will lead to any good thing. Feelings may be genuine, but they may not lead to correct actions afterwards. The older people here are sorry for their sins, and the loss of their family and friends because of religious compromise, yet many of their children will fall into the same compromises later in their own lives.

Emotion reflects an inner state, but it does not guarantee that anything good will come of that state. God requires godly actions, not just good intentions, or warm and fuzzy, or sad feelings. 2 Corinthians 7:8-12. In this place the Israelites will offer sacrifices, recognizing that the Lord has indeed spoken to them here, but they will not follow up this practise and keep on gathering regularly to offer sacrifices. It is their ongoing offering of sacrifices that is evidence of their genuine faith in the God of Israel, and their regular affirmation that they believe in Him and worship Him alone. Hebrews 10:23-27.

Verses 6 – 9. The time frame described here may apply to the time of the visit of the Angel of the Lord, or may be a reference back in time to the division of the land under Joshua and the situation that leads to the Angel's visit. It is most likely, as noted above, that it refers to the fact that after all meetings at Shiloh, the people "returned to the lands given to them". Chapter one has described the chaos and loss of key towns after the death of Joshua, and their recapture, so it may be here that the writer is simply giving us a flash back to that earlier time, and reminding us that during the days of Joshua the majority of the people did serve the Lord, even though idolatry was creeping into the lives of many. Are we dealing with the Laodicean problem here? Revelation 3:15-22.

The writer is putting the best spin on the truth here, and he is right, in that most of the places given to the tribes have been held, but the losses are significant. His words ring a strong note of warning however, given the message of chapter 1 and the words of the Angel. Maybe the truth is, as it will be later in the days of Isaiah, that the people have served the Lord with their lips and their sacrifices, but their hearts were starting to drift far from Him. Isaiah 29:13. There is a need for repentance, and for working out their salvation in "fear and trembling". Philippians 2:12-13.

My suggested time line summary of events here is as follows, and I repeat, it is only my suggestion, as the writer does not give us the clear time markers that provide certainty. The people have received their allotted lands within five years of their entry into the land, and have settled those places, with the Levites "pepper potted" in amongst them, and with cities of refuge assigned and operational for the first twenty years or so. The majority of the people of the older generation do serve the Lord faithfully through this time, but many have begun to harbour idolatry in their hearts and homes. Joshua's last message indicates this and his call to reject the idols tells us that the compromises have begun. Joshua 24:14-15.

At some point after Joshua's letter to the twelve tribes, (Joshua 23), the Angel of the Lord comes up to Shiloh during one of the national feasts, and He delivers the message we have just read here. Joshua is not present, probably being too ill to make the journey. Canaanite attackers may be waiting to be sure he dies, as an old warrior was still feared.

At some later time (months or a few years may have gone past), Joshua is ready to die and the elders are recalled together to Shechem, and they temporarily move the tabernacle itself there for Joshua's last words. Shortly after this

meeting he dies. Around this time the Canaanite resurgence has occurred, and possibly after his death the real Canaanite attacks begin and then the counter attacks we read about in Judges Chapter 1 are delivered.

Verses 10 – 13. Now we discover the truth of the faithfulness of most of the older generation, but also the truth of the nature of the secret idolatry of many of the younger Israelites through the last thirty years. The death of the older generation is spoken of in lovely terms. They are “gathered to their fathers”. This description of death indicates the belief in an after life in fellowship with those who have gone before in faith, and indicates that they expected to recognize and enjoy each other.

This is the faith of the Patriarchs, who buried their bodies together, because, I believe, they wanted to be together in the day of resurrection, as they were together until that time in heaven. The choice of a burial site was significant, as the tomb was to be a place where faith was affirmed, not where the dead were simply entombed. Being in good company in burial was important to them, for that tomb was where the resurrection body would be received later. It doesn't matter whether the body survives in a visible form to be found by later people, the site is where the Lord will deliver the resurrection body on the day it is to be received, and the person will go to this spot (from heaven) to receive it.

The body was put away “out of sight”, **Genesis 23:4-8**, but that does not mean forgotten, but counter to the cult of the dead amongst the Canaanites. They worshipped the dead and made carved coffins for them with food and goods for the “afterlife”. Abraham and the other Patriarchs, buried the dead in simplicity without food, without grave goods, and any other things, in faith that death was not the end of anything other than this life's journey. **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**.

The “generation of Joshua” was limited to those who had experienced the Exodus, the meeting of the Lord at Sinai, and the conquest. Those people with memories of these things were all by this stage in their seventies. The Exodus is at least sixty years past at the time of the visit of the Angel of the Lord. They have been in the land for at least twenty years, four to five years were required to conquer the land, and the wanderings were forty years. To have a memory of the Exodus a person would have needed to be in their mid to later seventies, and this generation of people are dying out rapidly. Caleb alone is blessed with great longevity in this generation, and this is about the odds of such things even today, with about 1:100,000 getting to beyond age 100 years.

By the date of Joshua's death, all those he had led from Egypt who had vivid memories of the events (were in their later teens at the time) have died or are very old. This is the generation that stayed close to the Lord in their time in Canaan, but their children were enticed by the religion of the enemy amongst whom they had settled. They started to compromise with the small household idols of the “Baalim” and the “Asherah”. These were the small idols, (many of which have been recovered from the land in archaeological diggings), that spoke of fertility and were worshipped in the home with pleasant rituals of bread and wine offerings.

These “pleasant rituals” led however to far more sinister and evil rituals that involved gross sexual immorality, child abuse, and child sacrifice. The milder forms of idolatry are spoken of by Jeremiah. Jeremiah 7:12-20, 21-29, 44:15-23. There was much more evil that unfolded as Satan got a grip of these people however. 2 King 16:1-3, 17:17, 31, 21:6, 23:10ff, 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6. Child sacrifice was a great evil and was practised by many of the pagans of this day who had fallen into the depths that Satan will lead foolish men into. Carthage would fall after these things were done on the battlements of the city, to the disgust of the Romans watching. They showed no mercy to the Carthaginians as a result of what they saw, and the Romans were not easily shocked!

Verses 14 – 19. The “anger of the Lord” is the anger of a spouse whose partner has been unfaithful to them. It is the sad anger of one who still loves the sinner, but hates the evil acts they have committed. The people had gone after the very enemies of the Lord who loved them and insulted the Lord and violated all His standards. The natural consequences of these actions had been made clear to all the people on Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim. Moses had spent a great deal of his teaching warning the people of the events that would flow from such actions, for all actions have consequences. Deuteronomy 27 – 32.

God's promise was that while they walked in His strength, no enemy would stand against them. Leviticus 26:37, Deuteronomy 7:24, 11:25, Joshua 1:5. The nation had experienced the results of unconfessed sin in the affair of Achan at Jericho, and had seen that defeat followed immediately after disobedience. Joshua 7:12-13. They had the renewed promise of the Lord that they would defeat their enemies, but only as they walked in holiness before the Lord and served the Lord alone. Joshua 23:6-13.

When believers step outside the plan of God they enter the world of the enemy with his total hatred focused upon them and without any protection from that hatred. Believers out of fellowship with the Lord “crash and burn” quite quickly! It is a seriously dumb thing to step outside your door without doing so in the filling of the Holy Spirit! Some suffering comes from simply being in the devil's world, but some suffering flows directly as a consequence of being foolish in the midst of the Angelic Conflict. We forget the malice of the enemy to our grave detriment.

The writer is giving an overview of the next three hundred years here. He is trying to prepare us for the awful things he will record from this prolonged period of chaos. Over the years and centuries that this book will cover the people will rebel, but God in grace will send a series of men and women to deliver them when they cried aloud to the Lord for help. God will answer their prayers for assistance, even though at a deep level the majority hated the truth and despised righteousness, and actually preferred to follow the pagan gods.

Through the next three centuries, even when delivered from death, these people would reject the judge's words, and the majority would not fully return to the true worship of the Lord.

The majority of these people were determined to try to live a compromise life, with paganism mixed with true worship. They wanted the "fun" of the devil as well as the peace of God, but the two do not mix! The peace of the Lord comes only to those who serve the Lord in holiness. The Israelite people would be happy to receive the Judge's deliverance from their enemies, but many would equally quickly accept the pagan gods again. The majority never connected their disasters with their disastrous religious choices! In the midst of all this carnage and chaos there would however be a remnant of the people who will accept the truth, and this few preserve their nation through these times. It is the godly remnant who continue to preserve their nations today. Psalms 78:8, 32-58.

Verses 20 – 23. To weep and wail for the painful consequences of your sins is a self centred activity, and such narcissistic action will often lead to nothing other than further sinning. To weep for ones sin is alright, if it leads to genuine daily life and behavioural change, but otherwise such weeping is nonsense! Nonsense was the sad pattern of the Israelites through this period. They were upset by the pain of their suffering, but they also rejected their parent's standards and manner of life, and so would not follow after godliness, because it was not "cool" in their eyes.

The behaviour of the people of this day reflect so much the behaviours of the people of our own day in the opening years of the twenty first century. People will reject the truth because they do not want to appear to be like the last generation and be "uncool". God's truths have not changed, and while the manner of our worship has altered through the years, the basic truths must be kept intact and no compromise with paganism must be allowed at any level whatsoever.

The people have not listened to nor obeyed (hearkened) the voice of the Lord, and so the Lord's judgment falls upon them. The Lord's decision was not to drive out their enemies from before them, but rather to leave their enemies amongst them to test and try them daily. They were to be testing fires to prove the metal of each subsequent generation as to whether they would follow the Lord or fall into paganism. The writer notes that even Joshua was unable to destroy them all, and the hint is that the reason was because of the compromise of his own generation.

God leaves testing situations in our path to prove and test the strength of our faith. False prophets in their day and our own day do exactly the same thing; they challenge and test the genuineness of our faith. Deuteronomy 8:2, 15-18, 13:1-8. Such false prophets are actually no good for anything other than "training purposes" for advancing believers. We are challenged by the Lord to hear the Word of God, understand it, believe it and apply it, and mock and then ignore the false prophet. If we do that we can meet every testing situation and be strengthened by them as an athlete is strengthened by their training. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 2 Peter 2:9.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Compromise with evil is always fatal over time to the person who is foolish enough to do it. The Lord's challenge to us all is to reject any compromise with evil and walk in holiness before the Lord and worship in a spirit of holiness. Absolute separation from even the appearance of evil is called for. We are to be different to the people of the devil's world, amongst whom we live.
2. God has spoken in history. He doesn't need to step into time very often nowadays by means of angels, for His revelation is open for all to read, but He still is active in this world, for it is His creation. We don't need to wait for an angel today, for we have the full revelation of the Lord Himself in the completed Bible. God is involved in His creation, and we need to come to terms with the will of the Creator if we wish to have blessing on this planet.
3. Testing situations can be met by knowledge of God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are to walk in the filling of the Holy Spirit, and feed daily upon God's Word, and then we can be assured of guidance in all situations we will face in this life. Let us walk with the Lord and face all this world has to throw at us with Him beside us, the Holy Spirit within us, and God's Word as our cognitive framework.

REFLECTION UPON THE FACT THAT GOD CARES FOR YOU

1. God knows ...
 - a) Our sorrows. (Exodus 3:7)
 - b) Our devotions. (2 Chronicles 16:9)
 - c) Our thoughts. (Psalm 44:21)
 - d) Our foolishness. (Psalm 69:5)
 - e) Our frailties. (Psalm 103:14)
 - f) Our deeds. (Psalm 139:2)
 - g) Our words. (Psalm 139:4)
 - h) The composition of the universe. (Psalm 147:4)
 - i) All things. (Proverbs 15:3)
 - j) Our needs. (Matthew 6:32)
 - k) About animal creation. (Matthew 10:29)
 - l) Mankind. (Matthew 10:30)

- m) What might or could have been. (Matthew 11:23)
- n) His own. (John 10:14)
- o) Past, present and future. (Acts 15:18)

2. God is able to ...

- a) Save forever those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - Hebrews 7:25
- b) Supply every need - 2 Corinthians 9:8
- c) Deliver all who are tempted - Hebrews 2:18
- d) Sustain the weak believer and make him stand - Romans 14:4
- e) Keep us from falling and make us blameless - Jude 24,25
- f) Surpass all that we could ask or think - Ephesians 3:20
- g) Raise us up in resurrection in the likeness of His Son - Hebrews 11:19

3. With God, all things are possible - Matthew 19:26

4. God is in control. Nothing will ever happen to you that you are not able to deal with. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

5. God's character is stable.

- a) if God is for you who can be against you. (Romans 8:31-34)
- b) no matter what happens God's love is stable. (Romans 8:35-39)

6. God's promises are secure for he is always with us. (Matthew 28:19-20, Jeremiah 1:19)

7. God's power is always the same:-

- a) He will always keep us. (John 10:29, 2 Timothy 1:12,)
- b) God does not forget us or lose His power to keep. (Jude 24)
- c) Even if we fall away from fellowship we still are saved. (2 Timothy 2:13)

8. God knew before time what we would need in time and has provided for the supply of all our needs. (Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 3:12,)

9. God has the power to bless us. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

10. God is able to make all grace abound towards us. (Ephesians 3:20)

REFLECTION UPON THE NATURE AND VALUE OF VARIOUS TYPES OF WEEPING

1. Weeping can be an expression of unbelief. e.g. The weeping of Numbers 14:1 and Hebrews 3:19.

2. Sinful type weeping

- a) David's tears of failure. (2 Samuel 18:33, 19:1-4)
- b) Breakdown of the mentality in catastrophe. (1 Samuel 30:4, Psalm 42:3)
- c) Weeping of the frustration and bitterness of old timers at the dedication of the second temple. (Ezra 3:12, 13)
- d) The crying of the drunkards in national disaster. (Joel 1:5)
- e) The weeping of fear because of the giants in the land. (Numbers 14:1)
- f) The weeping of unbelievers at judgment. (Matthew 8:12, 25:30, Luke 13:28)

3. Bona-fide areas of weeping.

- a) Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Weeping is therefore bona-fide at bereavement.
- b) Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) Weeping of patriotism.
- c) Jesus wept on the cross (Hebrews 5:7)
- d) As a mourner (1 Thessalonians 4:13)
- e) An expression of happiness and faith
- f) A reaction to pain.

4. There comes a time when all weeping is going to cease. (Isaiah 30:19, Revelation 21:4) after death.

REFLECTION UPON OUR DESTINY AS BELIEVERS

1. He/she who believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life now (1 John 5:11-13). We will never die (John 11:25,26, John 8:51)

2. Believers are said to "fall asleep" at their death (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The soul departs to be consciously present with Christ, but the body "sleeps" in the grave until the resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)
3. When Christ comes at the Rapture, the bodies of those in Christ shall be raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
4. Our physical bodies will be replaced by immortal bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1-4) - conformed to the body of Christ (Philippians 3:20-21)
5. We shall be like him (1 John 3:2) seeing His glory and reflecting it in ourselves (Colossians 3:4, John 17:22).
6. We will be rewarded because of works of faith (Luke 19:12-19) which will vary in proportion to our faithfulness in serving God (Matthew 6:20, 1 Corinthians 3:11-15)
7. In the Millennial Kingdom, we shall reign with Christ as priests of God and Christ (Revelation 20:6).
8. To the overcomer (1 John 5:4-5) Christ will give to eat of the tree of life (Revelation 2:7) and shall not be hurt by the second death - the lake of fire (Revelation 2:11). He will be given authority to rule over nations (Revelation 2.26-27) Jesus will acknowledge the believer before God (Revelation 3:4-5) who will be made a pillar in the temple of God. (Revelation 3:12) and will be seated with Christ in His own throne. (Revelation 3:21)
9. God will wipe away all tears from his eyes; sorrow, crying, pain, and death shall be no more (Revelation 21:4)
10. We shall know all things perfectly (1 Corinthians 13:12)
11. We will receive an incorruptible inheritance. (1 Peter 1:3-5) kept by our all powerful God in heaven.

WE HAVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

1. **DEFINITION:** Life belonging to the ages (Greek word aionios). This is the life of the believer who had a beginning in time but whose life will continue through the other side of death into the infinite future.
2. Mankind were created for eternity. God's purpose was to create a being to enjoy fellowship with forever. 2 Peter 3: 9.
3. The issue for entry into eternal life is faith in Christ. The choice for man is clearly stated in John 3:36, 5:24, Acts 13:46, Galatians 6:8, Matthew 25:6.
4. Those who are serious about life and concerned about death ask about it. Matthew 13:40-43, 19:16, Mark 10:17, Luke 10:25, 18:18.
5. The Lord's words provide the answer to the questions about eternal life. John 6:68, Romans 5:20, 21, Romans 6:22, 23. It is the Lord who gives eternal life, John 5:39, 40, 12:50.
6. The Lord gives eternal life to those who believe on him, John 10:28, 17:2. The door to fellowship and all that goes with it is opened by faith in him as Saviour. John 3:15,16, Acts 13:48, John 6:40, 47.

"To Eat His Flesh and Drink His Blood" is graphic language to picture his work and our need to appropriate it for ourselves. John 6:54, 4:14.
7. While it may only be fully known in heaven the believer may grasp a glimpse of eternal life here and now by way of anticipation and relationship. Knowing God is a glimpse of eternal life now, John 17:3, and fellowship with him is the joy of every believer now and forever. 1 John 1:1-4, 5:10-12, 20, 1 Timothy 6:12, 19.
8. Eternal life is received in full at the resurrection/rapture when we all receive our new bodies from the Lord. Rewards are received then to enjoy with the Lord forever. We are all urged to live each day with the eternal life perspective in mind, thinking of our place with the Lord forever. Matthew 19:29, 30, Mark 10:29-31, John 12:25, John 4:36, Romans 2:6,7.
9. Eternal Life is the believers hope, associated with the Rapture and Resurrection, and should be on our mind through each day, as it sets us apart from the unbelievers who have no such hope. Philippians 3:20, 21, Titus 1:2, 2:13, 3:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 4:13, 1 Peter 1:3,
10. The assurance of eternal life is grounded in the promise of God given through Christ. 1 John 2:24,25, 1 John 5:13-15.

THE REALITY OF PHYSICAL RESURRECTION

1. The resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel "good news". (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
 - a) Had there been no resurrection then we would all still be in our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17).
 - b) Resurrection indicates completion of justification. (Romans 4:25, 2 Corinthians 5:2 1)
 - c) Resurrection is a guarantee of ultimate sanctification. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
 - d) The resurrection is the Father's seal on Christ's completed work, and the public declaration of its acceptance.
 - e) Without the resurrection it is impossible for Christ to be glorified. The humanity of Christ is glorified higher than the angels. (John 7:39, John 16:14)

2. Historical proof of the resurrection:
 - a) The empty tomb. (Matthew 28)
 - b) Many of witnesses died rather than change their testimony.
 - c) Subsequent changes and confidence of the disciples after the resurrection.
 - d) The day of Pentecost. The reality of the resurrection was so well known that when Peter preached the first two sermons in Jerusalem over 8000 people were saved. (Acts 2:41, Acts 4:3-4)
 - e) The observance of the first day of the week as the worship day. (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10)
 - f) The historic existence of the church. The church worships a literal risen Saviour, and not merely the memory of a dead martyr. (Romans 5:12,14,17, 6:3-9, 8:2, 1 Corinthians 15:26,54-55, Hebrews 2:14)

3. Baptism is a sign of the new resurrection life. (Romans 6:3-11, Colossians 2:12).

4. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of the expected return of the risen Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

5. Order of the resurrections:-
 - a) The first for believers only including Jesus Christ which is divided into four parts.
 - i) The resurrection of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:23, Romans 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Peter 1:3)
 - ii) The Rapture of the church (1 Corinthians 15:51-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)
 - iii) The Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs at the end of the Tribulation. (Daniel 12:13, Isaiah 26:19-20, Revelation 20:4)
 - iv) The Millennial saints and those who survive the Tribulation to enter the Millennium in their physical bodies.
 - b) The second resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennium and is for unbelievers only. They are judged and cast into the lake of fire forever. (1 John 5:28, 29, Revelation 20:12-15, 2 Peter 3:7, Matthew 25:41)
 - c) Jesus, who must be the first eternally resurrected human., was not raised until three days after the crucifixion.
 - d) People in the Old Testament who were "raised from the dead" were merely resuscitated, and later died.
 - e) Matthew 27:52-53 is a transfer scene not a resurrection scene. The transfer is one of saints from paradise to the third heaven (Ephesians 4:8). Some were given resuscitated bodies to witness to the Jews.

6. The sequence of events at the Lord's resurrection is as follows:-
 - a) Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary the mother of James and Joses head towards the tomb followed by other women carrying embalming spices.
 - b) The three find the stone rolled away. Mary Magdalene goes back to tell the disciples. (Luke 23:55-24:9, John 20:1-2)
 - c) Mary the mother of James and Joses draws near to the tomb and sees the angel. (Matthew 28:2)
 - d) She goes back to the women carrying the spices.
 - e) Peter and John who have been advised by Mary Magdalene arrive, look inside the empty tomb and go away.(John 20:3-10)
 - f) Mary Magdalene returns weeping, sees two angels and then Jesus.(John 20:11-18)
 - g) As instructed by the Lord she goes to tell the disciples.
 - h) Mary the mother of James and Joses meets the women with the spices and returning with them they see the two angels. (Luke 24:4-5, Mark 16:5)
 - i) They also receive advice from the angels and, going to seek the disciples, are met by Jesus. (Matthew 28:8-10)

NOTES

CHAPTER 3**INTRODUCTION**

The wars that followed the death of Joshua, off and on for three hundred years are now introduced. The reasons for them are given again, even though in the chapter before they have been explained. **Judges 2:22**. This chapter has caused many to attack the author(s) of the book, and note that he(or they) is clearly just fantasizing here, and that the whole account here is clumsy, and indicates the mark of bumbling hands at work in the manuscript's authorship and editing through the centuries.

Now pause for a minute and consider this more closely than the critics have. The writer, or editors, is well able to read the earlier chapter and know that the points made in the first verses here have just been stated. He knows he doesn't need to repeat them, so the only reason he does repeat them is for emphasis and the communication of a deeply understood and painful truth. To myself, having served in and witnessed the trauma that war causes, and working regularly in the field of Post Traumatic Stress, this repetition is evidence of these words being written quite close to the events described. He also does something that many will do close to a traumatic event; he searches for some additional purpose or meaning in the midst of it, in addition to the obvious reason of simple discipline of the people for their sin.

The period we are entering here was tragedy/carnage filled, with possibly every family losing members to slavery or death through almost every generation for three hundred years. The horror of these days is to be meditated upon. The obvious questions on the lips of those who read or heard this book read aloud later would be firstly, "Why did the Lord let so much evil befall His people?" Secondly there would be the questions of purpose and meaning, for there is a deep need within every person to discover some good that could come out of incredibly bad things. **Romans 8:28-39**.

Both are such passionate questions at the time, that the writer repeats key points and principles to underline the reasons for the evils, and warn his own and subsequent generations about the dangers of compromise with any form of satanic religious evil. As you read these words and the next chapters remember the incredible human tragedy that is behind words like "sold them into the hands of". They mean many died, many were raped and abused, and many were sold into slavery, never to see their families again. The personal cost of loss of spiritual power was incredibly high and awful; it still is today and the writer is baffled, distressed and questioning – let us walk with his upset – and accompany his pain.

JUDGES 3:1-31

1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; **2** Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; **3** Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath. **4** And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. **5** And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: **6** And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. **7** And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. **8** Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years. **9** And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. **10** And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim. **11** And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. **12** And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. **13** And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. **14** So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. **15** But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left handed: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. **16** But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh. **17** And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. **18** And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present. **19** But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him. **20** And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. **21** And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: **22** And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. **23** Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. **24** When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. **25** And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth. **26** And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. **27** And it came to

pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. 28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. 29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years. 31 And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 6. The nations left behind in the land were allowed by the Lord to live to “prove” Israel; to test their resolve to follow the Lord by providing daily temptations to follow after the evil of the pagans. An additional “test” is now mentioned by the writer; that the people who had not known the war of invasion might learn the arts of warfare in defending their national identity against the ever present pagans. This is further evidence that the author is not re-writing complete earlier material, at least at this point, for had he re-written earlier material he would have introduced this point in the earlier chapters. It is as if he sees God’s revelation of this truth having written the first two chapters and now records it.

It strengthens my belief that Samuel is the author of both Joshua and Judges, for these words have the prophetic stamp upon them. This is a man who is seeking the Lord’s purposes in the midst of the awfulness of the story he has to record. He is working from basic material passed to him, but it is very sketchy for this time period because of the chaos of the time.

Had the Israelites destroyed the enemy forces totally when they arrived in the land they would still have needed to “learn war” in later generations to deal with foreign invaders, but their need was highlighted by the evil within, and they were forced to fight always on two fronts; firstly against their pagan neighbours and then against their pagan allies from outside.

Warfare is a constant threat to all nations in the devil’s world and will be until the coming of the Prince of Peace. Until Jesus returns there will be constant warfare upon the earth; we have the Lord’s word on that! No Bible believer ought ever to be wasting their time in trying to abolish war, for the Lord tells us that He alone can do that. We need to be sure we walk spiritually upon the earth so that the battles we fight are the right ones and we fight them within the Lord’s will, not as a result of national discipline because of our own evils.

The summary of the key eastern and northern enemies who the Israelites had to fight is now given in verses 3-6. They are a mixed list and not in chronological order, and this may be the clue that Samuel is telling the story of the Judges thematically rather than chronologically, and utilizing only the fragmentary sources that he has that have survived from the time of chaos they have emerged from. The enemies closest to the author are mentioned first; the five lords of the Philistines. They will only arrive around 1200 BC, nearly two thirds of the way through the period. The other groups mentioned here are some of the older enemies; the Canaanite kings, the Sidonians of the northern coastal cities, and the Hivites of the northern Lebanon Mountains.

The writer does not mention the southern enemies (from chapter 1) nor the Midianites here; this later group will play a prominent role in attacks in earliest days, and will be the focus of several early Judge’s stories. Nor does he mention at any point in the book the significant attacks of the major power of the time; Egypt. This is inexplicable if we consider this book a simple “history”, for as such it should record the attacks of the most major power, and we have significant extra-biblical records of the destructive power and scope of the attacks of the Pharaohs like Ramses.

Why does the writer leave the attacks by the Egyptians out of the record? Let us leave the final answer to this question hanging, and see if the manner of the telling of the stories gives us any clues as we go through the book. These things mentioned above all draw attention to the very selective and prophetic-didactic (teaching) purpose of this book. Many historical events are left out, and things are ordered out of historic sequence to underline a spiritual point, so as we go through we will see revealed the writer’s purpose and his points, and see why other major events of the day are omitted.

I will not spend much time at all trying to work out how the years of the various Judges inter-link, as I do not think they do in any straight forward western historical sense. They are separate stories that have been recorded and passed down to the writer, and record their local situations, so the wars and the peace that follow them are often very localized. This means several judges may have been operational at different points in the land simultaneously. The chaos of the years of the Judges is such that the writer of the book is missing vast amounts of the connecting historical data due to the destruction of records through this time, and so joins the stories together in a prophetic manner, but don’t waste time trying to get 450 years here because they are not here. This book reflects its time – chaos and darkness dominate.

The author is teaching spiritual principles from the surviving facts he has, but many things from these years are just shadows of memories by the time he starts to write. He sticks with the truths he has before him and does not speculate beyond the written records he is sure of. As noted above, I believe it is Samuel that is recording these things for us, and he is careful to utilize only the things he has good evidence for in front of him, and he does not go beyond the facts he has. He is writing as a Jewish prophet, not a western historian, nor a pagan German fantasist, and operates completely differently to others of his day and later, as he is truthfully accounting for events.

The stories relating to the Philistines will be the best known and accessible to him, because they arrived only about 100 years before Samuel's birth, and by his early years of ministry the Israelites are forming their own administrative government structure and records are becoming centralized again after the destruction of so much through the previous 250 years, and the destruction of the tabernacle early in his life.

I had a good example of how easy it can be at times to go back well over 100 years with reasonable accuracy and with colourful and easily proven personal accounts. I had the privilege of writing the official Naval history of the Naval Volunteers of the city of Auckland in New Zealand as my farewell gift to the Royal New Zealand Navy, in which I served as an officer. The Naval Volunteers served from the year 1858, when they were first established in the young colony.

As part of the research I did in the 1980s I met some very old men whose memories, photographs, and documents went back to 1901 with absolute accuracy. These men were able to look at photographs and remember the events and identify people in situations and explain what had happened that day. This was going back at times nearly 90 years. They at times joked with me that they couldn't remember breakfast, but October 1901 was as clear as yesterday.....

The biggest surprise however was to speak with an elderly lady, who was also a keen historian, and she had spoken with her grand-mother in the 1930s and was able to recount things she had been told by her about the late 1850s, and explain things on faded photographic plates from the 1860s that she had asked her grand-mother about in the 1930s, and recorded the details she heard! I was able to ascertain details of daily life in the Blockhouse (Small Fort) that defended the people in my local area 120 years before. All I was told was verified by written and photographic records.

Samuel was placed in a situation where he would have been able to have just such conversations with elderly people whose older relatives could have recalled the arrival of the Philistines, and would have recounted such stories around the fires at night to them as youngsters. These are referred to as "myths" by purists, yet I have seen just how accurate these so called "myths" are in my own local area, and the distance from Samuel as a young man back to the arrival of the first Philistines was exactly the distance I was able to bridge with my conversations in my local area!

The key purpose for the attacks by the enemies of the Lord and Israel is given in verse four. The enemy were left as a constant threat to try to get the people to cling solely to the Lord and obey His commandments. Faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant is a central theme for the writer of this book, and disobedience to God's clear instructions to the Patriarchs and Moses-Joshua is the main reason he sees for the disasters that unfold upon the scattered tribes.

The presence of the enemy laid a daily challenge before the people to cling to obedience to the Mosaic Law and build their spiritual distinctiveness and strength in their confrontation with evil. If they did this they were promised victory over their enemies and more prolonged periods of peace in the land. The writer's point is that peace of the souls of the people at one with God is always going to be reflected in military peace in the land. Isaiah 57:20-21.

If the people of Israel walked away from their God they were walking into battle with their enemies and they were on a path to defeat. War was going to be common, but victory would be rare, unless the people walked with God. The people failed to obey the Law and added to that evil with the foolishness of mixed marriages with pagans; they inter-married with the pagans amongst whom they lived, and so they compromised with their religions also.

The slide downwards gathered pace with each inter-marriage and each religious compromise. The sad words at the end of verse six record the full reality of their compromise; "they served their gods". This was forbidden by the Mosaic Law, and it was death to all who went down this path. Exodus 23:23-30, 34:10-17, Deuteronomy 7:1-11.

When pagans ask for compromise they do not shift their ground, they expect the believer to accommodate them and worship with them. The sin of Solomon in this matter led to the loss of his spiritual ministry, and to the destruction of his kingdom after his death, and it will destroy any ministry and family today also. 1 Kings 11:1ff, Nehemiah 13:22-31, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Satan doesn't compromise, only deviously deceive the foolish onto a path that is easier to be unhinged upon later. Satan doesn't need to change his strategies, because human beings are stupid and don't learn...

Verses 7 – 11. The first Judge of Israel mentioned after the death of Joshua is Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. Judges 1:13-16. The apostasy had begun in the days of Joshua, but until he and his generation of leaders is gone, the worst of the enemy attacks do not begin. Now this is within a few years of Joshua's death. We have already seen the number of campaigns that are required to re-settle some of the cities of the tribes and Othniel proves himself a thoughtful and courageous commander.

The attack by the major enemy from Mesopotamia occurs at some point after the cities described in chapter 1 are retaken. It may only be a few years have passed. The attack by a significant king from Mesopotamia brings the first major challenge to the people of the lands of Israel. The writer does not make it clear how much of the land was conquered or controlled by this king. It may be that the lands of Judah were not taken and so there Othniel could gather forces in the south and counter attack after eight years of domination by this foreign king in the north. A move like the one described here by a northern, probably Hittite king, would have gained Egyptian attention and possibly also their intervention.

This period is well covered by ancient records discovered over the last 150 years from Ugarit, the Hittite Empire archives, and the Amarna Letters from Egypt. From these records we know that the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I was trying to get power to shift in his direction through this time frame and even tried to work with the widow of Tutankhamun later in his

reign to place a Hittite on the throne of Egypt after Tutankhamun's death. Egypt and Mesopotamia were rivals for power and influence in this area of Canaan, and given the closeness of the time frame to the invasion we have described here I cannot help think they are all related together.

Dating events in this period is fraught with difficulties and so precision is impossible, but great political events are unfolding around Othniel and the Israelites from Joshua's death around 1370 through until around 1320 when the successors of Tutankhamun settle things militarily and exercise control and sovereignty over much of the coastal plain of Canaan again. Othniel does not concern himself with super-power politics, he asks the only question for a believer caught in the middle of a power play by others; "What is it that the Lord requires of me?" He asks the question and launches his attack on the northern super-power and gets victory. He doesn't play at politics or value percentage for success thinking; he prays and moves to obey the Lord's revealed will.

Samuel, writing 200 years later, would have little information about all these things except the very brief details he gives us in these verses. It must have been a significant incursion by this Mesopotamian king, but Samuel sticks with the facts he has, and they are few, and he doesn't give us the additional facts that we yearn for. The key points for Samuel are firstly that the people suffered this major invasion and disruption to their lives due to their religious compromise.

The southern area had faced this spiritual problem just before and after the death of Joshua (Judges 1) and so it is probably only the northerly tribes that suffer this attack, and it is the spiritually revitalized southern region under Othniel's leadership that sorts it out. The spiritually stable group assists the spiritually carnal group. This is the pattern for all history! Galatians 6:1. The foreign king's name preserved by the writer here means "Cushan (an area of Arabia) of double wickedness" – it may be a nick name that this man got through his evil behaviours.

The Lord moves Othniel to act only after eight years bondage in the north, for only then do the people turn to the Lord and specifically deal with their idolatry and ask the Lord for assistance. This is Samuels' second point. The Lord moves upon specific leaders to deliver His people from the specific assaults of the enemy, but only after they have acknowledged their sin and turned back to the Lord alone as their help. While they trust the pagan gods for deliverance, and while they continue to compromise their faith the Lord will not hear their prayers. This is another principle that applies throughout history. Psalms 66:18, Proverbs 15:8,29, 21:13, 28:9, Isaiah 1:15-18, James 1:5-8, 4:3, 1 Peter 3:12.

Othniel attacks the forces of this great king and he is given victory by the Lord. He apparently does not kill this king, but the power of the enemy over Israel is broken, and they are forced back to their land, and there is peace for the north, as there has been for the south for the next forty years. This is a similar situation to that of Abraham's rescue of Lot in Genesis 14.

Verses 12ff. The next deliverer is a brave and cunning commando, and inspirational leader named Ehud. If the deliverance of Othniel was around the time of Joshua's death at 1370 BC, then the Moabite attacks may occur around 1330 if the time sequence is correct here, and it may be. The Moabites felt "robbed" of their pillaging land by Israel when the people of God entered the land. Numbers 21-22. They have harboured desires for revenge since being thwarted when they hired Balaam to prophesy against Israel. Numbers 22 – 25.

They have learned from these prophetic words that Israel can only be beaten when they enter into immorality. They were watching for signs of this, and they took advantage of the spiritual weakness of the Israelites to surge back and control the East Bank of the Jordan and even enter into the central region of Ephraim and Benjamin. Eglon their king gathered the Amonite and Amorite survivors of the initial invasion and formed a revenge army and retook much of the land given to Reuben and Gad, and he has crossed the Jordan and taken the new city by the mound of destroyed Jericho. It is this grouping of nations that makes me think this attack may be in its right time sequence, as it has the hallmark of being an early campaign, just decades before the arrival of the "Sea Peoples" – aka Philistines.

Ehud knows that the king of Moab is not a military warrior, but he has good generals for his field army and so he doesn't have to fight. He has been clever in bringing together the eastern enemies of Israel in alliance and dividing spoils between them all. He is a cunning and self satisfied man who thinks he is special. King Eglon is dangerous because he is a wise and cunning leader, but he has a weakness, and his nation has a weakness because of him. This is a man who is self centred and selfish. He is grossly fat, and in this case this means he is totally absorbed by lust for food. He believes he is so special that he can do anything and will get away with it.

Ehud spots this weakness, for a man who is a slave to lust does not tend to trust others, and will have made himself central and crucial to all administration. He will tend to be what we now call a "control freak", and that means the nation is vulnerable if he is suddenly removed. Ehud, like Othniel is a quiet and thorough thinker, and a personally brave man, and so he hatches a plot to kill this man in a way that is possible for one man alone, but would be impossible for a group.

The members of the affected tribes of Israel serve Moab for 18 years, and no opposition is found to deal with the threats and tribute demands by the Moabites. After eighteen years the people repent of the spiritual sins that have led to the disaster and call upon the Lord for assistance. Ehud is God's man for the crisis. He is ready and resolute and prepares carefully, even to personally and secretly making an eighteen inch (30 cm) dagger that he knows he can use on this man to get through the fat layers. Ehud has watched his enemy and he knows him and his habits. He has observed that Eglon likes to believe he is the centre of the Intelligence operations of his nation also, and will be able to be enticed into a secret meeting to hear things that he should leave his intelligence section to work through. It is this weakness that opens the door to his assassination.

Ehud was a left handed man. This was frowned upon by some people's but it gave him an advantage as the normal place to look for a dagger or sword would be where a right handed man would draw it from. Ehud is able to hide it ready for use as a left hander, strapped to his right thigh, (verse 16) and he knows the guards are over confident, and not careful enough in searching for hidden weapons, and can be fooled. He takes a great risk, but it is a well calculated risk, and he is ready to serve under the Lord and deliver the people.

Like Othniel he thinks things through, and he is brave. He is the delegate to deliver the tribute to Eglon (the present) from his tribal group. He is a man who is trusted with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of goods by his own people. This man has integrity and he has discretion; no-one amongst his own people know of his actions. He leaves nothing to chance, and he trusts no-one who might betray him. He acts under the Lord absolutely alone and so there is no chance that he can be betrayed.

It appears from the account in verses 17-19 that the king had come over the Jordan to receive the tribute this year, as Ehud makes it appear that he is leaving and starts to head towards the rock quarries by Gilgal with his delegation, and then he secretly slips back to the king's quarters and seeks a secret meeting. The king believes this man may be betraying his own people, or disclosing a plot, and so calls him to be silent, and dismisses all his guards and courtiers.

The king is sitting in a special "summer house" that has been built for him for this trip. He is a pleasure lover and is sitting in a beautiful place, "fit for a king" and feels very secure. Ehud tells him, quite correctly that he has a message from God for him, and the King rises to hear the message, and Ehud draws close, draws the dagger and thrusts it with all his might into the king's abdomen.

He is so fat that the flesh encloses the dagger and he can't draw it out and there is no sign of it at all. The dagger cuts the stomach or intestines open and smelly gastric juices emerge. A fatal heart attack will likely follow quickly. Ehud quietly leaves the room and locks the door behind him. (Verse 23).

He locks the door and hides the key – possibly taking it as a sign of what he has done. He knows this man's habit of taking an afternoon nap and so the servants believe that this is what is happening and do not enter the room until much later that day, when they get a second key and enter, to discover their dead master. Ehud is now far away heading for the assembly point of the tribe of Ephraim. He arrives at Mt Ephraim and from there blows the ram's horn shofar to call the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin to war. They respond with all their armed men to the call of Ehud and hear his news. He announces the victory the Lord has given and calls the men of the tribes to follow up what the Lord has done through him.

His message is clear; the Lord has delivered the enemy into your hands! The Moabite army that is collecting the tribute is widely spread in small groups and is now trapped on the west bank of Jordan, and without leadership stays there. Ehud moves quickly and cuts them off and holds the fords of the Jordan against any attacks from the Moabite side. They kill ten (elephs) or companies of the Moabites. Remember this could be anywhere from a few hundred to ten thousand men. These were tough men, who were extorting goods from the Israelites, and they are all killed. The Moabites are cowed by this defeat and they do not trouble Israel for eighty years (two generations).

Almost as an after-thought the writer records the deeds of Shamgar who killed 600 Philistines with an Ox goad. This is way out of time sequence, as the Philistines do not arrive until 1200, but the link is the personal bravery that is the hallmark of each of these three Judges mentioned first. The story is being told in accord with the thinking and actions of the judges, not the time sequence in western terms. Think Jewish here... Each man operates alone and is a thinker, keeps secrets well, and is a courageous commando, as well as being a leader of men. These are brave and stable men. Some of the later judges will lack this stability of mind and emotion.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. To lose your spiritual power is a fatal thing over time; whether it is through unconfessed and dealt with sin or through compromise with satanic evil. All compromise with Satan's policies will lead to spiritual debility and personal and national judgment. Great evil follows all dealing with the father of evil. Satan's malice towards mankind is great, and any opportunity we give him by drawing close to his policies, he will take to destroy us and all who are dear to us.
2. The decisive actions of God's called men or women is often enough to turn the tide against the devil and all his works. The Lord does not need armies, He needs obedient individuals who are ready to stand in the gap and act with thoughtful courage. We are called to pray, but we are also called to think and then act courageously and decisively. Ehud acts with forethought, but with cool courage. Let us train ourselves in obedience, so that we do the Lord's work without thought of personal cost.

NOTES

CHAPTER 4**INTRODUCTION**

We come now to a more “famous” set of judges with Barak and Deborah. These two are reasonably well known in the writer’s day and their deeds are well documented, and so the author is able to spend some time discussing the events surrounding their time. The “Song of Deborah”, recorded in full in chapter five, has survived the chaos years of the Judges and was clearly a song that gave hope to the people in these dark times. This couple bring hope for more lasting peace, just as the three individual warriors brought temporary hope in their days.

The action is once again in the northern area that had been afflicted by the invasion of the Mesopotamian king. Here we see both the value of teamwork, and the dynamic role of a godly Holy Spirit filled woman at this time also. The timing for these events is specifically related by the author to the death of Ehud, which may still place the action here in the 1300s. Shamgar, even though the latest Judge mentioned, is not referred to as a man to date this action by, because his solo action was much later.

JUDGES 4:1-24

1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. **2** And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. **3** And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel. **4** And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. **5** And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. **6** And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? **7** And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. **8** And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. **9** And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. **10** And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him. **11** Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh. **12** And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. **13** And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon. **14** And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. **15** And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. **16** But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left. **17** Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. **18** And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. **19** And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. **20** Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. **21** Then Jael Heber’s wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. **22** And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples. **23** So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. **24** And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. Ehud has died by the time of the resurgence of the Canaanites of Hazor. It had been seized and destroyed by Joshua in 1400 BC. The ash layer of destruction in the archaeological excavation of Hazor from this time is significant. The Israelites truly burned this city with fire. Joshua 11:1-11. It was later given to the tribe of Naphtali, but had been lost to the Canaanites because of religious compromises and apostasy from the Mosaic Law. Joshua 19:36. It is sad to read the oft repeated words; “and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord”. Remember evil is not a relative thing, it is an absolute thing, measured by God, not by man, and it is judged by God as spiritual adultery.

The Israelites have slipped backwards again into the evils that surrounded them and their spiritual powerlessness has allowed the enemy to regain his old strongholds and rebuild their military strength. It may be that during the invasion time of the Mesopotamian king that the Canaanites were returned by him to this area to help control the Israelites. Whatever

the reason, Hazor, or at least a part of it, has been rebuilt and stands again. The king has the same name as that of the days of Joshua, which is common in this period. The name "Jabin" means "the discerning one", and was a title, similar to Abimelech, meaning "my father was king".

The total city of Hazor is clearly not rebuilt at this time by Jabin, and the evidence for this is that he has his general Sisera organize his chariot forces elsewhere in the Galilee at a military camp called Harosheth. The fact that the chariot forces are not in Hazor is evidence of it's very incomplete rebuild. The king has seized Hazor due to it's historic and possibly religious significance for the Canaanites, but it's rebuild is possibly only of a small defended area on the Tell with possibly only the temple as it's main building. When Sisera is defeated he does not even try to return to Hazor, which is further evidence that the "city" there is small and easily able to be taken by the Israelites.

The archaeological excavation of Hazor has uncovered significant temple ruins which were smashed by the destruction of 1400 and little evidence of any substantial rebuild until the days of Solomon. Joshua and the Israelites clearly destroyed the Canaanite's religious centre here and king Jabin's return is possibly tied in with his pagan religion and his Satanically inspired desire to re-establish it. We are face to face with the ANGELIC CONFLICT here again. The meaning of the name of the army centre (Harosheth) indicates a place of mechanical work, and as no city of this name is known, my suspicion is that it was the name for a vast campsite at the Hazor and other sites for the mobile army and their workshop for repairs and construction of the metal covered chariots that they built there.

This army was designed and built as an army of oppression only, and Jabin uses it for twenty years to control the Galilee and crush any opposition. Having lost the citadel of Hazor once to the Israelites the new king does not want to fight a stationery battle there again, but builds a totally mobile armed force that has no citadel to attack, for it is constantly on the move and can keep the offensive initiative. This man is a good strategic thinker, and he has the right general to lead the mobile and ruthless forces at his command. These pagans have the arrogance and cruelty of men who have had their religion trodden under foot and are out to re-establish it and hold their feet on the neck of Israel.

The chariot forces of this day operated as a tight formation with one or two archers in each chariot with the driver. Joshua 17:16. It may be that the very Canaanites that the children of Joseph were unable to control, were part of the group that resettles this area, and they bring their chariot technology to assist them. It is another reminder of the disaster, a generation or two down the track from Joshua, that flows from his failure to destroy these people.

Each chariot had a troop of two to five cavalry assigned for their protection. These were operated on the Egyptian model although may have been a lot heavier, more like wagons. Refer to the commentary on Exodus 14 for a discussion of these "Ready Reaction Force" mobile armies. It was a self contained armoured force. With 900 chariots, the total army may have amounted to around 3000 men for chariot service and another 6000 – 12000 back up cavalry. With these forces he terrorized, oppressed, and controlled the northern region for twenty years. There is great suffering for these northern Israelite tribes in this time. These men kill Israelites for sport/pleasure! It is "heavy oppression" the Israelites suffer, but they do so due to their own choices to follow the very religion of these oppressors. Finally the Israelites repent of their foolishness and return to the Lord.

Verses 4 – 11. Deborah lives as the prophetess close to Mt Ephraim, close to where Joshua had lived and died. She lived in a house under a great palm tree between the towns of Ramah and Bethel, possibly on the borders of Benjamin and Ephraim. It is another reminder that the Lord is not male dominated in his leadership, and that great women abound in scripture as leaders, working with the men, and the godly men recognized the Holy Spirit gifted woman as they did their fellow men. The gifting and filling of the Spirit is the key to leadership, not gender politics.

The writer notes the palm tree still has her name associated with it in his day. This is another good dating clue for the writer, and puts him within 300 years of the life of Deborah, as that is the normal life of the great palms. It is another clue that points to Samuel being the initial author, with Nathan and Ezra likely editors for later generations. Deborah was a religious leader of the people in that day and held the office and gift of prophet. She is married to a man called Lapidoth, and serves the Lord as His preacher, teacher and counsellor to the people of the central region.

She is not young at this time as many of the 20th century art pictures make her appear, but possibly a woman in her sixties. Her husband is not mentioned again and it may be that he has died at some point earlier than the time of crisis. She is well established as a prophet by the time of the crisis and she is the spiritual focal point of the tribes and they come to her for matters of judgment rather than to the High Priest at the tabernacle at Shiloh. She has clearly been manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit for many years and the people know that she is close to the Lord. She has positioned herself by faithful service for many years to be the person who can respond in the crisis when the people of the Lord cry aloud to Him. 1 Peter 5:6-9.

She waits for the Lord's word to come to her before calling for action. She waits upon the Lord, and moves only when the Lord orders her to do so. This is a God-dependent and Holy Spirit led woman, and mentors the importance of these things to us. When the people cry genuinely to the Lord for assistance she is told by the Lord to move and she swings into action immediately. She calls Barak, from the tribe of Naphtali, who are the tribe suffering the most oppression from the Canaanites. She gives him the strategy to use to defeat the enemy. She is a prophet and so her words are from the Lord and they are timely and accurate; the strategy she suggests is perfect. All the people need to do is obey the words of the Lord through Deborah; and this is their test.

The strategy is simple and will be effective. They are to gather all the forces of Naphtali and Zebulun; the two tribes facing the worst of the evils of the army of Jabin. Every man who can bear arms and is ready to fight to the death against the oppressors is to gather to Mt Tabor. This is country where the chariot forces will not have the advantage and where an army of 10,000 men will be a match for the similar sized enemy forces. Given the number of chariots with the enemy, the size of the army of Barak is probably in the vicinity of 5-10,000 men. Remember the word translated “thousand” (eleph) has a flexible meaning at this time, meaning simply unit/group.

The word of the Lord tells Barak that the enemy will be drawn by God to the vicinity of the river Kishon and around that place they will be delivered into the hands of Barak to be slaughtered. Barak is not at all confident without the presence of the prophet of the Lord. He will not go to face these tormentors of his people without the personal presence of Deborah. She agrees to go with him as his spiritual guide and strength. She also prophecies that the killing of Sisera will be the result of an act of a woman rather than the act of Barak. He will not get the glory for defeating and killing Sisera. Barak does not mind this, for all he seeks is the end of the tyranny. His mind and will is focused on the real outcome, not any pride based “fame”.

The two leaders go to Kedesh in northern Naphtali. They have to march past Hazor to do this. This requires great courage, physical toughness and fitness, and also great secrecy in their movements, right until they have the forces gathered. As they head south they gather more forces as they go. They march right past Hazor, although heading down a parallel valley, and keep going, heading for Mt Tabor. They must express faith in the words of the Lord immediately, for the Lord requires them to go through enemy territory to Kedesh, past the very headquarters of the satanic religion of their enemies and do so without being tempted to attack their headquarters. They are challenged to stick with God’s revealed plan only and not deviate from it. They must “step out in faith” and march, trusting God will gather the people needed.

By the time Jabin hears of the gathering of the enemy forces to the north he is too late to stop them before they head south and reach Tabor. The weakness of Jabin’s army is that they are gathered only in one place and depend on local spies to feed them intelligence about any Israelite movements. The Israelite army assembles to the north of Hazor, but then marches south right past their spiritual HQ. This will baffle the Canaanite strategists who will always be a few days behind the movement of the Israelites, and it may be they raced their cavalry forces to the north first and then were forced to turn around and march south again. If this is what occurred, then part of the army of Sisera has been force marched over 150 kilometres as a result, whereas the army of the northern tribes has simply marched due south to Tabor in good order, learning to work together as they go, and with good food and water supplies.

They are fresh, and hungry for revenge upon the evil Canaanites, and they have the prophet of the Lord with them, who has assured them that the Lord will deliver the enemy into their hands by the river Kishon. They wait at Tabor to see the enemy come to exactly the spot where the Lord has told Deborah they will be handed to them. As part of the setting of the scene we are also told that one descendent of the family of Hobab the Kenite has moved north from the area around Arad and has settled on the plain outside Kedesh and has pitched his tent there and is living as a pastoralist. Numbers 10:29-32, Judges 1:16.

Verses 12 – 13. The message finally gets through to Sisera that Barak has gathered an army and it is now on the slopes of Mt Tabor. He organizes his chariot forces and immediately leaves their camp at Harosheth and heads directly, as if drawn by the magnet of God, to the river Kishon. He is over-confident and does not fear a trap from the Lord, for he has dominated this area for twenty years now. He clearly knows Barak and knows he is a leader of the enemy. It may be that Barak was a guerrilla fighter in the hills against the Canaanites until this call to full battle by Deborah. All Barak’s skills as a guerrilla leader will have been called upon to move his army quickly and secretly through the enemy held territory for over 60 kilometres. He has kept the army hidden until they are ready to challenge their enemy and draw them into the trap of the Lord’s choosing. This is an obedient and devoted, attentive army.

Verses 14 – 16. The army of Israel is camped openly on the higher ground and can see their enemies arrive in their magnificent and shining metal (bronze) covered chariots. The view from Tabor is expansive and the word of the Lord through Deborah is clear when the enemy arrive at the river and ford the waterlogged ground. Deborah calls all the army to its feet and urges Barak to go onto the attack immediately. She can point to the disposition of the enemy forces on the river flats and say, “See the Lord has gone before you and organized them as he said he would!”

The Israelite soldiers on foot were at no disadvantage as they came from higher to lower ground, and if the river had been in flood recently the ground may have been boggy and would have slowed the chariots and made it impossible to manoeuvre them. Whatever the combination of natural phenomena that conspire against the chariots, the army of Israel has success against the over confident and bogged down Canaanites. The chariots are pressed together and cannot manoeuvre at all, and as his men fall to the Israelites around him, Sisera must leave his chariot and flee away to the north on foot. The army of Sisera that can escape the field of death race back to their base camp to replenish their supply of arrows and arms, but they are overtaken, and they are all either killed on the road, or within their under-defended campsite at Hazor (destroyed by Joshua and burned to the ground years before).

Verses 17 – 21. Sisera has fled for several days from the battle site to the far north. He does not turn in to the city of Hazor, which is another clue that it was more a religious and political centre than a great fortress any more. He does not report the defeat to Jabin, nor turn in there for protection, for there is none, but he keeps heading north. This is another clue that his origin may have been with the Mesopotamian powers to the north and that he sought their support, not that of the religious leaders at Hazor.

He finds the tents of the Kenite group on the plains outside Kedesh. He is greeted by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who invites him in to rest and sleep a while. He may have been walking and running for two days and nights at this point, so he will look like a desperate and beaten man, but in his arrogance he is still giving orders to the Kenites.

Jael is another of these amazing and powerful women through these years. The Bible is full of accounts of amazing and strong women; from Tamar, through to Rahab, to Deborah, and now Jael. These women heed the word and will of the Lord and are ready to obey the Lord and even slay the enemy when required. These women are no weak shrinking weeping flowers, they are strong and courageous, and are ready to risk all for the Lord. She is ready to kill this oppressor of her neighbours, for even though her husband has a treaty with him, she is an equal before God, and she doesn't have any treaty with this evil man.

He is clearly exhausted when he arrives and she gives him a drink of milk to refresh him, but also to calm and relax him. He then orders her to keep a look out for the enemy forces from the tent door and lays down to sleep in the tent, and she covers him entirely with a mantle/cloak (weather cold – wet season). She pretends to be ready to hide him from the Israelites, but her plan is different. This man has killed many innocent people through the years, so do not waste any sympathy on him in this situation. He instructs her to lie for him to any pursuers from Israel, but she has lied to him, and takes a long metal tent peg and nails him to the ground with it.

Verses 22 – 24. Barak is rightly relentless in his pursuit of Sisera, for he knows that this man is the evil genius behind the success of the army of Jabin. This man is heading north not just to escape, but to gather forces and return to relieve Jabin, and re-establish control of the area in a new battle. Barak understands correctly that this is no time to allow any enemy to escape. This man is too important and has been too ruthless in the past to ever let him rise again. Barak may have left his army to pursue the Canaanite forces to Harosheth, and he alone may have chased Sisera, because he knows Sisera must be killed. This great general must not rise again to kill another Israelite. There is a time for mercy, and this is not that time! **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.**

Jael comes out to meet him as he draws near the tent of Heber, her husband. Her husband must be away, as his was the right to do all these things, but in his absence Jael has acted under the Lord's direction. The dead body is disclosed by Jael in her tent, and Barak is able to announce his death, just as Deborah prophesied, killed by a woman. He is also able to launch the final assaults upon the remaining forces and people of Jabin at Hazor, and possibly other places. God causes him to prosper in his next attacks and maybe several hard weeks of campaigning are required to root out the last of the Canaanites/Mesopotamians in this area so that there is no chance of any return battle.

Barak is as ruthless as Sisera has been, and he needs to be against these Canaanite thugs, and so he brings peace for a time to the north. It is always a dangerous thing to show mercy to a person who has showed no mercy, and remains unrepentant, for they will simply use the opportunity you have foolishly given them to kill again. In our own nation there is a murderer who ought to have been executed for his first murder, but was given ten short years in jail. Under our weak and ineffectual laws he has since been released three times and killed again each time. He is now an old man but "mercy" had been shown him and the innocent have suffered, and he remains an old drug dealing thug killing the young.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Service in any crisis requires many previous years of spiritual preparation and positioning. Deborah is ready to take the leadership of the tribes in the battle against the northern Canaanite forces because of her faithful service through the previous twenty to forty years. She is known as a woman of God and a faithful prophet of the Lord, whose words are right and holy. The fruit of her life positions her in the place of respect and obedience, so that when she needs to give an order all who hear it respond with instant obedience. Let us work to manifest the power and character of the Lord through all the quiet periods of our life, where-ever we are called to serve, for then, when the crisis comes, we are ready for it, and have the position to take the leadership without any dispute.

2. Jael acts with strength and focused energy to eliminate the murderer of her neighbours. She does not wait to check with her husband who has made a treaty with the evil forces, for that would be to involve and compromise him.

By acting alone she saves her family from Israelite and Canaanite vengeance, and had she failed, her actions would have led to her own death only. She takes a risk for herself, either way to save her own family and obey the Lord. Let us be ready to act decisively in crises without sentimentality or liberalism giving any chance for evil to rise again.

3. Mercy is to be shown to those who genuinely seek it through true repentance, but the Lord's words are to be obeyed in the matter. This means that the "fruits of repentance" are to be seen before any "easy forgiveness" is granted and greater evil is unleashed upon the innocent. Satan delights in the actions of foolish believers who are quick to forgive those who have no genuine remorse, nor any real desire to change, for by their welcoming of evil men into their homes they open the door to greater evil still to fall upon the innocent.

We have seen in our own nation the great evil of an unrepentant murderer being taken into a community by a church, and that man raped and murdered another young women in their midst, destroying the faith of many, and the witness of that church to it's community. Satan delights in such acts of foolishness. There must be no mercy to those who show none, until they repent and give evidence that their repentance is real. **Matthew 3:8, 7:15-27, 2 Corinthians 7:8-10.**

BACK-SLIDING AND RECOVERY

1. Definition - falling from the standard of living that the Lord calls us to and living at a lower level of belief, behaviour, and emotion. Living in a state of embarrassment at the gospel, thinking as an unbeliever would.
2. The Lord knows who are his, we don't. 2 Timothy 2:19. A backslider is out of fellowship, and may resemble an unbeliever in every way yet still be saved. They are like the prodigal son. Luke 15:3ff. These people are different (although they appear to be the same) to religious unbelievers. 2 Peter 2:1 -22, Jude 4 -13, 18, 19, 22.
3. The Lord desires these people to be restored. Matthew 18:12 -14, Luke 15:3 -32. In the Old Testament this message is also clear. Hosea 4:14-19, 11:7, 8, 14:1-4, Jeremiah 2:19, 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22, 5:6, 8:5, 14:7, Jeremiah 31:22, 49:4.
4. Believers who are "offended" at the Word have failed to grow spiritually John 6:61 -63, Matthew 11:6, 1 Corinthians 10: 13, Matthew 13:21, Mark 4:17, John 16:1, Matthew 24:9, 10.
5. The disciples all were offended at the Lord at his death. Matthew 26:31, 33-35, cf. 67-75.
6. Falling from grace is another way of expressing backsliding. Colossians 1:23, Galatians 5:4, 2 Peter 3:17. It means to fall from a place where you stand for grace and adopt an inferior way of living the Christian way of life, like legalism.
7. God disciplines the backslider, but their eternal security is secure. Hebrews 12:5 -13, 16, 17, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, 1 Peter 1:4, 5, 2 Timothy 2:11- 13, John 1:12, Ephesians 1:13.
8. The Lord is able to keep us from falling, although we can walk away from his provision by following our pride rather than his truth. Jude 24. 1 Corinthians 10:11 -14, 1 Timothy 3:6, 7.
9. At the end of the church age the Lord prophesied that there would be a time of almost total backsliding on the part of the organised church. 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 1 Timothy 4:1- 6, 2 Timothy 4:3, 4.
10. The Lord warns all backsliders very directly in Revelation 2 : 5. No fruit for too long = sin unto death! John 15:1-5.
11. Backsliding and Recovery

Seven Steps Downwards

- a. Trifling with Sin Romans 13:14
- b. Yielding to Sin Romans 6:13
- c. Habitually Serving Sin 2 Peter 2:8
- d. Abandoning Ourselves to Sin Ephesians 4:19
- e. Being Abandoned by God to Sin Romans 1:24,26,28
- f. Encouraging Others to Sin Romans 1:32
- g. Experiencing Hell on Earth James 3:6, 1 Timothy 5:6

Seven Steps Upwards

- a. Resisting Sin in our Attitudes James 4:7
- b. Overcoming Sin by Faith in Christ Galatians 5:16
- c. Habitually being Victorious over Sin Romans 6:14, 1 John 5:4-5
- d. Entering into the Secret of a Victorious Life Hid with Christ in God Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Colossians 3:1-3
- e. Being Taken by God into Deeper Fellowship 1 Timothy 1:12, 1 Corinthians 4:2
- f. Delivering Others from Sin. Jude 22-23
- g. Experiencing Heaven on Earth Jude 24-25, Philippians 4:6-7

NOTES

CHAPTER 5**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter records the victory song sung by Deborah and Barak as a duet to the people who gathered to celebrate the defeat of Sisera and Jabin and their Canaanite forces. In the details of the song we have many of the events of the battles fought described, and the nature of the evils of the enemy, as well as the greatness of the Lord's deliverance proclaimed. By putting the details into a song that could be sung, all the Israelites can learn the song, and by singing it to their children encourage them in their faith in the God of Israel. This song becomes a powerful tool for good through the centuries, and it appears to have been added to through the early centuries also. It is a reminder to us all, that if we want to teach principles of doctrine, then the best way is to put the principles into verse and have people sing them.

JUDGES 5:1-31

1 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, 2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. 3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. 4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. 5 The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel. 6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. 7 The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. 8 They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? 9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. 10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. 11 They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates. 12 Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. 13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. 14 Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. 15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. 16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. 17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. 18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardated their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. 19 The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. 20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. 21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. 22 Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones. 23 Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty. 24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. 25 He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. 26 She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. 27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead. 28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? 29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, 30 Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? 31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 2. Both Deborah and Barak sing this song to the assembled people, but from verses, 3, 7, and 12, we read that Deborah is the author of the poem as the prophetess. Barak sings the song with her, as they both have been used to gain the victory, and so both sing the glory of the Lord together, for they needed each other. The prophet needed the obedient warrior to do what she has called him to do, and the warrior needs the guidance of God through the prophet to gain the victory. They join together to praise the Lord God who has given the victory to the people, and to remind them that their obedience to the Lord has opened the door to victory, just as their disobedience to the Lord had opened the door to tyranny and judgment. There is no arrogance here, nor any point scoring, just shared worship.

Verse two may be translated in poetic form as follows:

“(Praise God), that the strong of Israel showed themselves strong
That the people of Israel willingly offered themselves (for service)

Praise Ye all, the Lord."

Israel had to respond to the call of the prophet to obtain the victory. Willingness to serve and give of your self is the starting point for spiritual victory. **2 Corinthians 8:12, 9:7, Philipians 2:12-13**. We have to step out in faith, in obedience to the Word of God, to obtain the victory in the Lord's plan for our own lives. If we want to praise the Lord as we read His praises here in this chapter we must walk as Deborah and Barak walked. Let us be strong in the Word of the Lord, and firm in our determination to apply all we read in God's Word into the fabric of our daily lives. **Deuteronomy 31:6-7, Joshua 1:6-18, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 2 Corinthians 12:10, Ephesians 6:10, 2 Timothy 2:1, Hebrews 11:32-38**.

Verses 3 – 5. The proclamation of victory is to be announced to all the kings of the nations around about, so that they might know that the Lord God of Israel is the Lord indeed of the heavens and the earth. The pagan kings are urged to hear and pay close attention to what has happened to Jabin and Sisera because the same fate awaits them if they do not face the reality of who is truly God. The worship of the pagan gods has gained Hazor nothing, and led to the death of all the adherents to this evil religion. The gods of the nations are nothings! There is only one true God and the rulers of the pagan nations need to recognize the truth before their own judgment day comes. Psalms 119:46, 138:1-8.

The song is a song of praise to the Lord, the God of Israel. It is a worship song to glorify the holy name and character of Almighty God. Psalms 2:1-5, 10-12, 49:1-2. The reference in verse four is obscure to us, but expresses the work of the Lord in a way the peoples of the time identified with. The coming of the people of Israel into the land is described as a move of God, for God alone brought them into the land, through Edom, Arabia, past Moab and into the land of Canaan.

The Lord made the heavens drop food in the form of manna, drop water to form the rivers, and then dry them before his people, and he shook the mountain of Horeb when he gave the Law. The wonders in the natural realm were amazing and the people were meant to be amazed and stand in awe of their mighty God. Let us stand in awe of our amazing God. Deuteronomy 4:10-13, 33:2, Psalms 4:4, 18:7-10, 33:6-8, 97:1-7, 119:161, Isaiah 64:1-4.

Verses 6 – 8. The reference to Shamgar raises a time problem for some, for if he fought the Philistines he is another hundred or more years later than the days of Deborah. What can be the answer to this? Was there an addition to the song of Deborah through the years, with a verse about Shamgar added later? Are there two Shamgar's, with one fighting the Philistines in the eleventh century and one here in the thirteenth? Pause and reflect on this matter.

I have no clear explanation of this, for the Philistines only arrive in 1200 BC and any reference to them earlier is a later writer's addition to the original text, that I believe is early and very close to events. My suspicion is that the reference to the more recent man is made by a writer in a manuscript (and adding to the song itself) in the eleventh century BC and is passed to Samuel in the tenth century and it gets inserted into the book here, with Holy Spirit approval through Samuel's addition, as the days and bravery of that named judge, is similar to the times of Deborah and Barak.

The days of Shamgar were indeed like the days of Deborah in the northern areas, for people had to avoid the main roads and villages were deserted because of the predations of the army of Sisera who robbed and murdered at will to subdue and break the will of the local Israelites, just as the Philistines would later do in areas they marched through. Their culture of war was that all foreign peoples were simply prey to them to be used, abused and killed at will to test their swords. The evils of the later days are the same even though two hundred years apart. It may be that the song of Deborah is added to through the two centuries until it is recorded here, for it was a song that encouraged each and every generation of Israelites, through to our own day as a song for the Israeli Army of the 21st Century.

There is a clue to the fact that a line has been added about Shamgar by a later writer; added into the song after it was originally written. If we set these verses out in poetic form we have the following lines.

"In the days of Shamgar, the son of Anath
In the days of Jael, the paths kept holiday
And the wanderers of the paths went crooked (hidden) ways
The towns in Israel kept holiday (were deserted), they kept holiday (remained empty)

Until that I, Deborah arose
That I arose, a mother in Israel
(For) They had chosen foreign (new) gods

Then was war at the gates
Was there then seen the shield and the spear
Amongst the forty thousand of Israel?"

If we remove the line about Shamgar we have the normal three line units of the poem and it makes much more sense. My suspicion (and that is all that it is), is that a later writer who had personally experienced the deliverance of Shamgar inserted a line about him to compare him with Deborah, for they had achieved the same result, and the later writer saw Shamgar as the natural inheritor of the role of Deborah and Barak. While he was right in this, it makes for a clumsy verse in the poem and places an event out of historic sequence and it makes no sense in the context of the rest of the poem, however, as we have seen before, Hebrew connections are those of theme, not time sequence.

This is a song about Deborah and Barak, and Shamgar does not really belong here. He worked alone, whereas this couple worked together and raised an army to deliver their people. The only conclusion is that this line does not belong here in the original poem/song, even though it tells the truth about this man Shamgar. His addition into the song in the eleventh century would have encouraged people then, and if Samuel approved it, we must accept it as Spirit certified, but it makes a problem for us in our day, and has allowed pagan commentators to have a field day for the last 200 years.

Can you see the state of the nation as Deborah's song describes it? The main roads and paths are deserted and people are taking hidden tracks through the undergrowth to avoid being seen by the enemy who will hunt them like animals if they spot them. Many villages are deserted with their people dead or scared off into the hills. The men have been robbed of their masculinity and all the shields and spears of the nation have been confiscated by the enemy.

This puts in perspective the attack/charge of the Israelites from Tabor. The Israelites had swords and daggers, but lacked the shields and spears of their enemies. It was a rag tag band of farmers that attacked the ordered and well equipped army of the Mesopotamians and Canaanites, but with prophetic guidance, in God's power they won.

The men who followed Barak and Deborah had to use their hand weapons and farm implements as their weapons, and use daggers rather than spears. They had to get up close and fight eye to eye with their enemy. This explains why Deborah urges them forward at the crucial moment, because their only chance of victory was to press the enemy backwards and get amongst them before they loosed their arrows and spears in their direction. Once they had closed with the enemy they could use their daggers and swords, and the shields and spears of the enemy were of limited use in the press of bodies around them. The captured enemy's weapons will then become useful to the Israelites for later days.

The Israelites needed courage and confidence. They could have confidence in the words of Deborah but they had to express their own courage and attack the enemy and close with them. Courage is called for today still, and when the order comes to advance we must be ready to cast our life into the Lord's hands and move forward. God's call is not to hazard our lives in sports and leisure activities, but to be ready to hazard our lives in ministry activities, and be prepared to exhaust ourselves in the work of the Gospel.

Sadly we see believers being killed doing dumb things for personal pleasure or excitement. A year does not go by without some story of a potentially great believer being killed in our city in a risky activity that had no point or purpose to it other than "leisure"! The Lord challenges us to spend our lives and pour out our blood for things that are of value. Let's challenge all young (and old) believers to be ready to show courage in things that matter, not in sporting activities that do not matter eternally. Numbers 13:20, Deuteronomy 31:6-7, Joshua 1:6-18, 10:25, Nehemiah 4:9-18, Psalms 27:14, 31:24, Matthew 6:25, 10:39, 16:25.

Deborah is clear as to the cause of the distress that her people faced. They had found new gods, and they were the gods of their oppressors. It was a really dumb thing to serve the gods of the people who murdered your ancestors and relatives! What help can gods/demons be if they are served by the people who are abusing you?

Deborah's age is referred to here also; she is spoken of as the "mother of the nation". The men of Israel were certainly calling for their mothers as they faced the evils and threats of their enemies. As we will see in the end of the poem, Sisera himself is a "mummy's boy". The Israelites had all become like boys again; they were powerless until they confessed their weakness and their sin, and then Deborah's prophetic words gave them hope. She becomes their "mother" when they find the Lord their God as their Father again.

They lacked the military equipment, but they had the promises of the Word of God through His prophetess Deborah, and they had their limited weapons and their great courage. With poor equipment, but with biblical courage and the promises of God, the greatest battles can be won. These men were not going to wait until they made better weapons, for there was no time for that; surprise attack was their only hope. They moved to follow the Lord's Word with what they had, and they made no excuses relating to their equipment or resources. They stepped out in faith!

Often we feel we need to wait until we have all the most modern resources in place before we attempt a project, when the Lord uses raw courage and Holy Spirit filled people working in the called place of service. We don't need the latest equipment; we need the Spirit's power and our applied courage into the right situation at the right time when the Lord orders us to attack.

Verses 9 – 11. All classes of people enjoy the victory that Deborah obtains by her courage and focused actions. Those who ride upon the asses of the wealthy, and those who walk are all able to rejoice in their deliverance, for all have their lives restored to them. They are free to undertake commerce and normal life again. They can approach the gates of the towns again and not be afraid. They can draw water without expecting the sound of an arrow coming towards them from the enemy. Sudden and arbitrary death awaited all Israelites from the mobile army of the Canaanites. Let us see these verses poetically.

"My heart is inclined towards (is drawn towards) the leaders of Israel
To those who offered themselves for service to their nation
Praise ye all the Lord

You who ride upon white asses
You who sit upon carpet coverings

And you who walk in the way – all of you – reflect (upon what has occurred)

With the voice of the archers amongst the drawers of water
 There praise the righteous actions of the Lord
 His righteous acts in the villages of Israel
 Then the people of the Lord went (freely) down to the gates.”

The archers were the men of Benjamin, and they are now there amongst the people to protect them as they draw their water. 1 Chronicles 8:40, 12:2, 2 Chronicles 14:7, 17:17. They are talking amongst the people as their protectors, not sending arrows amongst them as the pagans did. All the classes of the people can rejoice in the salvation Deborah has won for them. The wealthy men upon the white asses, and the middle class merchants upon their carpet covered asses, and the poorer people who are walking; all rejoice in the Lord's work amongst them. All are urged to reflect upon what has happened and rejoice in the Lord for the glory that they have to enjoy through the work of Deborah. Psalms 105:1-4, 107:1-2, 145:1-18, Isaiah 28:6.

Verses 12 – 15. Verse twelve forms the start of the second section of the poem. It dramatically reflects the rousing cry of Deborah in calling the men to stand and attack the enemy at the ford of the Kishon River and get the victory the Lord had promised them. Barak is urged to “lead captive his captives”. What does this mean? This refers to his leading away the captured soldiers of the enemy for execution. Barak may have done this initially but when he discovered that Sisera had escaped he directed his men to pursue the remnant of the enemy to their camp site and he set off in hot pursuit of Sisera himself. The next verses tell the story of the battle itself.

“Then came down the remnant of the nobles of the nation
 JHWH himself came down amongst his heroes

Of Ephraim, whose root is in Amalek
 Behind thee Benjamin, amongst thy peoples
 From Machir came down leaders
 From Zebulun marchers under the staff of their leader

And princes of Issachar (standing) with Deborah
 And Issachar as well as Barak
 Driven into the valley through his feet.”

This part of the poem describes the wave of Israelites surging towards the enemy, as if pouring from the source of Barak and Deborah. The last line of this stanza of the poem may indicate that the troops were lying down in a hollow place on the hill disguising their numbers, and when Deborah called “UP!”, they surged forward, and they appeared to be like a great spring of water gushing out from Barak's feet.

From the description in verse fourteen it would appear that Barak and Deborah had archers from Benjamin with them in the battle, standing behind the main army on the hill so they could shoot over their heads into the enemy. This would mean that they could loose a rain of arrows upon the enemy initially, and create the sort of confusion amongst them that they had not experienced for over twenty years. These men may have joined them directly from the south as the others were gathering to Tabor from the north. As the enemy were recovering from the arrows of Benjamin the foot soldiers of northern Israel swept in amongst them with scythes, axes, spades, picks, and daggers.

All the leaders of the northern tribes who had been in hiding had come out and stood with their army, old and young they stood together in this battle and all surged forward to kill their tormentors. Deborah herself may even have surged forward with her army to fight alongside the princes of Issachar. The enemy may have despised them as a “dad's army” of farmers, but they surged to victory because they marched with God. Remember, God delights in using those the pagans consider foolish to confound the wise! **Romans 10:19, 1 Corinthians 1:20-27.**

Verses 16 – 18. The great glory of victory was only savoured by those who were there. Many from the tribes did not heed the call to battle and so missed the opportunity to rejoice in the Lord's provision of victory. As the leaders of the Lord's people we are called to advance and fight the battles He calls us to with the resources and people we have. We are not to wait for reinforcements, nor bemoan our poor numbers. The Lord does not need great numbers, He needs great hearts of faith amongst His people.

It is courage and obedience alone that God can use, and so knowing this let us advance to obey the Lord's commands. The challenge for all these people was to put behind them twenty years of being victims and obey the Lord and become victors as they follow their leadership. Philippians 3:13-17.

“Why (did some) remain in the sheepfolds hearing the bleating of the flocks?
 Amongst Reuben, there is great searching of their motivations

Gilead remained beyond Jordan
 Dan remained by their ships of commerce
 Asher sat by the sea shore – by the pleasant bays they relaxed

Zebulun (however) despised their own lives even to death
Naphtali stood on the high points of the battle field."

When we make a choice to stay away from a great endeavour we choose to limit our celebration later when victory is won. The tribes mentioned stayed with their flocks and herds, they stayed with their commercial interests, and on holiday by the sea shore. They missed the glory that was Naphtali and Zebulun's glory in the Lord. Those who hazarded their lives spent them well, for they despised the thought of death. They had the right mentality for soldiers, thinking that it was better to die upon the field than see their families enslaved any longer to cruel men. Acts 20:24, 1 John 3:16, Revelation 12:11.

Verses 19 – 21. As we read these verses we are challenged with a question. Was there a second battle, or is the writer poetically comparing the victory by the Kishon River to an earlier one by Joshua by the streams outside Megiddo and Taanach? I have seen no answer to this question that gives finality. It may be that there was a second follow up battle in this vicinity against the kings of Canaan who came up to assist Sisera in his battle. This battle field is about 30 kilometres from Mt Tabor, and it may have been that Sisera went first down to the coast to gather forces before finally fleeing north after a second defeat. We have no way of knowing at this distance.

"Kings came, and they fought (against Israel)
The kings of Canaan fought
At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo

A piece of silver booty they did not obtain
From heaven they (the angels) fought
The stars fought against Sisera

The brook of Kishon swept them all away
That brook of ancient times, the brook Kishon
Advance my soul in strength."

It certainly appears that the two places are all tied together in one campaign as it is sung here. The Kishon river flows out to the sea past Megiddo and enters the Mediterranean Sea by Mt Carmel. It appears that reinforcements were arriving from the south west for Sisera and that Israel headed down the path beside the river Kishon and destroyed the relief army just as thoroughly as they destroyed the original one in the boggy ground by the river. We cannot be absolutely sure from this reference here, but that would seem to be what has occurred.

The key point is that the enemy fought against, not just Israel, but the Lord God of Israel, and the very creation itself. When people fight against us they declare war on God Himself and they step outside nature itself. The Lord is with us, who shall we fear? **Psalms 44:3-8, Romans 8:28ff.**

Verses 22 – 24. The inhabitants of one town that were close by the battle didn't come to assist their brethren and they are roundly cursed by the Lord for their slackness. They have valued their lives and their goods and desperately try to hang onto them. They value things that will pass to others, rather than the glory of obedience to the Lord. **Luke 12:16-21, James 5:1-8.** They "loved this present world" rather than valued the glory of God eternally. **2 Timothy 4:10.**

The enemy's panic is described in the prancing of their horses, as they literally raised their legs again and again to defend themselves against the Israelite footmen, but were unable to get their chariots moving in the press of bodies against them. Jael receives a blessing from the Lord for her courageous and decisive actions.

"Then did the hooves of the horses stamp the ground
With the hunting, the hunting of their mighty men
Curse ye Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord

Curse ye, curse ye the inhabitants of that place
Because they came not to the assistance of the Lord
To the help of JHWH in the midst of the mighty men

Blessed be Jael before all women
The wife of Heber the Kenite
Blessed before all women is she in the tent".

The horses of the war chariots were taught to stamp their feet to kill the enemy infantry ahead of them, but the stamping here is panic, because the Israelites had pressed the chariots together so they could not manoeuvre at all, and they were sitting ducks for the infantry to kill the drivers and archers within them.

Verses 25 – 27. Jael's actions eliminated the great threat that this evil man Sisera posed. He had to be killed, or he would have returned in greater malice. Jael saw the truth and took her opportunity to calm and reassure him and then to slay him so that his risk to the innocent was permanently over. She was cool and calm and ruthless in her elimination of evil, and that is what is required when evil is to be eliminated.

We get even more details here than in the previous chapter. She gave him a rich meal in addition to milk from a skin or pottery vessel. This means she used milk that may have been mildly fermented, and in addition to rich butter saturated

food she would have brought on deep sleep to this exhausted man. He slept deeply after eating and drinking with her provisions. Having drugged him to sleep, she then took a metal tent peg and drove it through his temple, and smashed the bones in his head. This woman was no weak and retiring frail damsel, she was clear thinking, tough and determined.

“He asked water, she gave him milk
She handed him cream in the dish of nobles
She stretched out her hands to the tent peg

In her right hand she held the workman’s hammer
She hammered Sisera and she broke his head
The bone shattered and she pierced his temples

Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down
Between her feet he bowed, he fell
Where he bowed, there he fell down dead”.

The blow that Jael struck was a single blow, and it was with all her strength. She held nothing back when she drove that great nail into this evil man’s head. She showed no mercy and thus she brought grace and peace to her new land. She showed mercy to the suffering by showing no mercy to the evil man. If we are called to act, let us act as Jael does, with decisiveness, calmness, and all our strength.

Verses 28 – 31. Even evil men have mothers, and we read of her distress when he doesn’t return to her. It is an important section of the poem for it reminds us that sympathy for the lost must not rob us of our certainty, and hide the need for their judgment. This woman is not to be pitied, for she lived to rejoice in the losses of others and delighted in the theft of other people’s goods. It is of note that he went home to mother rather than to his own family. Such men who live as he lived, as mercenaries who prey on others, are unable to have normal family lives. This man was thoroughly evil and his mother rejoiced in his evils. It is her turn now to weep and experience the pain that her son has caused to so many others.

“Through the window she looks out
The mother of Sisera through the lattice work
Why is his chariot delayed in coming back?
Why delay the steps of his horses?

The wise of her princesses reply
But she replies herself with the same question again and again

Surely they delay over great booty
Two young girls for each man as slaves
Quantities of coloured cloth
Vast amounts of cloth and clothing of many colours
Striped cloth, two beautiful garments to slip over his neck as booty”.

This man delighted in his booty, even wearing captured clothing back home to impress his mother. He delighted in slaves captured in his raids and brought them back to serve in his mother’s household. All her joy is over, for his sun has set. Deborah ends the poem with a prayer that all who rejoiced in his evil deeds might have their own sun set, and might feel the judgment of the Lord upon them. I cannot help but think that Sisera’s home, filled with booty of goods and people was taken by Barak and all he had stolen was returned to its place in Israel. With the death of this evil man the northern area had rest from war for forty years.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Let us praise the Lord for who He is. Let us stand in awe of the Almighty God. Let us see the heavens and hear their music, and accept their proclamation of the mighty Creator God who is above all our small conceptions that we call theology. Let us stand with heads bowed before the Creator of the universe, and the One who has saved us from evil and sin and death, and fitted us for eternity with Christ our Lord.

2. Deborah writes the song and Barak joins her in singing it. He is ready to join in worship and accepts the leadership and spiritual mentorship of Deborah. Barak is not hindered by any stupid male chauvinism for he sees in this woman the Holy Spirit gifted and God authorized leader for his generation. Let us embrace the work of the Holy Spirit and acknowledge the spiritual leaders of our own generation whether they are male or female. While women do not appear to be called to solely pastor New Testament churches, they are called to exercise leadership and prophetic roles often in the church. Let us accept what God is doing and judge by the means the Lord has given us as to who is to lead; that is by the manifestation of the relevant fruits of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people, not by their sex or backgrounds. Its not gender than means anything, but Holy Spirit filling!

3. Let us remember that while “everyone has a mother who loves them”, this has no significance whatsoever when judgment is called for. Let us be guided by Bible doctrine not human sympathy. Evil men will all have some redeeming qualities, but they do not mean that such a person can be redeemed. Those who select evil as their god and path have made their life choice and if judgment is called for then the sword is to cut them and no mercy is to be shown to such evil men.

CHAPTER 6**INTRODUCTION**

We meet the next judge in this and subsequent chapters. He is Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh. The timing after the last events is unclear, for the forty years of rest after the defeat of the Canaanites may have referred to the northern tribal areas only. The next challenge is focused in the area south from where the action was centred with Barak, although the northern tribes will be given opportunity to assist their central brethren defeat the enemy. Gideon confronts the Midianites and other Arabian tribes who would sweep into the land across the fords of Jordan, during the dry season when the river was easily crossed, and enter the valley of Jezreel (verse 33). They came in vast numbers and would pillage through the lands of Manasseh south to the coastal lands of Judah even to the town of Gaza.

Gideon is visited by the Angel of the Lord and called to service, and he is a reluctant deliverer of Israel. This is not a man like any of the judges to date. Each man so far has been a warrior when called, and each man had been tested in battle prior to their call. They were mighty men of war and well trained in all the tactics of warfare. This man is what we could call a "chicken hearted" fellow. When we meet him he is hiding away from the enemy and he has little faith or confidence in the words of the Lord, and requires the Lord to really prove that His words can be trusted. He seeks signs from God to make his initial moves. He is a mighty example of how God can take a coward and make him a great warrior through faith.

JUDGES 6:1-40

1 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. **2** And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. **3** And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; **4** And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. **5** For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. **6** And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. **7** And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, **8** That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; **9** And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; **10** And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice. **11** And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. **12** And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. **13** And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. **14** And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? **15** And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. **16** And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. **17** And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. **18** Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. **19** And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. **20** And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. **21** Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. **22** And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O LORD God! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. **23** And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. **24** Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. **25** And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: **26** And build an altar unto the LORD thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. **27** Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. **28** And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. **29** And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. **30** Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. **31** And Joash said unto all that

stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar. 33 Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. 35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. 36 And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, 37 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. 38 And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39 And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. 40 And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 6. The sad words that we will read again and again are seen here. The children of Israel “did evil” in the sight of the Lord. Notice some things here; firstly that they actively “did evil”. To enter into evil is a decision of will; it is not a thing that just happens. You must decide to leave the truth and follow a lie; you don’t just “fall into it”. Let us not excuse ourselves or others from falling into evil.

We fall because we fail to discern the truth and follow it, and we take lightly the things of God. Let us take the Lord seriously and ensure we follow His Word and walk His way. The second thing to notice here is that all actions are in “the sight of God”. Nothing is hidden from the Lord. God cares for His people and He will act to deal with their foolishness. **Psalms 106:43-48, Hebrews 12:1ff.**

The third thing to notice is that the Lord “gave them over into the hands of Midian”. The Lord actively handed them over into the hands of the Midianites for discipline. The Mosaic Law had made it very clear that if the people chose to leave the holy paths of the Lord, then they would be handed over for discipline to the very people whose gods they were worshipping. Leviticus 26. The Midianites were ever keen to punish Israel for the suffering they endured at their hands during the wilderness wandering and afterwards. The Midianites hated the Israelites and took any chance to express that hatred.

The Israelites had to abandon their unfortified towns, for when the day came to harvest crops the Midianites and the other Arabic peoples of the eastern lands would sweep in and destroy their buildings, capture their grain harvests, and kill their people. The Israelites had to dig shelters to hide in from these people, and fortify their strongest cities to resist a siege.

The Arab raiders were not able to sustain a siege, but anyone caught in the open by them died, and all goods left in the open lands were stolen by them. The land was devastated and only a fraction of the crop was saved from the enemy forces each year of the seven they suffered at their hands. The people were impoverished by the raiders and finally they will reject their pagan gods, who have failed to protect them and turn back to the Lord. Psalms 50:15, 84:3-12, 136:17-26.

Verses 7 – 10. We confront another prophet, although this time we do not even have his name. Remember we have many through history who served without their names being known in the scriptures. We can think that we are unknown and insignificant to God, yet all of us are known by name by God our Redeemer. We don’t know this man’s name, but God does. It is heavenly renown that alone lasts forever. Hebrews 11:1ff.

This particular prophet calls the people back to righteousness, and tells them bluntly that they are in this place of suffering because of their sin of disobedience. The prophet then reminds the people of their spiritual history. He reminds them that it is the Lord who brought them to this land, and that it was He who drove out the enemy from before them, and that He will deliver them in this situation, just as He has before, but only if they return to Him. They are confronted by the foolishness of their actions; to worship the gods of their defeated enemies is stupid, and for many has proved fatal. Nehemiah 9:24-31, Jeremiah 42:19-22, 43:7, Zephaniah 3:1-7. They are to declare war upon the gods of the Amorites; they are not to fear or honour them.

Verses 11 – 12. The prophet has given the message and then he disappears from the page of history and sadly the people continue on their way, and as we will see the family of Gideon himself will continue their compromise with the evils of satanic religion and ignore the spiritual facts of life that they have been challenged to apply. The Angel of the Lord again directly intervenes to save His people. The Lord selects one man through whom to bring the deliverance, and this man is not the sort that you or I would pick. Gideon is not the sort of man with a CV to lead to public office.

This is the first story that leads us directly to the similar circumstances of the appointment of David as King over Israel, for he also was the last that anyone would have appointed as “king material”. God delights in making the foolish wise, and the weak strong, and those who seek His will powerful and mighty in deed. **1 Corinthians 1:27. God needs our obedience, not our brilliance.** God seeks spiritual strength in the soul, for from that place He can build wisdom and bodily

strength. First always toughen the mind and heart, then the body can follow! The angel arrives and sits under the oak tree at Ophrah, and is close by to the wine press where Gideon is hiding away trying to thresh the wheat.

To thresh wheat requires wind movement and was normally done on a hill, but at this time that was to be inviting attack by the Midianites. Gideon is hiding away in this hole in the ground, trying to thresh enough wheat to feed his family and hide it from their enemies. The family is in a battle for survival and they are losing to their enemies. They also have spiritually compromised and have set up a family altar to the Canaanite fertility god (read demonic force) Baal. These people are worshipping the fertility god of evil, as a sort of “good luck charm” type religion – but it has led to their judgment. Notice the Lord’s greeting to Gideon. He reminds him firstly that the true Lord (not Baal) is with him. Joshua 1:5-9, Matthew 28:20.

A believer out of fellowship needs first to remember that he is still a child of God and God is with him, even though it may be for discipline at this point. The prodigal son had to remember that he was a son of his father before he was ready to be delivered from the pig pen. Luke 15:11-32. Notice also that the Lord addresses him as the warrior he is to become, not the coward he at present is. He will become a mighty man of valour, and this is how God sees him. The Lord sees us “in Christ”, and that means He always sees what we are capable of in the power and place of God’s plan for us. Let us advance into this reality in the Holy Spirit’s power! Acts 18:9-11.

Verses 13 – 16. Gideon’s response to the Lord’s greeting tells us that he has been seriously thinking and possibly praying about the military situation he and his nation faces. He has been reflecting upon the words of the prophet and even quotes his words about the Exodus. He immediately asks “why” of the Lord. He then asks “where”; where are the miracles of deliverance that their father’s saw? He has been thinking seriously about these issues and knows that they need a miracle from the Lord to deliver them.

He cannot see any leader like Joshua, Othniel, or Barak, and he doesn’t consider himself as a likely candidate. Gideon betrays the fact that the words of Moses have not been taught, for he doesn’t know about Leviticus 26, nor Deuteronomy 29:24-28, 30:11-20. Truly, without the vision of God through His Word the people perish. Proverbs 29:18. He does realise that the Lord has delivered them into the hands of the Midianites. He sees that this is a judgment, but he fears that the Lord has abandoned his people to death.

He is defeated in his heart and believes there is no hope. He is right in that there is no human hope, but wrong about God. God does not abandon His people. **Romans 3:3-4, 11:1-5, 2 Timothy 2:12-13.** The Angel of the Lord encouraged him and us with the promises and challenges given next. Gideon’s might is that he sees that God is in control, and has brought the present disaster upon them, just as He previously brought them into the land.

If he goes in this knowledge he will be the deliverer of Israel. Do you see what the Angel of the Lord is saying here? He is trying to get Gideon to hold firmly to the truth that God’s power has not changed, but that they are receiving His powerful discipline instead of His powerful blessing now. **Hebrews 12:5-13.** The same power that brought them to the land, now brings the enemy into the land to discipline them. That same power will drive the enemy from before them also when they have dealt with their sin of idolatry.

The Lord’s promise becomes very personal now to Gideon. He will be the deliverer of his people. God will use his inner certainty about the power of God and will to build upon it, and he will make him into the great deliverer he is capable of being in God’s power. The Lord directly addresses him; “have I not sent you?” in other words, Gideon you have just been appointed!

Gideon has poor self esteem, and clearly he has been brought up to believe he is not worth much, and that his family are not important in the scheme of things. His humility is the result of poor parenting and low social position, and the Lord is challenging him to look beyond his birth circumstances and be “born again” into his new role as the deliverer. The Lord’s words to him are of certainty; “surely I will be with you, and you will smite the Midianites as one man”. All Gideon has to do is believe and step out now in faith and seek the Lord’s direction about the next thing he is to do to become the deliverer he has been called to be.

Verses 17 – 21. Gideon now wonders whether he has been having a dream or vision, and that maybe the angel isn’t real at all, so he asks for a test in feeding the angel. He asks the angel to wait and he heads off and prepares a meal for the angel of the Lord, much as Abraham had done. Genesis 18:6ff. It was common courtesy in the Middle East also for a visitor to be fed. He brings the young kid’s meat in a basket and the gravy in a pot and the unleavened bread for the angel to dip in the gravy. This sort of meal remains a common one throughout the Middle East.

Gideon presents the food as his offering to the Lord who receives it respectfully, but then asks Gideon to do a strange thing with the food. He is told to place the meat and bread on a large rock nearby that could have acted as a table. Having laid out the pieces of meat he is then instructed to pour the gravy over the meat on the top of the rock. Gideon is obedient in all this. He stands back probably expecting the angel to eat the food, but instead the angel of the Lord reaches out with his staff and touches the rock and the entire meal is consumed in fire in an instant. Gideon’s sacrificial gift has been accepted, and the Lord then disappears from his sight.

This has occurred in the days of Moses, Leviticus 9:24, and will occur again in the days of Elijah many centuries later, (1 Kings 18:1ff), and it would have been a dramatic moment for poor Gideon, and he is beside himself with fear, for he now knows he has met the Lord Himself. He realises that he now stands where Moses and Joshua stood – to work for God.

Verses 22 – 24. He cries aloud in his grief and shock when the Lord disappears, and the Lord answers him out of the air and reassures him. His fear is that he will die as a result of this meeting, but he is told that he is safe and that he can be calm and rejoice in the Lord. He immediately does the right thing, which is to build an altar there to the glory of the Lord. He calls it “the Lord is peace” (Jehovah Shalom), because he is now at peace in his soul, for he sees that the One True God indeed lives and there is none beside Him.

This altar becomes an important sign for later generations that indeed the paths of the Lord alone bring peace to the heart and peace to the land. The writer records that this altar is still there in his day as a memorial. It may be that this was a large stone pillar making a square altar, rather than many stones. It is likely that it was close to the stone upon which the meal was placed, for the Lord will order another altar built using this stone later.

Verses 25 – 27. Later that night Gideon is spoken to again by the Lord. The Lord now orders a blood and fire sacrifice be offered on the stone that the meal was burned up upon. It is to be the young bullock that his father had, possibly set aside for an offering to Baal. It is not the farm bullock, but the “second one”, and that makes me think that this was an animal set aside for the pagan rituals his father had accepted. Gideon is also instructed to tear down the altar to Baal that is on their family land and cut down the grove of trees that surround it. It was common for these altars to be on high places on the hills. A grove of trees was planted around the altar which was dedicated to the god of fertility for blessing upon crop harvests. This pleasant, but evil paganism has taken firm root in the community, just like the trees!

These are young trees, for the entire grove will be used to light the sacrificial fire under the bullock, so these are not ancient trees. It looks as if there were ten trees in a cultic circle to cut down, as he takes ten servants to do the job quickly so that all will cut simultaneously and they will finish the job before anyone stops them. Gideon believes there will be opposition to the instructions of the Lord being followed through, but he takes the men, takes responsibility for the carrying out of the actions and does them. He fears his father, but can gather ten servants who believe the altar needs to come down to obey his instructions. The action takes place that night under cover of darkness so there is less chance for anyone trying to stop them, and they work all night because the Lord calls them to do so.

Verses 28 – 32. The altar of Baal was clearly a central feature of the landscape, but far enough from the places where people lived to be able to be destroyed without waking anyone up. This community is divided in its loyalties and the men who want compromise with Baal awaken to see their altar destroyed. Unlike the altars of the Israelites, made of twelve unhewn stones, the Baal altars were quite elaborate affairs, and this one may have been stuccoed and even carved and painted. It would have been a beautiful place within the grove.

Satan likes his religions to be attractive to unsaved people, and so the loss of this place would have been felt greatly by the people who had spent their meagre wealth on its construction. The town awakes to the sight also of the grove gone and the bullock of Gideon’s father burning on the large altar he had built close by the village, by the tree where the Angel of the Lord had met him. Gideon and the ten servants have had to work all night and carry all the wood down the hill to the site of the new altar by the great oak tree.

By morning the sacrifice has only been burning for an hour or so. The men of the settlement know exactly what has happened; the words of the prophet of God (verses 10 above) have been followed and their paganism has been overturned in the night! I suspect the bullock that they had set aside for Baal is the one on Gideon’s altar to the Lord God of Israel. Gideon is quickly seen as the culprit and he is accused by the pagan men of the village of blasphemy and they require the death penalty. Now of course the reverse is correct; these men are due the death penalty for their paganism. Leviticus 20:7-27, Deuteronomy 13:1-11, 17:1-7, 18:15-21. All paganism in Israel was to be punished by death!

It is Gideon’s family pagan altar that has been destroyed, but clearly his father is now torn between his paganism and his son. He may also be torn between the words of the prophet of God and the religion he has followed in the grove on the hill top. He is at the point of decision as those of Elijah’s day will be also. How long will he hesitate between two contradictory opinions and life paths? **1 Kings 18:21**. This remains the challenge in every generation.

Gideon’s father pleads for his life with strength, encouraging his neighbours, for whom he has probably built the grove and altar complex, to see that if Baal couldn’t wake them up to protect him, then he is no god at all. He then quotes the Mosaic Law that we have seen, and urges the crowd to execute the men who plead for Baal. He publically renames his son as Jerubbaal, meaning “let Baal plead against him”. It is a name which is a specific challenge to the paganism of the land and will be his battle cry to the tribes when he calls them to arms.

Gideon’s father is the first one to be led back to the true faith in the revival that has now begun. The neighbours and friends of the family are the second group to be convicted of their sins and are revived. God has his people within the nation, and they are being restored to their faith by the courageous actions of Gideon. He challenges them to believe and apply the Word of God, and this remains the heart of all revivals through until today. Revival is a turning away from pagan world viewpoints and a return to obedience to the living Word of God.

Verses 33 – 35. The Lord has come to Gideon at exactly the right time. God’s timing is always perfect, and that is why we need to be ready to respond to the call of the Lord when it comes, for it is always timely for what is to unfold. The Midianites have crossed the river Jordan and are at this time camped a few miles to the north of Gideon’s family in the Valley of Jezreel. In this place they are threatening and stealing from the Canaanites, but it will soon be the turn of Israel to suffer at their hands.

The Holy Spirit comes upon Gideon and instructs him to blow the war trumpet. He blows it upon the local hill; possibly the one on which the stumps of the trees of the grove are sitting. He may even stand upon the ruined altar of Baal and do this. All his extended family are drawn in full armour and weapons to his side, ready now to fight the enemies of God.

He sends his family, all of whom have seen the altar torn down, as the messengers throughout all the areas of Manasseh. The men of Manasseh gather to him, and then he sends out messengers again to the northerly tribes of Asher and Zebulun and Naphtali, and they come to him.

The enemy are in the land and all the cities of the Israelites are now shut up against the enemy and these men must move through dangerously open country to get to the assembly point. There is bravery here and the recognition that the time has come to fight, and there is faith, for they are leaving their walled cities undermanned against the mobile camel army of the enemy.

Verses 36 – 40. Gideon has had a message from the very Angel of the Lord who spoke to Moses and Joshua, and he has been spoken to by the Holy Spirit twice, and yet at this point he doubts his mission. This is an encouragement to us all when we falter in our calling. He asks for a sign from the Lord and for specific direction. Both these things are unnecessary to request of the Lord, for he has seen that the Lord directs him always at the right time. He simply needs faith to wait for the Lord's instructions and then obey them.

As the armies of Israel gather around him he starts to feel overwhelmed and small again. He doubts his ability to lead and the army's ability to fight and win. The soldiers are courageous in coming but there is great fear and little military expertise in this army. He sees them all well armed, but he knows they are not ready to take on a mobile camel army of men who live to fight and pillage.

It is easy to accuse Gideon of lack of faith and identify that he was wrong to ask for these signs, but the Lord does not criticize him, and so we must stop our criticism of him, and heed the significance of his actions for the power he has in the subsequent events. He is a weak leader and he will not have the spiritual strength of the previous Judges, but he will focus himself on being obedient to the Lord and he will take leadership and act for God in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is fearful and he does the right thing with his fear, and this is why the Lord does not criticize him. God wants us to take our fears, anxieties and legitimate worries/concerns, all to Him, **1 Peter 5:5-9**.

He wants a sign of the reality of their future victory; a sign that will prove to him that he will lead to victory. He lays the fleece of a lamb upon the ground and asks for it to be wet and the ground dry the next morning. The next day he asks for the reverse thing to happen, and it also does. He has the evidence the Lord has given him now. He knows that he will be victorious and he rises up as the last of the army groups arrive to lead them to victory in God's way. Don't get carried away with discussion of the significance of the fleece and its symbolism, get the message of the Lord here. Gideon doubts and fears and he takes these things to God, and God answers him. This is the pattern to follow in prayer.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. It is not wrong to doubt and fear, it is only wrong to sit on these emotions and thoughts. All of us will be fearful, but those who the Lord will use will not stay entrapped in their fears. God seeks all our worries be cast before Him and left at the foot of the cross. Let us take our worries to Him and let them be solved there at the feet of the awesome God who made the heavens and the earth.
2. The strongholds of enemy religion need to be cast down from their prominence in our lives. All worship of any objects other than almighty God need to be cut down, smashed, and cast away from us. Let us tear down any religious elements that separate us from genuine relationship with the one true God. Let us get a glimpse of the awesomeness of God and worship Him alone.
3. God's timing is perfect. He calls us to action when there is action to get involved in. Our task is to be ready to move forward with the Lord's power and guidance. We can relax in the Lord's timing regarding all things in this world. He has called us to follow Him and that means listening to the Lord's voice within through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, and being obedient to the revelation of the Word and applying things directly and immediately into our lives.
4. It is not wrong to seek a sign from the Lord that a path is the correct one to walk when the situation is uniquely difficult or strange. Gideon had never faced the sort of things he confronts here and so he seeks special revelation and receives it. He is obedient once he is clear in his mind as to the will of the Lord, and this is the call of the Lord on our lives; once we are clear as to His will, we are to do what is required.

He is ready to work all night and he is able to call ten men to assist him, for his opinions are respected by others. He has "power of command" and can give orders, and this is most commonly true when a man is also able to receive and obey orders. Gideon is good officer material and the Lord uses this man because he is ready to obey and ready to work hard through the night.

5. Gideon was not a great warrior, he was a quiet and timid man, but he was ready to be obedient to the Lord, and this readiness to cleanse the land of evil made him a suitable Judge. It is the readiness to serve the Lord and courage

when it is demanded that makes a man great. Gideon will become a mighty man by doing the things the Lord requests. This is the same way we all become mighty in the Lord's service; by walking/obeying in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION UPON OUR POSITION IN CHRIST

1. We have a position with Christ rather than a position with the cosmos system. We are separated from the world and are different from them. We have a new position in Christ - Ephesians 2:6
2. We have a new position of partnership with Christ, we are never alone. - Colossians 3:4, John 17. We have a communion with him. He says that he will never put us in a situation without a way of escape. The way of escape is through Christ.
3. We are workers together with God, we are in his service - 2 Corinthians 3:9, 1:9, 6:1
4. We are ministers of a new covenant, we have a new message to man. 1 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4
5. We are ambassadors for Christ - 2 Corinthians 5:20
6. We are living epistles, we are letters to a lost and unsaved world. Our lives should be such that Christ should be read from the book of our lives. Our life and lips should tell of Christ and Him alone.
7. We are members of the Royal family - Galatians 6:10, 1 Peter 2:9
8. We are united with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit:
 - a) We are in the Father, he is in us - Ephesians 4:6,
 - b) We are in Christ - John 14:20,
 - c) He is in us - Colossians 1:26,
 - d) We are in the Spirit and he is in us - Romans 8:9.
 - e) We are united forever to God.
 - f) We are not part of a universal soul. That is new age.
 - g) We have been entered into a living union with a personal God.
9. We are members of his body, branches of his vine, living stones, his building, sheep of his fold, part of his bride, priests in his kingdom, saints set apart for his glory.

THE NAMES OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

God reveals Himself and His character by His names.

1. EL - The strong one (singular) - 2 Samuel 22:33
2. EL ELYON - The most high God - Genesis 14:18-22
3. EL OLAM - The everlasting God - Genesis 21:33
4. EL SHADDAI -The almighty one - Genesis 17:1
5. ELOHIM - The all powerful one. (plural) - Genesis 1:1
6. JEHOVAH - The self-existent one - I AM Exodus 3:14
7. JEHOVAH-ELOHIM - Lord God, Creator - Genesis 2:4
8. JEHOVAH-JIREH - Jehovah will provide - Genesis 22:13, 14
9. JEHOVAH -NISSI - Jehovah is my banner - Exodus 17:15
10. JEHOVAH-RAAH - Jehovah is my Shepherd - Psalm 23:1
11. JEHOVAH-RAPHA - Jehovah that Heals - Exodus 15:25, 26
12. JEHOVAH-SABOATH - Lord of hosts - Psalm 46:7, 11
13. JEHOVAH-SHALOM - Jehovah is peace - Judges 6:24
14. JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH - Jehovah is there - Ezekiel 48:35
15. JEHOVAH TSID KENU- Jehovah our righteousness - Jeremiah 33:16

CHAPTER 7**INTRODUCTION**

Gideon has received from the Lord direct instruction, and specific encouragement from the two “fleece” tests over two nights, that victory is certain. He has the promise of victory, and now he is told exactly what he is to do to achieve that victory. He is to win a victory by means of faith and absolute obedience, and the tests he has set the Lord will open the door for the Lord to test his faith. Faith will always be tested by a required action. **James 2:14-26**. The Lord will stretch Gideon’s faith further, and at the same time rebuild the faith of Israel in their God.

Israel has trusted in their own mind’s imaginations, Satan’s fake religions, and the strength of their own arms, and they have all failed. All Satanic religion has its power rooted in self centeredness and the arrogance of men who want to play act with their god in their rituals. Satan appeals to the pleasure principle of man through the pagan religious rituals. Satan’s plan is to fool men into thinking that they are secure and powerful through their playful, and often sexual, fertility rituals. The worship of Baal was man centred, and by the way the Lord gives the victory to Gideon he will encourage the people of Israel to become God centred again, and throw away their powerless pagan nonsense.

JUDGES 7:1-25

1 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6 And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. 8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley. 9 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. 10 But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: 11 And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. 12 And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. 13 And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14 And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15 And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. 16 And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man’s hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. 17 And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. 18 When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. 19 So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. 20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. 21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man’s sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. 23 And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites. 24 And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. 25 And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. The new name of Gideon is used with his own given name, and it appears that this new name became his title, and possibly a challenge to his people to cast down their own Baal groves and return to the worship of the Lord alone. The army of Gideon numbers 32,000. Now remember the numbers here may mean anything between 3200 and 32,000 as the word for thousands (eleph) had a flexible meaning at this time, but generally referring to a group/unit of a specific family/clan grouping. His army had then 32 eleph/"units" in it, possibly this being the number of tribal subgroups that responded to the call.

The Lord makes it clear to Gideon that he has too many men, for if they get the victory here they will claim it as their own due to their numbers. The enemy forces are still vastly larger than them, but the Lord wants to win by means of a miracle so that there is no doubt as to the source of the power behind victorious Israel.

The call to lower the numbers is given within sight and sound of the enemy camp, which is on the other side of the range of hills to them in the Valley of Jezreel. The enemy camp is vast with up to 135 clan groups of raiders encamped like locusts in the valley. They have ridden over from Arabia and now are camped here and are consolidating the booty they have already seized on the eastern bank of the Jordan and around the Jezreel area. All the populations of the towns in the area that are fortified will be behind their walls and all their populations will be on alert, with their soldiers sleeping on the walls.

The grouping of the enemy here is vast from the descriptions of them, in addition to the words for their numbers. At least 135 tribal units are gathered here and the numbers could be from 13,500 to 35,000. It is such a vast grouping of tribes and sub-tribes that their unity and cohesion as a fighting force is fragile, and it is this fact that the Lord will use to undo them. Always remember, the satanic doesn't do team work. This is not a well organized army as the Assyrian and Persian armies will be in later centuries. The largest Persian host numbered around 200,000 men when they invaded Greece under Xerxes (later to marry Esther) 900 years after the times of the Judges.

The danger in the service of the Lord is always centred in arrogance. When believers start to think that they are special and that the victories they have gained are their own, then their spiritual power will drop steadily away to zero. We move from spirituality to carnality in this very area; when we stop walking in the Holy Spirit's power and begin to trust our own mind and arm. The Israelites have to recognize that without the Lord's power with them they are nothing, and so do we also! **1 Corinthians 1:25-31, 2:1-5, 2 Corinthians 4:7, 10:4-5.** The danger for Israel is the danger of the arrogance that leads them to think they are entitled to dwell in the land and do not need the Lord's help to prosper.

This attitude still exists today, and we see it when we hear people say that they believe that the Lord doesn't mind their sinful behaviours because he has left them to "get on with life". These people believe that God doesn't bother Himself with details, and that we will all be alright in the end, because God is love and will forgive us all our trespasses! Such casualness flies in the face of all the scriptures. The Bible makes it clear that God deals in details, and as He got all the details of the creation right, just so He wants us to walk in holiness before Him and get the details of our own life right.

The battle that the Lord has planned for Gideon to fight will require courage, great self control, and tight military discipline. Only the best and most experienced warriors will be able to be obedient to the orders Gideon will be required to give. All the men who have responded to the call to arms have been obedient and have some courage, for they know who they are fighting against and they have at least turned up. They all want to serve the Lord, but the vast majority are untried in battle and are without spiritual strength, and are fearful. They have done the right thing by turning up, but they are unfit for the first phase of the Lord's deliverance due to their lack of training and their inner mental attitude of fear.

Over two thirds of the army are in this state and Gideon is instructed to read aloud Deuteronomy 20 and call upon the men to examine themselves, and any who are mentally distracted for any reason are to head home and wait for the second call up. Refer to the Commentary on Deuteronomy 20 and read the rules for warfare that Israel was to practise. These men will be called up to join in the pursuit of the enemy forces, and in this phase they can build their military confidence and deal with their fear in a battle already won.

Easy victories are required to build strength, the same as easy weights are required to build muscle in the early stages of weight training. Trying to attempt too much, too early, leads to failure and to injury that may debilitate later. Acts 13:13, 15:36-41. Here we see young John-Mark failing on the first journey due to the rigours of the evangelistic campaign the older men have embarked upon, but he is restored by his uncle Barnabas on the next campaign back in the easier field of Cyprus. Do not push young believers to go too far in ministries they have not been called to by the Holy Spirit.

Verses 4 – 8. The Lord then tells Gideon that the army is still too large for the plan that He has for them. They might still depend upon their own strength rather than rest solely upon the power and plan of God. The Lord gives Gideon very strong commands to lower the numbers further by a straight military test of alertness and self control.

Only 300 pass the test that the Lord sets them. They alone have the military alertness and self control to hold their weapons in their hands, crouch to drink, and lap water from their cupped hand as a dog laps up water. They alone are ready to respond immediately if an attack comes and spring into action. These are the men who are trained, self disciplined and ready for action in a heart beat. These are the men the Lord can use, and the other 9700 must wait in their separate villages for the second phase of the battle. **1 Timothy 4:7-16, 2 Timothy 2:3-15.** They are not excluded from action, and will be required to fight later, but miss the great victory because of their lack of preparedness.

The majority are sent home to wait the next blowing of the trumpet, and the 300 stand with Gideon, each having a ram's horn shofar/trumpet in his hand. It may be that each one of these men was given their unit's/eleph's shofar to summon help to follow up the victory when it would be needed. From the next chapter's details it would appear the men leaving the camp were given some direction as to where they might be needed later. The men leaving the camp leave all the things that the 300 will need to stay in the field and fight. Part of this provision is 300 large clay pots and 300 oil lamps.

The great host of the Midianite's camp stretches out in the valley beneath the hill where Gideon now encamps. This is probably Mount Moreh, with the enemy encampment covering the valley between Mt Moreh and Mt Tabor centred around the village of En Dor. The enemy have been informed of the gathering of Israel's army to attack them, and should have received some intelligence about the large numbers and identified where they are. The lowering of the numbers from 32,000 to 300 should also have been noticed, and the very fact that the majority of Israel's army have headed home to their fenced cities should have given heart to the Midianites, if they knew of it, but apparently they do not.

From the facts here I may be giving too much credit for military planning to the Midianite host and their leaders, for it has sat still for too long in the valley by this time, and it has allowed the Israelites to gather against them, and they don't appear to be sending out any intelligence gathering patrols at all. They also have not set a watch on the top of Moreh, and have left this key hill for Gideon. These evil men have been engaged in a "talk fest" for too long, and they are likely trying to end blood feuds between the various groups and resolve past differences. This is anything but a united alliance and so it is satanic indeed – for Satan the Narcissist finds it hard to produce unity amongst his narcissistic followers.

Their leaders are over-confident in their numbers, but their men are disunited and are now, with inaction, feeling increasing unease. The Lord is working in the Midianite camp to bring their war counsels into confusion. God works for his people in areas and ways we do not know as we pray. The Israelites returning home get there unmolested by the Midianites, so militarily something is wrong in the enemy camp. Their leadership and the membership of their host are clearly divided, and no clear orders are being given.

With this vast host they should have sent out cavalry parties in all directions daily and harassed the Israelites, even stopped them gathering, and certainly stopped them dispersing. They should certainly have gained intelligence of Gideon's whereabouts and be well informed of his numbers and plans. They apparently have none of this information, and have sat in the valley waiting, talking and holding meetings – not the time for a "talk fest"..... Such passivity is always a dangerous thing for morale. Exodus 15:11-16, Joshua 2:9, 24, 5:1, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

Verses 9 – 14. Gideon is a doubter and he gets more and more concerned when he looks at his 300 men and sees the thousands of camp fires beneath him in the valley. He keeps doing the right thing with his fears however. He keeps on praying, and the Lord keeps on answering his prayers for guidance and provides him with the instructions he needs, and it is only once he enters the enemy camp that he realises what the Lord has been doing in the camp of the enemy. He is instructed by the Lord to take his servant and conduct a reconnaissance into the very camp of the enemy in the night.

Gideon is tasked to work all night at times and this is no exception. It will take him several hours to work his way in the darkness quietly into hearing distance of a camp of the enemy, and work his way close enough to the camp fire to overhear their conversations. It is also a reminder that the language of the Israelites and the other Semitic peoples at this time were very close, and so each could understand the other's speech. It may also be that the vastness of the Midianite horde requires the use of the common language of the time – Akkadian, so all could understand their speech.

Notice the words used to describe the host of the enemy in verse twelve. This is a seriously big army and the chances of Gideon arriving at the right camp fire are zero, unless he is led by the Lord. He crawls to exactly the right place to overhear, at exactly the right time, the dream one of the Arab raiders has had. From the recounting of this dream we see that the Lord has indeed gone before him and the enemy not only know he is the leader of the forces opposed to them, but also they fear that the Lord is against them. The story is already circulating in the camp that the "sword of Gideon" is the Lord's revenge upon them for their seven years abuse of the Israelites. This fact will give Gideon his battle cry.

This is a vast, but already mentally beaten army. Gideon now has the information he needs to launch the attack at exactly the right time, and that is as soon as he gets back to his camp. Once again he is going to be up all night and his fitness is going to be called upon. This is the man who was ready to thresh wheat the hard way to feed his family, and the same strength he required then he is able to call on now.

Verses 15 – 17. Gideon hears the dream clearly, and he immediately sees that the Lord has gone before him to guarantee the victory. Gideon has been guided to the very spot to hear this dream and the man in the telling of it has given him his battle cry; he knows the Midianites fear the mythical "sword of Gideon". He will use their fears against them. 2 Corinthians 10:4-6. He worships the Lord silently in his heart, for he recognizes that the victory is indeed the Lord's. He realises however that great things are required of him and his men, to express the faith and confidence that this dream has delivered to them. The Israelites under Moses were told to trust and watch, but Gideon is called to more active obedience. Exodus 14:10-14.

He rouses his men from their sleep. As the commander he has let his men rest and build their strength for the battle the next day. He and his servant alone have been up all night. This is an important principle of leadership; the officer in charge sets the example of disciplined and tireless service. His men's welfare, and fighting fitness are his concern at all times – remember the motto for leadership of an 82nd Airborne General – "First into Action, Last to eat".

His message to his men conveys his absolute confidence and assurance; “the Lord has delivered the enemy into your hands!” Notice he makes the promises he has received personal for his men. They will receive the glory of the victory through the Lord’s communication to Gideon and their absolute obedience to the revelation Gideon has received. He divides his forces into three sections of one hundred men each. He wants to launch his attack simultaneously from three sides of a square, and so drive the enemy in panic in the fourth direction back towards the Jordan.

This will mean that he will have to get two of the companies to run silently to the other side of the enemy’s camp in what remains of the night so that it is still dark when the attack is launched. This means they will need to leave off any of their heavy metal, and noisy, armour and finally attack the enemy without the heavy body armour of the day. It means they will have to run several miles carrying the clay pots with the lamps within them, carrying only the trumpet and their swords. Faith and fitness is called for here, and both need to be at a high level. Matthew 16:24-26, 1 Corinthians 11:1, Hebrews 13:5-8.

The instructions are given to the groups before they head off from the hills above the camp. Gideon will take charge of the middle group, with another group heading beyond him to take up position to the left of Gideon, and one group coming down from their camp on the right side and taking position there. The open area into which they intend to panic the enemy is the flank leading back to the fords of the Jordan. It is around there that the units he has sent home are to be waiting to be called to attack. This is great military strategy; always provide the enemy with your chosen path for their escape route, so they don’t feel they must fight to the death, and you can kill them on the chosen path.

His instruction is clear to each unit commander; they are to await his action and then they are all to do as he does. What this will mean is that when Gideon smashes his pot in the midst of the central unit, and lets the fire catch oxygen and burst to fierce light, then all the pots will be smashed to either side of him, and the lights will ripple along the line one hundred lights on each of three sides of the camp, and simultaneously there will be the sound of three hundred trumpets calling, then three hundred voices raised with the battle cry that the enemy fear most.

From a psychological point of view the enemy has four events in the pitch darkness that will come together to produce the impression that a vast army is descending upon them; the order will be - the war trumpets wail, the smashing of the pots, the fires all around, and then the war cry that states the image they fear the most – the “sword of Gideon” is amongst them. In the darkness they cannot gather and coordinate plans, and they are not ready for the attack.

Verses 18 – 21. Gideon’s instructions are clear and simple and he will start the chain reaction that will spread along the ranks of his men. The noise will be great and the natural acoustics of the valley will give them even more power in their voices. At the right moment Gideon blows his trumpet and smashes his pitcher. He grasps the lamp in his left hand and it catches fire brightly, and all his men follow him around the three sides of the camp. They keep on blowing the trumpets and crying aloud alternately their battle cry. They do not have a weapon in their hands, only the trumpets and the lights. The enemy are in total panic. The attack is launched just after the setting of the middle watch of the night (probably after 12 midnight). The Hebrews had a three watch system. The Romans would later bring in a four watch system.

The time frame here is not 100% clear at this distance, but for Gideon to go down into the enemy camp after dark and return to his men, brief them and send them to their posts on the far side of an army of over a hundred thousand men would take several hours. If he was able to arrive at the enemy’s camp just after dark, around late dinner time between 7-8pm, he would have an hour at least to work his way back to his men and brief them, and it would take at least three to four hours to position his troops, as they have a jog-march of at least 5-10 kilometres to outflank the enemy and move without being seen. Earliest time for attack would be midnight, with the most likely time being around 3am, which is the low point of the night and the time when men are the most groggy.

Verses 22 – 25. The attack is launched successfully and the enemy kill each other in the dark and confusion. The fragile unity of the many Arab tribes gathered breaks down and the carnage is significant. As dawn breaks they start to flee towards the fords of the Jordan River but well before that the call goes out from Gideon to recall all the men of Manasseh. Many of his men will be sent straight from their trumpet blowing to gather their fellow tribesmen, while others will assist the panic of the enemy camp by entering it and killing Midianites.

The men of the tribe of Ephraim gather quickly to block the Jordan escape route as they are right there as the tribe through whose country the enemy must flee. They harass the army of Midian as they take the fords and they slay two leaders of the Midianites at the fords and behead them and bring the heads to Gideon as evidence.

The writer speaks as if this is a great victory and it is a good one, but Gideon has dismissed some of his army too far away in sending them back to their towns, and so there is a delay in their re-gathering, and the result of this is that many of the Midianites are able to escape across the fords of the Jordan around Adam. No battle is “over” until it is over and you never drop your readiness too soon, nor celebrate too early. The pursuit of this last enemy group will open up the divisions between the tribes and create significant ill feeling.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God does not need numbers to win any spiritual battle; he needs spiritually dependent people who look to him alone for their power and direction. He needs men and women who are trained and ready for the fight, and that means

they have had years of obedient walking before the Lord before the big battle to which they are called. It is obedient walking through many little spiritual skirmishes that prepare the man and woman of God for the big battle.

God needs us to develop the mental attitude that we see in the 300 here. They were hungry for action, alert to the enemy, and self controlled when they drank their water. They were not driven by thirst or any human needs, but solely by their desire to be the best soldiers for the Lord that they could be. This is to be our focus, and we are to be prepared to suffer hardship for the greater victories that spiritual toughness brings.

2. Gideon and his army are ready to work hard all night if needed. They are fit, strong and have both the stamina and mental attitude that pours energy out without complaint. It is this mental and bodily toughness that the Lord calls us to. We are to be as fit as we can be, and as strong mentally and physically as we can be, in order to be of service. Whatever age we are, we are to be as strong as we can be, because then we are ready to be used anywhere and instantly.

When the call to battle comes we will not have twelve weeks to get physically fit and spiritually learn the things we need. We must have learned things in the times of peace to be ready to apply them in the noise of battle. We need also to remain as fit and strong as we can be, for physical stamina is required in spiritual warfare.

3. It is not wrong to ask specific direction of the Lord in a difficult place when we face hard things to work through. If we ask for a miracle however, we had better be on firm ground, for if it is granted we will have much expected of us. Gideon gets miraculous signs and he is expected to do miraculous things with his 300 men. It is not wrong to doubt, it is human. It is wrong to stay in the area of doubt and not pass them over to the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-9.

4. Gideon is able to take charge and give the required orders to the army he has, and lead the attack upon the camp. Their main role is to create chaos rather than fight the Midianites although once the initial trumpet calls are made they may be required to draw swords and attack their enemies to increase their flight. The Israelites stand back and let the Midianites kill each other for several hours, and the Lord keeps the enemy in confusion through the night and into the dawn when they flee for the Jordan fords. God fights for Israel. God fights for us and often we are called to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Let us ensure we are positioned each and every day with the expectation of the Lord's work amongst us. Let us not send our people "home" to rest, when alertness and a quick call up is needed. **A battle is not over until all the enemy is dead!** Many opportunities are lost because the initial victory isn't followed up.

REFLECTION UPON FEAR

1. Fear is seen in two ways in scripture.

[a] Firstly as a mental attitude sin that is incompatible with our status as children of the most high, the ruler of the universe.

[b] Secondly it is used to describe the correct attitude towards God the Lord for all his creatures.

There is godly fear, awe, and respect for God as God, and there is inappropriate fear, which is the cringing fear of one who believes the other is able to hurt them. This second kind is wrong for us as children of God, for none can harm us without God's permission for we belong to Him.

2. Our occupation with the persons and majesty of God is often spoken of as "fear" in the legitimate sense for believers. 2 Samuel 23:2-3, Nehemiah 5:9, Job 28:28, Psalms 19:9, 34:11-12, 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 10:27, 22:4, Malachi 3:16, Ephesians 5:21.

3. Staying in the fear of man/hurt/demons as a mental attitude sin is spoken of in 1 Samuel 17:11, 24, Proverbs 29:25.

4. In God's grace plan for us cringing fear has no place. His plans for us are always divinely good, and any testing situation is for our good. Romans 8:28.

5. Fear is an expression of a failure of faith in the plan. Exodus 14:13-14, Deuteronomy 31:6-8, Joshua 8:1, 1 Chronicles 28:20, Isaiah 41:10, 2 Timothy 1:7.

6. Spiritual death is one way of describing Satan's kingdom and is the place of the source of fear. Hebrews 2:14,15

7. In spiritual death, Adam was afraid. Genesis 3:10, this fear motivated Adam to produce religious activity (fig leaves) and lies. Genesis 3:7

8. Salvation removes the basis of fear, which is condemnation from the Justice of God (spiritual death).

9. Spiritual maturity provides freedom from fear. 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 13:6, 1 John 4:18, 1 Corinthians 13:5b

10. Carnality and any form of religious activity that leads us away from grace and daily obedience to the Word enslaves the believer to Satan through fear. Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:15
11. The mature believer is commanded to fear nothing he may suffer in life, for by means of God's grace provision all we ever may need is provided for us. Revelation 2:10
12. The baby believer is sustained by believing God's Word, obeying his commands hour by hour to daily life, and rest upon his promises. Hebrews 4
13. As we become mature believers we continue with this resting on the promises but in addition to this we are sustained by our understanding / application of entire categories of God's Word - we have then moved beyond the promises to confidence in the very character of God itself.
14. Illustration: A woman who asks every hour, "Do you love me?" needs assurance through many promises, and many actions backing the promises up. Once she gets to truly know her husband, and her love is fully established in him through his faithfulness to her, she has absolute assurance, and doesn't need constant reminders of his love by specific words. She is full of confidence through knowledge of her husband's character.
15. Chapter's 3-6 of Hebrews deal with the falling away from growth and confidence by these believers. The spiritual principle of Chapter 4 is the means of getting them back on target.
16. In Hebrews 13:6, we see the objective of the writer, freedom from fear by their daily, moment by moment living the awareness of the love of Christ for them, and the power of Christ available to them.
17. The writers of Scripture identify correctly that when the believer is fearful, he imitates the unbeliever ("cowardly" – Revelation 21:8), and that is not right given our great position. Hebrews 11:27 "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is unseen." This is our standard!
18. Fear is a mental attitude sin that shows our mind has moved away from thinking of the Lord. 1 Samuel 17:11,24
19. Fear is a sign of falling back into domination by the "prince of this world". 1 Samuel 18:12,29 21:12 28:20
20. Absence of fear, or resisting fear, is a big part of maintaining a dynamic mental attitude. Hebrews 13:6 11:27
21. There is only one legitimate fear ; it is the fear of failure to enter into spiritual maturity. Hebrews 4:1
22. Love demands absence of fear. 1 John 4:18 They are two opposing mental attitudes.
23. Fear is not part of the Divine Plan for the Believer. 2 Timothy 1:7 Exodus 14:13-14 Joshua 8:1 Isaiah 41:10 2 Samuel 1:7
24. Courage and lack of fear is a sign of mature spiritual status. Psalm 3:6 Psalm, 56:3 Hebrews 11:27
25. Fear is the power by which the Evil of Satan rules among mankind. Hebrews 2:14-15 Genesis 19:30 (Lot) 1 Kings 18:9-14 (Obadiah), both Lot and Obadiah show how the failing believer lives in constant fear.
26. Fear is the word used to mean "Occupation with Christ" when related to the attitude of the mature Believer toward Christ. 2 Samuel 23:3 Nehemiah 5:9,15 Ephesians 5:21 Job 28:28 Psalm 19:9 34:10 Proverbs 1:7 9:10 Proverbs 10:27, 1 Peter 2:17

REFLECTION UPON OBEDIENCE

1. Obedience is better than offerings (1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 21:3; 28:9). If we are not in God's will, any "worship" we offer is unacceptable.
2. Obedience is something you have to learn. The basic training in obedience has to start in childhood. As it says in (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16) "Honour your father and your mother. " (Proverbs 4:3,4; 22:6; 29:15-17; Hebrews 5:8)
3. Teaching your child obedience is an act of love (Proverbs 3:12; 19:18; 23:13-14).
4. We have to obey those who are in authority over us (Exodus 20:12; 22:28; Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:16; Romans 13:1-5; Ephesians 6:1-5; Colossians 3:18-22; Titus 3:1).
5. Those in authority have been put in that position by God (Romans 13:1).
6. Obedience to those in authority is obedience to God (Proverbs 24:21; Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23-24; Romans 13:5).

7. Disobedience to those in authority is disobedience to God (Romans 1:30; 13:2).
8. But when we are ordered to do something that is against God's Will we have to disobey (Acts 4:19; 5:40-42).
9. The fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) is the only commandment with a promise (Proverbs 10:17; Ephesians 6:1-3). Social life in a society is only possible when the people in it have learned to obey.
10. If this commandment is ignored, if the authority of the family is denied or not exercised, society will quickly slide into anarchy (Isaiah 3:12; Proverbs 29:21; 30:21-23; Romans 1:30).

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

Tribal divisions now rear their head and we see the start of the falling apart of the unity amongst the descendents of the sons of Jacob. The criticism of the Ephraimites is justified in a way, as Gideon has not taken advantage of these closest relatives to his own tribe and they feel put out. All want to have the chance to avenge their dead relatives by slaying the Midianites, and as the men of all the tribes gather, it is a large army that Gideon will possibly lead across the fords of Jordan in hot pursuit of the Midianites.

The enemy have been slack in their attack on Israel this year, not posting guards to protect their camp, nor sending out the patrols they should have, and they have paid with the defeat at En Dor. The survivors of the first phase of the battle now make a fatal mistake as they flee through the East Bank towards Arabia. They pause and camp to re-organize and rest, don't set adequate guards again, and the army of Gideon has the opportunity to catch up and eliminate them all.

The devious cities of the Gilead members of the Israelites are cowardly, or worse, in their rejection of their brethren during the pursuit. They are disgraceful examples of cowardice in the face of the enemy, and they will pay dearly for this betrayal of their own people. This chapter is a sober reminder that the worst enemies of bible teaching are always those who pretend to be "Christian" but are actually false brethren. We know the true nature of people by the fruit of their lives and the false brethren are always shown up by their false behaviours. **Matthew 7:13-23, James 2:14-26.**

JUDGES 8:1-35

1 And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. **2** And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? **3** God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that. **4** And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them. **5** And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. **6** And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? **7** And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. **8** And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. **9** And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. **10** Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. **11** And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host; for the host was secure. **12** And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host. **13** And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, **14** And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. **15** And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? **16** And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. **17** And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city. **18** Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. **19** And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. **20** And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. **21** Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks. **22** Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. **23** And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you. **24** And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would

give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. 26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. 27 And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. 28 Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon. 29 And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. 30 And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. 33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god. 34 And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: 35 Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. The men of Ephraim are suspicious of Gideon's motives. Now this is a surprise to us, but there may have been some political fall out after the work of the prophet of the Lord, and as he is now silent we may have suspicions that dirty work has been done! He may have been killed, and tribal jealousies related to the position of Shiloh in Ephraim may be at the root of the divisions that are opening up. Remember religion is satanic and those who value the power and prestige that religious activity provides are often the enemy. Matthew 7:13-15, 10:16, Acts 20:29.

There are people around amongst the northern tribes who do not want the tribes united, nor their religion back to its ancestral roots at Shiloh. Because Shiloh is in the area of Ephraim there may have been strong political reasons why some in Manasseh and further north didn't want to revive their Mosaic faith, as they would have had to pay respects to Ephraim to visit Shiloh. Shiloh's position in Ephraim gave them a priority that many didn't want to accept or acknowledge.

This religious division will become a major problem when the north and south finally split after the death of Solomon and the northern tribes will establish pagan shrines in Bethel and Dan rather than have the priority given to Jerusalem in Benjamin-Judah. 1 Kings 12:26-33. Even after the victory over the Midianites this rejection of Ephraim's position as the place where the tabernacle dwelt will become a problem for the family of Gideon.

This spirit of factionalism is a dangerous thing for the work of God and in Gideon's case here it nearly stops the hot pursuit of the enemy. After the second phase of the battle it will instigate open apostasy from the Mosaic Law. Factionalism is always the enemy of truth and righteousness, and always shows that the enemy is present and sadly dominant in those who divide brethren. **Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 3:3, 11:18.**

Gideon proves himself a cunning politician and praises the men of Ephraim for their capture of the two kings of the Midianites. As it is clearly a local subject of ribbing, he mocks his own wine production and praises their own, and in his apparent humility, and apparent lack of political ambitions, he appeases them and opens the door for them to join with him in further pursuit of the enemy. Refer to your Bible maps and notice just how far the pursuit has gone so far, and will go. It begins on the morning of the battle at Mt Moreh, and goes over several long days of fighting to the fords of Adam, over 60 Kilometres away from the start point. The main Israelite northern army intercepts the enemy at Abel Meholah (Judges 7:22ff) and then joins the pursuit to the crossing point where the men of Ephraim join in.

Verses 4 – 9. It is unclear as to how many of the men of other tribes joined the last stage of the pursuit, as the writer only records that the 300 went over the river. They certainly cross first and race on ahead of the others, but it would appear that many follow them over for the final battle. The 300 have been running for 60 kilometres now and are "faint" after probably two days hard pursuit. This is an understatement.

These men are tired out, but they are fit, strong and determined to destroy the last vestiges of the enemy army that has devastated their lands for seven years now. They have water and the food they have carried, but a good hearty meal would sustain and strengthen them for the pursuit and the two key Israelite towns they pass by remain closed against them.

The Midianites may have threatened them as they passed and/or may have made a covenant with them for "next time" they return, but these towns face a test here. Will they stand for Israel and welcome their brethren as liberators, or will they trust the words of their enemies? Do they believe in the God of Israel or do they fear the Midianites? The sad answer is that they have made a deal with the Midianites, and in the case of Penuel may even have betrayed their own people, and so will not help Gideon and his 300 against what is still a significant Arab army. They also have no idea how many men of Gideon's army are still coming up from the river.

Gideon threatens dire justice upon them when he returns. Do not feel any sorrow for these men, for they should have joined Gideon and fought against their common enemy. The fact that they know the Arab kings by name, and that clearly the way the enemy entered the land was by passing their cities indicates they have made some sort of deal or treaty with the raiders.

Verses 10 – 12. The two Arab chieftains were camped at a campsite named Kakor. They have once again under-estimated their opponent and camped without guards, patrols, or general military organization and alertness. Their survivors are still a formidable host but they are morally beaten men who have been running for two to four days now and they are convinced they have run far enough to escape Gideon.

Gideon circles the camp and attacks from a direction they do not expect and destroys them all. It appears from the comment in verse 13 that he made a night attack again and exterminated the enemy this time, killing all he could. His 300 circled the enemy camp and attacked from the pastoralists side; this means he probably attacked from the east, and I suspect he drove them into the arms of the other tribal armies that were coming up from the Jordan a little more slowly than his commando unit of 300. He captures the two kings and possibly kills all their men, or at least drove the survivors into the Arabian Peninsula never to return.

Verses 13 – 17. On the way back down to the Jordan, Gideon captures a young man of Succoth and closely questions him about the nature of the leadership of his city. There is a council of 75 elders in the city and the young man indicates their devious nature and their bad attitudes. Gideon decides that their punishment will be exactly as he had previously determined, and he seizes their town and soundly whips these older men with thorn bushes for their bad treatment of him. The next town that refused to feed him is treated worse, with its tower destroyed, all the men killed, and the women and children likely given to others from their own tribe.

This punishment indicates that the men of Penuel actually fired upon Gideon and his men. This was the standard punishment for all who fired an arrow at a besieging force. If they surrendered they might receive mercy, but if they fired upon the besieger and wounded or killed anyone, they all died if they lost the battle. These men of Penuel chose their friends and allies, and their choice was as evil as they were, and they paid the price for it.

Verses 18 – 21. It is in these verses that we discover another element of the events around the enemy camp by Mt Moreh. The town of Gideon is not far away from the enemy campsite and it appears that his own family had joined the war and had attacked the Midianites from the north, from Mt Tabor. This attack may have been before the main battle and may have been a diversionary attack that kept the enemy focus northwards and allowed Gideon to make his advance from the south. We do not know when the skirmish occurred at Mt Tabor, but it cost the lives of all of Gideon's brothers.

This brings another element into the assessment of Gideon. He likely knew of his brethren's death well before he launched his night attack and he still followed the Lord exactly; he didn't let his emotions guide his actions in any shape or form. He did not seek vengeance, but sought the Lord's path to victory. Often people have emotional commitment – but not the follow through to victory. He kept his great personal grief under control and followed the Lord's instructions exactly. This is faith and courage under great pressure.

The Arab princes are ruthless and careless of the lives of others. Their killing of Gideon's brothers was "normal" for them, and Gideon tells them that it will cost them their life, for had they shown mercy he could have shown them mercy. As it is right for justice to be executed by a family member, he calls his youngest son up to slay these grown men but the boy is too young to do the job and the men ask for Gideon to kill them, for they accept the justice of it. Gideon slays them and keeps the gold ornaments from their camel's necks.

From the interchange here, this event may occur at the site of Gideon's own house. His youngest son could not have joined the 300 and been with them, and it is most likely that the two Arab leaders are brought back to the town of Ophrah to have justice done there, so all can see their brethren's death avenged. His family and neighbours would have had to clean up the battlefield and it is also only right for them to see the final fruits of the victory in the death of the two leaders of the Arab forces.

Verses 22 – 27. After such a great victory over a superior force the danger for the general is to start to believe he is pretty special. Gideon faces this test immediately from his own brethren and even the men of other tribes. After seven years of disasters Gideon has dealt with a vast enemy and delivered them all, and he has done it in a week or two.

The people are more than impressed with his actions and his apparently humble character, and they all offer to make him king over the tribes. He rejects the offer of kingship and requires the people to serve the Lord as their king, but he doesn't follow through with this and call for national unity through national worship and thanksgiving at Shiloh. He understood that they were to be a nation UNLIKE all others and he says it, but does not follow through with the call to worship. The Lord had made it very clear that they would not prosper if they elected a king to rule them and forsook absolute faith in their God. Deuteronomy 17:14-15, 28:36-37, 1 Samuel 8:4ff, 12:6-13.

Having stated a great truth Gideon then does a dumb thing with the loot that betrays his weakness. He should have taken the gold and given it to the men, and to the tabernacle, but he does not. Numbers 31:25-41. Gideon has followed through on every detail of the battle plan of the Lord until now, but at this last spiritual point he falls into celebrating the victory with a golden ornament, rather than a golden present to the Levites of the tabernacle. It is not wrong to celebrate victory, but the way it is done can open up evil. Gideon gets self centred at this point and avoids anything that might build the prestige of Ephraim and Shiloh, and his parochialism undoes his own future and that of his family.

Gideon asks for the earrings of the Ishmaelites and the men who are still with him willingly give him these, for they still get to keep the vast amount of other plunder they captured. The earrings alone weighed in at 1700 shekels of gold. This means that a lot of the captured earrings have not been returned to Gideon if the enemy army was even 35,000 men and each had one or two. However, Gideon receives a vast amount of fine gold. In addition to the earrings many men give him other things, from fine linen, to neck ornaments and even some from the camel's necks.

Of this gold he has made an "ephod". Now this is a word we heard first in Exodus 25:7, and 28:4-31. It refers to the outer ceremonial garment of the High Priest. It was the gold woven and ornamented breastplate and shoulder clasps of his garment with which the High Priest received communication from God. This is no cultic object to be worshipped, this is a garment to wear over the most formal clothing, and be used by a man who hears from God. Can you see the great sin of Gideon here? He has had made a piece of clothing that symbolises his being a man who hears from God, and so people will come to him to hear from God, rather than go to the tabernacle. He has started to follow "dress up religion".

If you think I am being too hard on this man, please read on and see how the Lord judges him. Gideon has been a prophetic voice, and a judge, but he is not meant to replace the tabernacle, the priesthood and the sacrifices, even if they were corrupt or the priests inept in his day. He was to be prayerful for revival, not replacement of the Mosaic Law. By this foolish act he replaces the tabernacle at Shiloh for his people and they come to his house rather than Shiloh. Over time he becomes the centre of a cult, and after his death the golden garment is set up in his home city as an object to be venerated and it takes people away from the tabernacle and the genuine worship there.

Even if worship in a local church/assembly becomes corrupted or stale, the "Lord's Anointed" leaders are to be supported and the divinely appointed worship at the local church is to be encouraged. Hebrews 13:5-8. We are not to forsake the gathering for worship in the local assembly, Hebrews 10:25. In the devil's world we are surrounded by the publicity and evangelism of evil in our media, and if we do not saturate ourselves in the Word of God daily and fellowship with God's people often we will drift into the snares of Satan.

Worship centres our hearts and minds, and it stabilizes our soul. Gideon is in the first flush of victory here and traditional worship would have centred him, and he should have called all the tribes to Shiloh for sacrifices to be offered to give thanks for God's great deliverance. Had he called for worship he would have bought enough time to decide what to do with the loot in a godly manner and so saved his own family from the evil that will unfold in the next generation.

Verses 28 – 32. The Midianites didn't trouble Israel again for many decades. All the tribes of the areas this raiding party was drawn from had lost all their men and had to wait for the next generation to grow up to replace them. Even the next generation did not send any army to the place from where all their men failed to return. The land had peace for 40 years after Gideon's exploits. So far so good we say, but then the writer goes on and all our worst fears about Gideon come true. He takes many wives, possibly some from the women of Penuel. He had seventy sons born to his many wives. He felt very special and obviously saw himself as the new Abraham, for God had spoken to him.

It is a sad fact that God never spoke again to Gideon, even when he dressed up in his ephod. His behaviour and his famous priestly garment impressed his friends and family but God never spoke through him again. When he decided to head home and make his ephod, rather than go to the tabernacle at Shiloh, he set his life path on the downwards spiral it would take. He also took a lover (concubine) at Shechem and she gave birth to another son called Abimelech (meaning "my father is king" – just a "tiny clue" that narcissism is beginning to take hold in the family through Gideon's sin/evil).

It was an immoral action and he gave his son a bad name, and it proclaims the arrogant attitude of this couple, and she will bring her son up to narcissistic greatness and arrogance. This boy will believe he is born to be king and will make himself one. His father's weaknesses are to be written large in this boy and Gideon's name and genes will be all but lost to Israel. "By their fruits you know them...." Remember Jesus words and weep for what could have been with Gideon!

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. We must choose our friends and our enemies on the basis of what God is doing, and not on who appears the most powerful, as God has a way of over-turning the evil ones, no matter how strong they appear. The men of the two rebellious cities had reason to regret their cowardice, and so will all who see with men's eyes rather than with the Holy Spirit's vision.
2. Gideon pressed on to finish the job he had begun and destroy these raiders totally. He knew that they would have to come back to avenge their dead if any survived. The only hope of peace was the death of them all so that none could return to wreak revenge upon Israel.
3. It is always a danger to celebrate before you worship the One who gave you victory. Worship keeps us safe and centred in the power and plan of God, and this is the only point of stability for us. Let us give priority to worship and not seek to set up alternative shrines for worship in our homes, when the Lord intends us to gather with the rest of God's people and worship together in the local assembly.
4. Gideon loved the pre-eminence and loved the fact that he was known as the destroyer of Baal and the man to whom God spoke. He became so impressed with his own reputation that he believed he could have many wives and live as morally careless as the men he had killed. He did not see the danger he put his sons and wives in. Let us keep ourselves from all idolatry and immorality, and regularly worship the Lord and be stabilized in Him.

Gideon also got into “dress up religion”, thinking that by dressing up like a high priest, God would continue to speak to him. His dress didn’t make him a priest of anything except his own fantasy. He could have continued to be God’s voice and arm, but his rejection of Shiloh, and his play acting, destroy his spiritual future. Let us walk humbly before the Lord and serve in spirit and in truth and not seek the titles and clothing of fake priesthood. We have a real priesthood, and so let us seek no other. 1 Peter 2:9-10. Refer to the BTB studies of PRIESTHOOD.

DEALING WITH DISAGREEMENTS

1. In Paul’s last words to the church, he records the danger of distracting arguments that lead believers away from Christ centeredness. The challenge for believers is to remain focused on the study of God’s Word in the filling and teaching of the Holy Spirit. We are not to be prophecy “nuts” or have any other pet doctrines, but rather we are to grow in Christ likeness. 2 Timothy 2:14-19, 23-25, 3:10-17.

2. Good men and women differ in their opinions on some doctrines, due to their different interpretation of a passage of the Word of God. The possibility is that either or both are wrong. There are some things that we will only be sure of when we get to heaven, and we must operate on earth upon “best practice” in exegesis and life. Major differences on minor doctrines in today’s churches centre around prophetic interpretation; with pre, mid and post tribulational views regarding the Rapture. There is also great difference regarding the manner of baptism, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3. Spirituality is determined not by correctness of doctrine, but by holiness and Christ likeness of the person’s life. A great saint of the past identified several tests for truth regarding interpretations of scripture. They are useful to consider before arguing – which is, by the way, always a sign you have it wrong!

- A. Does my interpretation make me more practical and loving towards others?
- B. Does my interpretation make me more evangelistic for the lost?
- C. Does my interpretation make me more keen to serve in the local church?
- D. Does my interpretation make me focus on others rather than myself?

4. If you discover that these questions are not true for your viewpoint, then on the basis of scripture you are 100% likely to be wrong in your interpretation and application of the text you have just “twisted”. 2 Peter 3:14-18. Refer Love, Sanctification, Servanthood. Matthew 12:15-21, 20:27, Mark 9:35, 10:44, John 15:4-10, 16-17.

Notes

CHAPTER 9**INTRODUCTION**

We can coast down hill on a godly heritage, or we can accelerate downhill at full speed by bad choices. Gideon's behaviours have born evil fruit in this illegitimate son of his. Sadly this illegitimate son of Gideon is a thoroughly evil man. Being illegitimately born is no problem if he had become born again, but this man never accepted his need for God, as he was too full of himself. John 3:1-16. He accelerates downhill into gross evil in the murder of his own half-brothers. He is a ruthless warrior, as ruthless as any of the Arab raiders his father slew. He ends his life in battle, but killed by a rock thrown by a woman from the wall of a place he was attacking. He lived by violence and he dies by it.

This is a "judge" in the loosest sense, and his story is inserted here by the writer to underline the dangers of spiritual decline through a generation. If a father gives way to sin, then the son is in grave danger of being worse than his father at his worst. God doesn't have grandchildren! At his best Gideon was great, but at his worst he was self centred, foolish, lust filled, and arrogant, and his son Abimelech sees all of Gideon's weaknesses writ large in evil. This is a reminder that God has no grand-children. Unless each generation accepts the Lord and walks with the Lord they are under judgment. I see Ezra's editor's hand in the way this story is crafted as this is Ezra's point in Chronicles, but equally Samuel or Nathan the prophet may be the editors.

JUDGES 9:1-57

1 And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, **2** Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. **3** And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. **4** And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. **5** And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. **6** And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem. **7** And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. **8** The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. **9** But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? **10** And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. **11** But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? **12** Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. **13** And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? **14** Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. **15** And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. **16** Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; **17** (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: **18** And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) **19** If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: **20** But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. **21** And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother. **22** When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, **23** Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: **24** That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. **25** And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech. **26** And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. **27** And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. **28** And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him? **29** And would to God this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out. **30** And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. **31** And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. **32** Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field: **33** And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against

thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion. 34 And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men. 37 And Gaal spake again, and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim. 38 Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them. 39 And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate. 41 And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. 42 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. 43 And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. 44 And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. 45 And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt. 46 And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. 49 And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women. 50 Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. 52 And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull. 54 Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A women slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. 56 Thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: 57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 - 6. Abimelech is a master of “real dog eat dog politics” and knows how to work a crowd and appeal to their base instincts. He uses his mother’s family contacts and the desires of the men of Shechem for the greatness that Gideon gave them, and he exploits the military and intellectual weakness of Gideon’s 70 legitimate sons, who do not promise to give the Shechemites anything. The fatal flaw of the men of Shechem is their lust, and their religious compromise, which we read of in verse four. They take money from a pagan temple to fund Abimelech’s coup.

This town has gone into the same sort of idolatry that Gideon delivered them from, and that is the writer’s point here. The sin of Gideon in not returning Israel to it’s ancestral worship at the tabernacle has born fruit in the next generation in their acceptance of a pagan god (demonic force) in their midst, and their use of the pagan temple as their town bank. Pagan temples were used this way in the ancient world, but Israel was not to operate this way. With the money he obtained from the evil men of his mother’s home town he hired what we would call today “low lifes” – that is men who will kill for money. He will later turn on these men, this town and the bank that funded him and destroy it all. This is common after Coups!

He will pay seventy pieces of silver for these murders, so he can’t have raised many men for the job or they wouldn’t have been ready to do it. He takes these thugs to the house/compound of his brothers and kills them all. Now there are seventy sons of Gideon and most, if not all, are fully grown men by this time, and yet they are surprised by their half brother and his thuggish friends, they all surrender rather than fight, and are bound, and weakly murdered one by one. They are not militarily prepared for this eventuality and Abimelech is able to murder them all one by one on a great rock, possibly even the very rock that Gideon had set up to mark the place where God spoke to him. Judges 6:20.

The sons of Gideon have not been taught to be militarily prepared and walk with weapons strapped on. In this day such an oversight indicates they were living a careless life style focused more on pleasure than on the violent realities of life. They have been living amongst people involved in paganism and yet they were not ready for murder! Do not think me too harsh in my observation here, for these men have had plenty of lessons in life, and time to have learned survival!

Now pause here and reflect deeply yourself, because are you surprised when you read of murders in your own city? Do you have your door locked if it is not attended? Are you ready for evil men, or would you be weakly killed as easily as these people were? Excuse my harsh words believer, but we live in a violent world and we are to be ready to defend those who we love from evil men, as well as being ready to give the Gospel to such men. We must know when to talk and preach, and when to fight to defend righteousness, or the innocent will be murdered! Also question yourself post-Covid-19! Have you been careful, and will you be vaccinated? Or are you relaxed/stupid/arrogant?

By the very pillar that Gideon set up to proclaim the grace and mercy of God this evil man sets himself up as king over Israel and is recognized by the families of Manasseh in his local area. Abimelech has reminded the Baal worshipping men of Shechem that the sons of Gideon are the sons of the man who celebrated the title “destroyer of Baal”. Gideon tore down the Baal grove, and the men of Shechem have repaid this deed by building a full temple to Baal in their midst.

By the great Pillar-Altar of Gideon Abimelech has these Baal worshippers worship him as king and he seizes the remnant of the household of his father. This may be the very stone upon which the offering was consumed, and may be the very place mentioned in Joshua 24:26, where Joshua established the last covenant with the people before his death. Judges 6:24. The fate of his half sisters, and the other wives of Gideon are not given.

Verses 7 – 20. One son of Gideon survives and prophetically speaks to the evil men of Shechem who have been party with Abimelech in the murder of the sons of Gideon. He stands upon Mt Gerizim, far enough away to escape the men of Shechem, but close enough to cry aloud a prepared speech to condemn them and prophetically announce their doom.

Mt Gerizim is where the blessings of the Lord were cried aloud by the generation that followed Joshua. Deuteronomy 11:29, 27:9-13, Joshua 8:33-34, 11:15. If the people had followed the Law of Moses they could have received great blessing and the words spoken from Gerizim two generations before would have been their own to claim, but their murder of the sons of their deliverer prove they are fit only for the curses that were uttered from Mt Ebal. Deuteronomy 27:13ff.

Jotham speaks the truth to the men of Shechem and then must flee for his life, for they seek to silence the prophetic voice and the voice of one who can prove their murder of his brothers. He calls them to hear the words of the Lord and acknowledge their sin before God, not continue to walk in the delusion of Baal. Psalms 50:14-22, Proverbs 1:7-12, 28-29, Isaiah 58:6-11. He then tells a parable to them that makes a strong point about the arrogance of the one who sets himself up as a king, rather than have God appoint and anoint him.

The parable of the trees is a wonderful piece of ancient world wisdom. The Olive tree with its rich oil rejects the kingship for it would have to lose its role in production of oil, the fig and the grape vine refuse the kingship for similar reasons. The bramble bush is the only candidate that accepts the offer. It is a low thorn covered bush and is the source of cuts and scratches to men, but also the dry tinder for forest fires that destroy the most noble and great amongst the trees. It is a bush that has its uses to protect the animals from wild predators, but it is a dangerous bush. Just so is Abimelech. He is not noble, nor godly, and he will be a warrior king and protect them from outside evils, but not from his own!

In verse 16 he directly accuses the men of Shechem of the murder of his brothers. He challenges them to prove their righteousness, their truth and their sincerity, all of which they are unable to do. These words indicate that the men of Shechem have denied complicity in the deaths of Jotham’s brothers. He asks them whether they have done to Gideon’s household what was deserved given the great deliverance that Gideon gave them. Gideon had hazarded his life to win victory for them over the Midianites. Sadly their gratitude for his past deeds has evaporated, and they were left with their present resentments towards him and his enormous and wealthy family.

No matter what the feelings towards him for his tearing down the grove of Baal and his more recent arrogant life-style with his many wives and sons, his family did not deserve this treatment. These words are an indication that Gideon’s last years were not years of blessing amongst his own people. Jotham indicates a great division between the city of Shechem and the household of Gideon. Jotham continues to refer to his father by the acquired name Jerubbaal as a standing rebuke to these evil men. Gideon’s sin in not returning his people to regular worship at Shiloh has come home to roost for his family now, with only two sons left alive; one evil and one good.

Jotham reminds these men that they have made the son of a servant their king and such a man will make them his servants, for servility is all he understands. This is not arrogance on Jotham’s part it is accurate observation. A boy brought up in servitude rarely learns the skills to rule without arrogance and cruelty unless he is carefully trained. This man has been trained by the mother who gave him the narcissistic name, and so he can be depended upon to act as a tyrant.

Jotham is wonderfully sarcastic towards these men in verse 19, for he knows they have placed themselves under God’s judgment and he is trying to insult them into seeing the truth, for direct accusation has brought only lying denials from them. They had better rejoice in Abimelech, or else they will be judged/murdered by him!

It is a fact of history that the tyrants who use thugs to seize power have to kill the thugs later. The most recent example was Adolf Hitler’s murder of the leadership of his Brown Shirts once they had gained him power. Remember, that only two places have “anointed” this evil man Abimelech as their king at this point; Shechem, and a fortress called Millo (it’s name means double walled fortress). Jotham calls for a judgment of fire from the Lord upon the two cities and upon Abimelech.

Verses 21 – 25. Jotham flees to a town called “Beer”, possibly south of Shechem in the territory of Ephraim. If it is this town it makes an interesting commentary upon his father’s avoidance of this tribe’s territory, when the son seeks their help to save his life. Jotham must hide in this town to the south and go to ground. While he is in hiding his half brother Abimelech rises in power and influence. Three years pass. We do not know how much territory was held by

Abimelech and how many tribes gave him allegiance; my suspicion is that his territory was not much more than the area of Western Manasseh and possibly the other northern tribal areas.

The writer makes it clear, with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer that judgment is starting to unfold from the Lord over the murderers of the sons of Gideon. Where Moses style of writing was to hint at things, this writer directly states the judgments of the Lord. The judgment upon Shechem will come first and it will be exactly as their betrayal of the sons of Gideon was; by deceit and hidden malice.

The lust for money and power that drove them to support Abimelech still drives these men and they begin to rule over the hills around them like bandit chiefs seizing the goods of all travellers who try to pass through their area to north or south. This is a direct challenge to the Lord, for they hinder people travelling to Shiloh, but to Abimelech they are a nuisance and he quietly and ruthlessly comes up with a deviously evil way to eliminate them and another rebellious group simultaneously. This man wouldn't have concerned himself if his "mafia" like followers were giving him a "cut" of the proceeds, but they are not doing that, but pocketing the money themselves.

Verses 26 – 33. Evil loves the company of more evil men, for from them they hope to gain more satanically inspired power and booty. The arrival of Gaal, son of Ebed, a soldier of fortune and his followers, signals a new phase of the rebellion of Shechem against Abimelech's power. He has been waiting for an opportunity to deal with the devious criminal behaviours of Shechem, and the arrival of this bandit chieftain will provide the opportunity. Betrayal and counter betrayal will mark the final days of Shechem and its associated tower-fortress Millo (possibly also called Mount Zalmon, or the castle of Shechem).

Gaal is a bandit chieftain, and he has a large group of fellow soldiers of fortune, that have joined themselves to him because of the spoil he is able to gain for them. This man is a cunning political player and a great con man, and the men of Shechem see in him a man ruthless enough to deal with Abimelech, their previously favourite son, who is not delivering them enough booty now.

The time of year is given to us here. It is late autumn and the grape harvest is being brought in. The men of Shechem need all the protection they can get as they bring in their cash crop and so they are pleased to have the private army of Gaal to protect them at this time. They put their confidence in this man, but they are seeking to use him as he is seeking to use them for his ends. Their real need is to put their faith in the Lord, repent of their evils and cast themselves upon the mercy of the Lord.

They have had three years of grace in which to repent, but this autumn is to be their last upon the earth. They complete the grape harvest, press the grapes, and then party into the night worshipping "their god" – Baal Berith. As they party on in drunken debauchery they curse Abimelech and Gaal takes the opportunity to use their rebellious spirit to his advantage.

He asks the rebellious question aloud, "who does this Abimelech think he is?" He then gives us the name of the second in command to Abimelech, who possibly is his regent here in Shechem. He is Zebul. Notice that Gaal refers to the pagan Canaanite past of Shechem with reference to prince Hamor who the sons of Jacob slew after the rape of Dinah. Genesis 34:1ff. Gaal refers to Gideon as the man who opposed Baal and cast down his altar. It is clear that this man is a pagan himself and is keen to form a new kingship that is pagan in it's religion, and based in Shechem, the home of paganism of the Hivites. He is a truly satanically inspired man, but he is up against a tougher one in Abimelech.

It is a reminder to God's people down the ages that evil does not disappear; it just re-emerges when people think it has long since died. Satan recycles his religious options for men who have rejected the truth, but Satan's weakness is the selfish nature of his followers, and they often fight amongst each other, as is illustrated here. The evils of the old paganism are returning in our own days as foolish people believe they can play with such things and they will not be hurt. Satan's schemes will all come to nothing in the end, because the selfish basis to them undoes all that his followers achieve. Note how the demons just waited for hundreds of years to re-emerge in Shechem – they have no-where to go!

Gaal makes a boast against Abimelech and it is reported back to the regent of Shechem, Zebul, who secretly gets word to Abimelech. He has to move quickly but also keep himself safe through the next days because the rebels outnumber him in the city, and if he has been unable to control the robber bands that operate from the city, he certainly is in no position to challenge Gaal directly at this point.

He calls his master to come to the city during the night, and attack at dawn, just as Gideon had specialized in such things. He asks Abimelech to wait in the fields for a signal from the citadel that he apparently still holds at this point. He requests a dawn attack when Gaal and his men go out of the city into the fields to gather the last of the crops in before winter. In the meantime he has kept the trust of Gaal and not let on he has overheard the words he spoke against Abimelech.

Verses 34 – 38. Abimelech is a clever soldier and divides his men into four companies so that their exact number is difficult to ascertain in the early morning light from Shechem. He waits hidden outside the walls of Shechem with his top troops. Gaal leads his men out to gather more of the crops and sees the first company of Abimelech, but the wily Zebul is there with him to suggest that he is seeing things. Shortly after however Gaal sees the next company coming up the road and knows this is his enemy Abimelech. Zebul now discloses his treachery to Gaal, and calls him to

make his boasting good and attack and defeat Abimelech, apparently while the lords of Shechem watch from the walls above.

Seeing only the first three companies and spotting that they are separated by some distance from each other Gaal thinks he might be able to kill their leader and seize power, and so he surges his men forward to take the risk-opportunity. The lords of Shechem have been cunning, for they hope that these two war-lords will exhaust themselves and then they can kill both and be lords of all the land themselves. They will close their gates against both. This plot only becomes clear the next day when they take the field against Abimelech. Their deviousness and double dealing with everyone is the cause of Abimelech's great anger towards them.

Verses 39 – 42. The loud talking Gaal is tough but he is up against a far tougher customer, with a far larger army in Abimelech, and quickly he is routed and his men flee back towards the gate of Shechem. Abimelech is not able to seize the town this time, but Zebul throws Gaal and his men out of the city and they flee from Abimelech and Shechem never to be heard of again. The following day the people of the city who are loyal to Abimelech flee into the fields. They go and tell Abimelech of the overthrow of Gaal and report the state of the city's defences and the morale and attitudes of the majority who are determined to resist Abimelech. We are not told whether Zebul joined these people in fleeing to Abimelech or whether he was killed after expelling Gaal.

It would appear that the political/family and religious divisions in the city have opened up, with Zebul and the few who are for Abimelech fleeing, and the remnant closing their gates against Abimelech. It appears that the people of the city believed that Abimelech may have left his camp to pursue Gaal and so the next day, when all looks quiet, feeling it is safe to leave the city, they leave it and start to gather in their last field crops. The group who have joined Abimelech tell him that this has occurred, and so bring death to all who have remained in the city, for he is determined to punish them severely for their attitude towards him. Who are those who fled to him? Do they include his mother's people, Judges 8:31, 9:2-3, or are they just the followers of Zebul? We are not told.

Verses 43 – 45. This time he divides his forces into three groups facing the gates of the city, but far enough away to remain hidden until all the men of Shechem who were going into the fields were out there. He places his own group at the centre and rushes the gate and holds it open, while his two other groups spring from cover to his left and right and slay the men of Shechem in the fields before the town's walls. Abimelech holds the gate open against counter attack from the men of the city until his other two groups reach him and then they enter the city and fight street by street through the city to the citadel. It takes all day before they have taken the city and destroyed it totally and killed all its inhabitants.

I suspect his mother's people are the ones who fled to him in the fields and so they alone survive, but this may not be correct. The sowing of the city with salt was symbolic for it never to be rebuilt, such was the danger or treachery of the place in Abimelech's eyes. He is a brave and determined warrior, but a life that is built upon the murder of his brothers is doomed to disaster and all his natural bravery will not save him until he has judged the evil men of Shechem and its castle Millo.

Verses 46 – 49. The actual site and shape of the castle here is now unknown, but Mount Zalmon is a wooded place not far from Shechem. The people who hide here are worshippers of Baal Berith and led in the applause for Abimelech's murder of his brothers and supported his kingship. They take refuge in the pagan temple and defend it against him now for their very lives.

Abimelech once again leads his men from the front. He cuts down big branches from the old trees of the wood and encourages his men to do the same, and they pile the wood up against the wooden gates of the temple/fortress complex, and there is enough wood to make the gates and roof of the structure burn so that the entire thing collapses upon the inhabitants of it and kills them all. The last of the people (other than the few members of his own family who escaped the city) who supported him and then rebelled against him are now all dead.

Verses 50 – 57. He next attacks the fortress town of Thebez. It would appear that he has spent his time like the crusaders of the middle ages, in attacking places that resisted his kingship and butchering their inhabitants if they opposed him. He lives to dominate and exercise power and mastery, but like all tyrants he is simply awaiting the judgment of God and it comes in this siege. He quickly seizes the city of Thebez, but the strong central watch-tower of the city holds out with desperation.

Abimelech is trying the same tactic as he did to deal with the fortress at Millo-Zalmon and is bringing up branches of trees to burn the gates of the tower and cause the heat to break down the wall. The surviving population are literally throwing everything at his troops and one woman throws down a grinding wheel upon Abimelech and it breaks his skull. He believes he is mortally wounded and in pride requests his own armour bearer to kill him in order that he not be reported as dying by the hands of a woman. He is just like the pagan Arab raiders his father killed all those years before. Judges 8:20-21.

Such pride as we see in the dying of Abimelech is pathetic, just like the Rohin Samurai warriors of the past, for who cares what others say of us once we are gone, it is our eternal destiny that we should be concerned about. He drops into hell, when he ought to have fallen to his knees and confessed his great sins before he met his Judge. Isaiah 5:14-16, 14:9-20. The writer underlines the fact that God's judgment is written large over this man and all who supported him; they all destroy each other by their mutual evil. This is always the way with people who walk the satanic path.

His death leads to the evaporation of any reason for the battle to keep going, and the entire army he has built up to dominate and control their fellows falls apart and each man slinks off to their own homes. What an end of the carnage, and to what purpose was it? What gain is there in such a rule of such a man? The answer is absolutely no gain at all for him or his supporters, for all he achieved was to ensure that all who supported him were judged by God through him. He was a wolf who lived off the sheep, and he was surrounded by jackals, and they all die under God's judgment.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Evil men will wax worse and worse. 2 Timothy 3:13. Gideon's sons lacked their father's military preparedness and abilities. He had failed to bring them up with the alertness and toughness to deal with the malice of the surrounding pagans. Let us ensure we do not rest on our past victories, for our responsibility is to educate the next generation to win greater victories. Ephesians 6:4, 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:1-11. Let us be focused forward at all times, ready to fight the next battles, not reminiscing about past ones. Let us be examples of readiness ourselves, and continually urge all the Lord's people to have their spiritual armour on every day, so they are never caught out by evil men or women. Proverbs 2:1-20, Ephesians 6:10-18.

2. Lust does not stay stationary. It will always drive the people possessed by it into more and more evil. The men of Shechem can't help themselves, they serve evil, and they go from accomplices to murder to regular bandits and robbers. They will then join with Gaal, and raise full rebellion against their former favourite son. Evil is devious, dangerous and always plays itself out to disaster! Rightly does the scripture say, "FLEE" from all appearance of evil. 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7. Let us reject the appeal of satanic lies, and flee from every thought or behaviour that might entangle us in the web of deceit that is evil's company.

3. There is a day of judgment and none may put off their day to meet their Maker. We do not set our date with destiny, nor do we set our date with death. The days of destiny for Shechem were the day they accepted Baal-Berith as their god, the day they accepted the murder of Gideon's children and Abimelech as their king, and finally the day they rebelled against him. Each was a day when their destiny was being decided by their own actions.

Their date with death followed as surely as night follows day. They played in the sun of paganism and lust and died in fear and horror, for that is the wages of sin and the devil always pays his servants by means of one of his other servants! Only a fool serves Satan. Psalms 14:1, 53:1, Luke 12:16-26, Romans 6:23.

JUDGMENT: GREAT WHITE THRONE

1. The judgment of the Great White Throne is the last judgment. (Revelation 20:11, 15)
2. Only the unsaved are judged at the last judgment as there is no judgment for Christians. (Romans 8:1)
3. The last judgment occurs at the end of the Millennium. (Revelation 20:7-15)
4. The unsaved are judged according to their works from the Books of Works (Revelation 20:12)
5. The judgment is to show that the Human works of man cannot satisfy the justice of God. God is totally fair and shows that he is only satisfied by "The Good Work". The death of Christ on the Cross.
6. Having shown the unsaved they have failed to satisfy the holiness of God, the condemned are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:15)

CHAPTER 10**INTRODUCTION**

We enter the middle years of the twelfth century as we look at the Judges in this chapter and the next, and the turn into the eleventh brings the Philistines to Canaan around the year 1200 BC. From the destruction layers at Hazor I believe we can be sure Israel arrived there about 1400 BC.

For 200 years the people have oscillated between godly service and worship of the household gods of their enemies, and in the ebb and flow of this century we see here the people serve the Lord more than they serve the gods, but at a crisis point the worship of the pagan gods has apparently triumphed and God gives them an ultimatum. They are challenged to pray to their gods if they want to follow them, and not just come to the Lord when they seek help from catastrophe.

“Catastrophe Christians” remain with us today. They live like pagans through the years and only enter the church meeting in a panic to seek the help of God to resolve a problem that has been caused by their dabbling in paganism. God’s words to us here are blunt; we are to clean out the pagan elements from our lives and serve Him alone. Only if we are “single minded” will the Lord hear our prayers. Psalms 66:18, Isaiah 1:15, 59:1-2, Jeremiah 5:25, Joel 2:2-3, Habakkuk 1:13, Acts 8:22, James 1:5-8.

JUDGES 10:1-18

1 And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. **2** And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir. **3** And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. **4** And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. **5** And Jair died, and was buried in Camon. **6** And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. **7** And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. **8** And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. **9** Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed. **10** And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim. **11** And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? **12** The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. **13** Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. **14** Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation. **15** And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. **16** And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel. **17** Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh. **18** And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. We are always surprised to read of Abimelech being a “Judge”, but in spite of his evil and his tendency to kill any Israelite who opposed him, he did apparently deal with external threats also, and he certainly eliminated the paganism of his people, but only by eliminating the people. The people of Shechem were evil, and they were the fourth generation in the land and so they suffered the “Sin Unto Death” and reaped the “Four Generation Curse” for their persistent sins and evils. Exodus 20:1-7.

The next two Judges are mentioned by name, but nothing of their work is noted. We have no biblical information on the work of either Tola or Jair. The only thing we have about Jair is the fact that like Gideon he had many wives, and so we can only suspect the same weakness for power corrupting the man applied to him as it did to Gideon. Their judging activity may have simply been in the dispute settling area, but the words used indicate they did defend the nation against attack also. Both operated in the north, centred in Issachar and Manasseh, and possibly the east bank of the Gilead. Events that may have happened in the south through this time are left until later chapters, but the attacks by the Ammonites bring threat to the southern areas in this chapter.

Verses 6 – 9. The familiar theme opens the door to catastrophe for Israel again. The people start to serve the gods of Canaan again. The Canaanite main gods were the husband and wife team of Baal and Ashtaroth. They were the fertility gods of the people of the land, and were worshipped with pleasant homely rituals of “cakes” (cereal –bread) and wine offerings, but also totally sexualized and perverted rituals in the temples involving sex of all kinds and child abuse and ritual murder/sacrifices.

The evil of this pleasure centred religion was addictive, like all sexual sin, and it took hold of Israel as it does today to any careless person. We are told by God's Word to "flee immorality" of any sort, for it "takes hold" of the soul and destroys the body and all good relationships. **1 Corinthians 6:18, James 4:7**. We are to see such religious practises as the satanic evils they are and have no part in them.

We enter the third stage of this time period of the Judges and the dominant people of this latter stage will be the Philistines. The writer mentions them here by way of introduction, although it will be another forty years before they start to be the daily threat to life they were to become. The people of Israel began to practise an eclectic religion through this period; they combined the worship of the One True God at Shiloh with the worship in their homes of all the gods of the seven foreign nations amongst whom they dwelt.

Getting over to Shiloh twice a year was proving hard and onerous and the people simply gave up their ancestral worship and the tabernacle fell into decay and disrepair. The Mosaic Law ceased to be the centre of national religious life, although the local priests would refer to it for dispute settling. The Word of God was not studied and so the people drifted further and further away from the pattern that Moses and Joshua had established.

Without godly local worship centres, like the later Synagogues would be, the worship of the Lord dropped away and even basic knowledge of it was lost to the general population. Coming to Shiloh twice a year and spending one day a week in local Bible study was not too onerous for the people, but they preferred a softer option. Remember Jesus words in Matthew 7:13-14. We are called to the "narrow way" of life, not the "broad way" that most take. The narrow way is the tougher option for life, and it will always be easier to run down hill, but God orders us to take the higher ground. If we do not walk in holiness before the Lord then He will leave us to the "tender mercies" of the pagans whose company we prefer.

The group that harass Israel in this period is the Ammonites who recapture most of the Gilead and drive Manasseh back into Gad and across the Jordan to their brethren's land there. The enemy sense the weakness of the Israelites and raid across the river Jordan attacking Ephraim, and going as far as Judah and Benjamin to the south. They continue to harass the Israelites annually for eighteen years. For the first time in many years the majority of the Eastern tribes all unite on the East bank at Ramoth-Mizpeh to resist the enemy and call for a champion who can lead them. (Verses 17-18). They may also be joined by elements of the West Bank tribes.

Verses 10 – 14. The Israelites confess their sins to the Lord, but this is not enough for God. This is a shock to some, but read on believer, and see what the Lord requires of us when we confess our sins. We are also to forsake them and put away all the sources of temptation that we have to return to our sins. God reminds them that he has delivered them from all the nations that have oppressed them, but they have repaid that grace and mercy by serving the gods of the pagan nations.

The Lord makes it clear that Israel has made it's preference clear by their actions; they have chosen evil over good. They have chosen paganism over the truth of God. He challenges them that if they seek to live like pagans then they must go to the gods they keep in their cupboards, not to Him. Deuteronomy 32:28-39, 30:1-10. What will it be for this generation?

Verses 15 – 18. Now the children of Israel confess their sins correctly; that is, they confess their sins and forsake the evil, with the evidence in their lives. They actually destroy the images of their gods so that they cannot be worshipped any more. They also recognize the justice and righteousness of God in their punishment. They accept that the Lord has been right in his treatment of them because of their sins and accept that they need a new path in life. They pray then for deliverance from the evils that beset them, and they will say "amen" as they strap on their weapons and stand by to await the Lord's man or woman to lead them. It is the follow through from confession to life change that opens the door to forgiveness and deliverance.

The Lord is still grieved at their sins, but even more by the needless suffering that they have put themselves through because of their past sins. This is the grieving of the Holy Spirit that is spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 4:30. To grieve the Spirit of God is to be persistent in a sinful pattern of behaviour. To quench the Spirit's work is to give oneself over to evil and so extinguish the fire of God with the work of the devil. 1 Thessalonians 5:19. These people have persisted in iniquity and brought themselves to the point of disaster and crisis by their actions. They need to change their hearts and their bodies, and they have started to do this by rejecting their past behaviours and destroying their idols.

The writer sets the scene for the deliverance now by telling us in verses 17-18, that the Ammonites were now gathered in the Gilead feeding their camels and themselves ready for the big push across the river Jordan when the river was low enough to cross. The people of Israel also gathered their forces in the Gilead, at Mizpeh, but not the city that was the centre for the people of Israel during the invasion years under Joshua in the tribal area of Ephraim-Benjamin. They certainly are looking for a Joshua to lead them, but this place is most likely Ramath-Mizpeh, the city of refuge in the tribal area of Gad. Joshua 13:26, 20:8.

The princes of the Gilead, who have lost their lands to the enemy now appeal to their brethren and offer the generalship of the dispossessed army of Gilead to whoever is willing to hazard his arm against the raiders of Ammon. It may be a gathering of all the tribes, from the West as well, but this is unlikely as the river may still be in flood at this time, which explains why the enemy has stayed put in the Gilead.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Confession is not to be a mechanical thing, but a response of heart, mind and body to the reality of the awfulness of the sin that has afflicted the believer. It involves both acknowledging the sin, but also turning away from the sin. It is active not passive. James 1:22-25. Let us deal with sin in a biblical manner and not fall into the "easy believism" and easy confessionals of the modern heretics who encourage licence in exactly the same way as the Baal worshippers did, by compromise and addition.
2. God gets angry with our repeated disobedience and He is rightly angry at us. Let us fear offending the heart of the Lord in this matter and resist temptations and flee from all known things that will trip us up.
3. The call goes out at times for a leader to take charge of the Lord's army and lead it into battle against the enemy. Let us be ready for the call to action by walking obediently with the Lord each and every day.

REFLECTION UPON THE SATANIC ORIGIN/NATURE OF RELIGION

1. Satan's religion is a humanly acceptable one: no sin, no judgment, no Saviour and no Hell. Satan appears as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:13-19,26)
2. Many pastors in the churches are servants of Satan's policy, knowingly or unknowingly. (Isaiah 30:12, Jeremiah 2:8, 2 Peter 2:1-10)
3. Satan's strategy towards unbelievers is to keep them blinded to the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Colossians 2:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10)
4. Satan's strategy towards believers is:-
 - a) To confuse by false teaching. (Matthew 7:15, Romans 16:18)
 - b) To appeal to pride. (2 Corinthians 10:12)
 - c) To promote idolatry. (Habakkuk 2:18,19)
 - d) To promote legalism. (1 Timothy 1:7-8)
5. Satan's policy calls for counterfeit faith:-
 - a) Counterfeit gospel. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)
 - b) Counterfeit pastors. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)
 - c) Counterfeit communion. (1 Corinthians 10:19-21)
 - d) Counterfeit doctrine. (2 Timothy 4:1)
 - e) Counterfeit righteousness. (Matthew 19:16-28)
 - f) Counterfeit way of life. (Matthew 23)
 - g) Counterfeit power. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10)
 - h) Counterfeit gods. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT (Unbelievers only) (Acts 7:51, John 16:8-11). This is hardening to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.
2. BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT (Unbelievers only) (Matthew 12:31). The purpose of the Holy Spirit was to reveal the person of Jesus Christ. The Pharisees rejected this by claiming He was demon possessed.
3. LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (Believers only) (Acts 5:1-3). A sin of false motivation. - Ananias and Sapphira.
4. GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT (Believers only) (Ephesians 4:30). Any sin which the believer commits.
5. QUENCHING THE HOLY SPIRIT (Believers only) (1 Thessalonians 5:19). A believer who is not allowing the Holy Spirit to exert His full influence, but is following after evil things.
6. UNPARDONABLE SIN (Matthew 12:22-32).
 - a) Rejection of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour is the only sin which cannot be forgiven. This unbelief is shown in Matthew 12:24, denying the person and power of Jesus.
 - b) It is impossible for a believer to commit the unpardonable sin. (Isaiah 1:18, Isaiah 44:22, 1 John 1:7)