

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



LIVES OF THE JUDGES
(THE LEADERSHIP CHAOS THAT
LED INTO
THE DAYS OF SAMUEL)

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INTRODUCTION

Abimelech was the son of a lover of Gideon and he was an evil man. This man Jephthah, in this chapter, is the son of a prostitute, yet he will prove that being born again and devoted to God, and so he will transform the worst birth status in society. Contrast him to Abimelech! Such a man as Jephthah had nothing to look forward to in his society except being looked down upon by others, but the spiritual and military crisis of his day will open up social acceptability for him. It is another reminder that the arrangement of the stories is by theme, rather than any chronology.

It is spirituality that transforms us, not birth or wealth. God works with **His** People, and its "born-again" status that counts, not natural birth! A crisis requires the right person for the right situation and this is how the Lord lifts some up and allows them to excel when in more ordinary times they would not be able to. This chapter is another reminder to leave your future in the Lord's hands and let Him lift you up. 1 Peter 5:5-9. There is to be no politics played for church office, but a relaxed waiting upon the Lord. God's Plan, God's power, and God's timing only!

It is also a reminder that every day is a battle day in the devil's world and we need our spiritual armour on, with the mental attitude of readiness guiding every step we take. Ephesians 6:10-13. It is a contrast to Abimelech and shows that it is a man's choices, not his birth, that make him great in evil or great in good. It is an illustration of the Plan of God, and the Lord's provision of the right person into the right time, so that the plans God has for His people work out to the deliverance of His people.

CHAPTER 11

JUDGES 11:1-40

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him. 4 And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. 5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: 6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. 7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? 8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. 9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? 10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. 11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh. 12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? 13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably. 14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: 15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: 16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; 17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. 18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. 19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. 20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. 22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. 23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? 24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. 25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, 26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time? 27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. 28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him. 29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah vowed a vow

unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. 32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. 34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. 36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. 37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 6. Jephthah was born of a prostitute and taken by his father into his home and brought up alongside his legitimate sons. This was often the way of things in the ancient world, when the man who used the prostitute would be responsible for any children born by her. This woman may even have been a Canaanite woman, as she is called "strange" by the sons of Gilead. She may even have been an "Inn-Keeper", or sacred prostitute of the Canaanite fertility religion, as was Rahab, and so it tells us that pagan compromises may be behind this birth.

She is able to identify the father, and had she been regularly working as a common prostitute such an identification would have been impossible. If she was a religious prostitute of Astarte then the birth of Jephthah is particularly interesting. It means his father was a serious leader in religious compromise, and had enough standing in the pagan religion to be approved to have sex with the fertility religion priestess and have a child to her. This boy may have been set aside for Baal and Astarte, and the Lord captures him back.

Jephthah grows up with a strong faith in the God of Israel, even though his Israelite family rejects him, and that may mean his father was rebuked of his paganism and returns to genuine faith, rescues his baby son, and brings this boy up in truth, but lacks family support for his religious "conversion" back to Abrahamic faith. Jephthah's father is not mentioned later, and the only conclusion can be, that around the time of Jephthah's expulsion his father has recently died. There is a tantalizing, exciting, yet tragic story behind the words we have here.

Illegitimate children were regularly taken from their mothers and brought up by their father's house, but if this boy was born to the sacred prostitute of Astarte, then he is destined to become a priest or a child sacrifice, and so his father must have worked hard to rescue his baby son from this evil religion that he had become part of. While this arrangement of taking in illegitimate sons was culturally acceptable, it nearly always led to envy and jealousy in the home. All sins of lust of any sort will lead to such mental attitude sins later; sin begets sin, but God alone can turn cursing to blessing.

The child born of adultery was barred from full fellowship in the religion of Israel. Deuteronomy 23:1-6. This harsh rule of Moses will be modified through the days of the Judges and the Israelites will accept all who genuinely come in the name and power of the Lord. They will learn that the father's sins do not fall upon the sons, unless the sons follow their fathers in that same sin. Being born again in faith wipes away the stain of evil and sin from an individual and a family. **Exodus 20:1-4, Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-23, Romans 8:26-28.**

The writer of Judges is providing later generations with the modified interpretation of Moses words in Deuteronomy 23, and underlining the importance of second birth, rather than legitimate birth. All who come to the Lord in faith are to be accepted as full members of the family of God, for all prior sin is fully wiped away. **Psalms 103:10-18.**

Around the age of Bar-Mitzvah, and after the death of their father, the other sons of Gilead force young Jephthah out of the house to make his own way in the world. He will have been around fourteen, and must have been big and strong at this point and already potentially a challenge to his half brothers. They certainly do not want him to take any share in the family inheritance. This was clearly done with the town Elders permission and approval, as we will see below.

Lust for control of the family wealth drives the half brothers as sexual or religious lust drove their father in his early days. All this occurs in the days of peace, but after eighteen years of attacks by the Ammonites the family must be in a different place. Their prosperity is gone and the boy who could have been their protector is not with them. However in God's economy he has been able to head into "bandit country" (Tob – north east of Gilead, between Syria and Ammon) and become a great soldier of fortune, and through the eighteen years of his nation and tribe's suffering he has been learning the art of war and is ready to move to the assistance of his people when they are ready to turn to God.

The same elders who agreed with his expulsion now beg for him to return. It is a reminder again to us that the Lord's plan is perfect and in the right time He will deliver us. We are to leave our fate always in the Lord's hands, and to timing

and the manner of our deliverance. God's Plans are not ours, nor our thoughts His thoughts. **Psalm 91:11, Isaiah 55:8-10.**

Verses 7 – 11. The elders come with humility and request help, but Jephthah remembers their arrogant dismissal of him as a young man, being called a bastard, and then being run out of town. He is ready to do the Lord's work, but first these men must make their peace with him. Paul does a similar thing to rulers in Philippi when he has been beaten, for as a Roman citizen he should not have been. **Acts 16:35-39.** Neither Jephthah nor Paul is wrong in their actions. They both require those who have done injustice to them to accept the truth before any further dealings are had with them. The elders have the sort of apology that is easy to accept. From bastard outcast they offer to make him prince of Gilead and their leader and Judge.

From the details already given above in chapter ten it would appear that the army of Manasseh and Gad have already gathered in the field against the Ammonites and the call for a man who has the reputation and general-ship ability to lead them has gone out. The only name that has come forward is that of Jephthah. This is a very age specific behaviour, and it is the Bronze Age shoulder period into the Iron Age, and we see it in the works of Homer with the "champion" as leader and "good luck charm" for the army.

Jephthah seeks a firm promise of the leadership of the tribe and the army if he is going to join with them. He requires a formal and public acceptance of him as their leader. There can be no back room deals that they can later withdraw from. He rightly does not trust these men until they have proved themselves honest. John 2:24-25. The Elders swear by the name of the Lord that they will do all that they promise to him. Jephthah's faith in the Lord God of Israel is shown by his acceptance of such an oath.

When he takes charge of the army at Mizpeh he repeats all the words of the elders and he tells the people all about himself and the Lord's call to deliver the people. Everything this man does, he does in public, so that there is no misunderstanding or misinterpretation, and he affirms the Lord's presence with him and the Lord's plan as his plan. He is God-centred in all his doings and acts with transparency. This is a man of biblical character.

Verses 12 – 13. He acts in a diplomatic manner immediately with the king of the Ammonites. He directly seeks an explanation for why the Ammonites have invaded "my land". By doing this he shows that he has been far more than a brigand in the years of absence from his people, he has been a diplomat, general, and ruler of a territory. It also tells us that the king of Ammon respects him enough to answer him and recognises him as the "king" of the Eastern tribes that are now assembled against him. The interchange here is evidence in itself for a very early age for this book, to the days of Samuel leading into the time of David.

Had Jephthah been just a "bastard brigand" he would not have sent such a message, and had he done so the king of Ammon would have laughed and insulted the Israelites for using such a man of no consequence as their leader. No-one laughs or mocks Jephthah any more; this man has a reputation for integrity, and for ruthless efficiency as a warrior. When he speaks people listen! He is a diplomat and a great general and the king of Ammon takes him very seriously and argues his case with historic accuracy in an attempt to prove his war is just and that Israel ought to deliver the Gilead to him. He is telling the truth, in that Israel took his people's land, but he is leaving out the reason why, and Jephthah will prove he has a good grasp of the Mosaic records in his reply. **Numbers 21:19-35.**

Verses 14 – 22. Jephthah now gives the king of Ammon a lesson in history. He records that Israel sought permission to travel through the lands of Ammon and enter only into the West bank of Jordan, but Sihon and Og fought against them and they had no choice but to put the land on the east of Jordan to the test, or court, of battle. Jephthah makes it quite clear that the contest was between the gods of Ammon and the God of Israel, not just the people. This debate is of great significance if his own mother was a devotee to the pagan rites of Ammon. Jephthah knows the pagan gods and despises them, their followers, and their murderous and immoral rituals.

Jephthah takes the story from Egypt to Kadesh and then to the lands of Moab and Ammon. He reminds the Ammonite king that the Arnon was originally the land of Moab and that the Ammonites had seized this land from Moab, so they cannot claim it as their own now. He makes it clear also that the Israelites had integrity, but the Ammonites decided to test the God of Israel, and they lost. Their choice to attack Israel opened the door for the land to be lost and it was, and so in the third century since it was lost they cannot claim it back, or they hazard their claim on the coming battle alone!

The issue is the choices made by the players, and the choices made by the Ammonites now are opening the door to their defeat again. They choose to attack Israel and test the power of the God of Israel and so they had to accept the decision that the battle brought, for God gave His verdict upon them. All of the Angelic Conflict is about choice, and the choices men make are sometimes permanent in their results. Jephthah makes it clear that he gives any credit in advance for victory to the God of Israel, as he sees the whole, thing as a spiritual issue – not a battle of human champions.

Verses 23 – 27. Jephthah is a good theologian and has really studied the Mosaic Law in his time in Tob. He argues absolutely in accordance with Biblical doctrinal principles. He understands that the Lord decrees who owns what land and for what length of time they hold it. He understands that all land is given by God, with responsibility and accountability for its use, and that no land is ever permanently owned by man. He understands that it is a "contest of the gods verses the real GOD" here, not a battle of men alone.

It is the Angelic Conflict, and the gods of Ammon are against the God of Israel, and the battle will decide who holds the land. He makes it clear to the pagan king that as he has decided to fight Israel, so he has in effect declared war on Israel's God, and he must accept the results of the contest he has chosen. He reminds them of history, that the Moabites fought against Israel also, and they were always beaten in the end. This will be Ammon's fate if they persist.

This man is absolutely stabilised in the truths of God's Word and he relaxes in this truth. This man Jephthah has personal history with the king of Ammon and he has proved himself a good ally to him in the past, and so he can appeal to the fact that there have not been any wrongs done to Ammon by Jephthah, but he intends to destroy the army of the Ammonites now if they persist in pagan political nonsense. In effect he tells the king that as he has previously been a good friend, he is now a sworn enemy and will destroy him if he persists standing on the wrong side of history. He ends his speech by calling the Lord God to decide who is right and who is wrong, and he makes it clear he intends to fight the Ammonites to the death, and in God's strength he intends to win.

Verses 28 – 32. The writer makes it clear that the king of Ammon heard the words of Jephthah and all around him pondered them, for they all respected and feared this man. This time they will have a real battle on their hands; they will not be facing the scattered remnants of Israelite tribes, they will be facing the best soldier of their age, and he will be led by the Lord God of the whole Universe. The next verse tells us that the Lord was indeed with this man in power. He has come from the north east of Ammon and so his journey has been in effect through enemy lines and he has had a good opportunity to see their dispositions and their numbers in the field.

His family, we will find lives in Mizpeh, and may have for some considerable time, even while he operated in Tob. Jephthah is now in the tribal area of Manasseh and he travels through the tribal areas of Manasseh and Gad and gathers his troops to Mizpeh and then moves on the Ammonites in the Vale of Gilead. His journey through the Gilead region is with wide sweeps; he does not march in a straight line. Behind the words of verse 29 is a sweeping campaign to mop up all elements of the Ammonite cavalry and their scouting forces, and also to gather the rest of the fighting men of the two eastern tribes for the battle to come. He is careful, prayerful and thorough – no spies get back to Ammon to report on his army strength, or its deployment and order of battle. He leaves no "loose ends"... But he has a weakness...

Jephthah now makes a hasty vow that appears innocuous in its utterance, but will mean he is to dedicate his only daughter to life long virginity and service to the Lord, rather than bring him grand-children. There is a major misunderstanding of this passage that he is offering his daughter as a child sacrifice. This is absurd, as only the gods of Ammon asked for this, and commentators who argue for it are mostly themselves unbelieving pagans (or "confused" in their understanding and logic), as this man is a genuine believer and the issues here are spiritual. This child sacrifice was the evil of Chemosh their god, certainly not the God of Israel. This man defeats Chemosh and all his servants; he doesn't follow their evil rituals.

It was an unnecessary and a dumb oath to take, and his story is told by subsequent generations of Israelites as a reminder that no believer ought ever to operate by emotional oaths, but only by logical and thought through promises to the Lord. Numbers 30:1ff. The Lord doesn't need our dramatic hasty oaths; He requires a simple "yes or no". **Matthew 5:37, James 5:12.** We are to give thanks offerings in gratitude to the Lord, and by faith (Hebrews 11:1) these can be made in advance, but making promises in advance is always a dumb thing to do. Always wait until the deliverance and then decide what to give the Lord and what to hold onto for your self to use for the Lord in the next phase of your life! Be willing and intelligent in your giving! **2 Corinthians 8:1-5.**

Verses 33 – 36. Jephthah sweeps south-east and destroys all before him. He shows his expertise in the open field and also in siege or sudden attacks upon towns, and seizes twenty of the enemy's cities and destroys them. He seriously destroys all the Ammonites he meets, "with a great slaughter". They do not rise again while he lives to oppose them; he is the "hammer of Ammon". They flee from before him and he hammers their forces in the field and in their defended cities right through to their grape growing area close to their capital Rabbath-Ammon (modern day Amman).

On his return to his home he is met by his darling daughter dancing in praise of her father for the great victory the Lord has given him. This man has taught his only daughter the truths of God's Word and she knows doctrine well. Notice her praise of the Lord and her absolute trust in the Lord in verse 36. What he has promised he will fulfil before the Lord, and she is happy about this, seeing her life long virginity as a small sacrifice for the great victory that her father has won over the enemies of Israel. All women of Israel hoped to be "mother of Messiah" and so she is excluded from this hope.

She will never have children, but all the children of her land will be safe because of her father's sacrificial actions. She will rejoice in the joy of others and accept her lot, because it means all the people are safe from the rape and murder of the past from Ammon. She models the self sacrificial attitude of all who are heroes of service for the Lord. **Acts 20:24, 21:13, Romans 16:3-4, Philippians 2:25-30.**

Verses 37 – 40. Jephthah's vow was not able to be excused under the Mosaic Law and he seeks no special treatment from the High Priest to have it set aside. He accepts he has made a careless and hasty vow, but that his respect for the Lord's deliverance of Israel is such that he accepts the Lord's verdict and allows his daughter two months to have "girls time" upon the hills with her friends, all of whom will marry their returning soldiers in the next year or so.

She weeps for the life she will not have and such grief is acceptable and right, but then she returns home to live in perpetual virginity in her father's house as the servant of the Lord. She becomes the patron saint of all nuns through the

ages. Her acceptance of her father's oath and living out her life in thankful praise for the deliverance of the people becomes an example for all Israelite women through the ages.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Jephthah demonstrates that our genetic and physical birth status has no relevance to any future service of the Lord, but our second birth and our spiritual growth does have significance. Jephthah serves the Lord as a bible doctrine saturated man. He makes a foolish and hasty vow, but he proves his integrity by keeping his words to the Lord and doing what is required. He has taught his daughter well from the Mosaic Law and so he is able to call upon her stability in this matter also. She accepts that her life will be different to all her friends, but that it is a small price to pay in time for the blessings of peace in time and peace with God forever.
2. God uses prepared people who do not take insults or any other reverses personally. Jephthah doesn't conduct any campaign against his half brothers, nor does he seek any vengeance upon the elders who supported them against him 18 years before. He leaves his case in the Lord's hands and seeks the Lord's will in the present, not temporary justice from the past. Deuteronomy 32:35, Psalms 94:1, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30. The Lord always wins better victories than we can ever hope to win.
3. Let us leave our fate in the Lord's hands. Let us learn like Jephthah and his daughter that God's plan for us is always better than any plan we can work out for ourselves. **Isaiah 55:8-10, 1 Peter 5:5-9.**

REFLECTION UPON GIVING

1. Giving is an important part of spiritual life. It includes your attitude, the giving of yourself, your capacity as well as your possessions. Giving is as much a part of worship as praying, singing, listening to teaching, observing the Lord's Table, reading the Word. It is a function of priesthood for team work and often to sustain the work of leadership.
2. Basic Principles of Giving
 - (a) Old Testament Giving - this giving was grace giving just as it is in our age. (Proverbs 11:24,25)
 - (b) New Testament Giving - (2 Corinthians 9:7) also grace giving.
 - (c) Tithing - this means ten per cent. It was a form of income tax in Israel. Offerings or giving were above this. Tithing was for all Jews, offerings for believers only. It should be remembered that Israel was a theocracy.
 - [i] In Israel two tithes were required annually
 - [ii] Tithe 1 - for the maintenance of the Levites (Numbers 18:21, 24) Civil servants in a theocracy.
 - [iii] Tithe 2 - for national feasts and sacrifices (Deuteronomy 14:22-26)
 - [iv] Every third year a third tithe was required:-
 - [v] Tithe 3 - for the poor of the land. (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29) Social security. In (Malachi 3:8-10) it mentions tithes and offerings, the tithes to be brought to the storehouse or treasury.
 - (d) The time to give - the first day of the week. (1 Corinthians 16:2)
 - (e) How much - as God has prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2)
3. General Scripture on Giving. (2 Corinthians chapters 8 & 9)
 - (a) 2 Corinthians 8:1-8. Contrasts the Macedonian givers to the Corinthian givers, the former having been made poor by Roman oppression gave liberally. The Corinthians, the richest Church in Greece, gave sparingly.
 - (b) Giving is an attitude of grace and inner happiness rather than compulsion or the amount donated (2 Corinthians 8:2)
 - (c) Before money is given you must give yourself. (2 Corinthians 8:5)
 - (d) Giving is as important an act as any other act in the fellowship. (2 Corinthians 8:7)
 - (e) Giving is love giving not law giving (2 Corinthians 8:8)
 - (f) Giving depends on being oriented to grace, the prime example being the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 8:9)
 - (g) Money given in the Lord's service must be properly administered. (2 Corinthians 8:19-21)
 - (h) If you give in grace you reap bountifully. If you give in legalism or with strings you reap sparingly. (2 Corinthians 9:6)
 - (i) How to give. Giving is a reflection of your character, by grace not habit. (2 Corinthians 9:7)
 - (j) God has given unto us his unspeakable Gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15, 1 Peter 2:24)
 - [k] Giving should be regular. 1 Corinthians 16:2.
 - [m] As we are prospered so we give: God provides the capital with which to give. 2 Corinthians 9:7-10.
 - [n] Mature believers are most effective givers. 2 Corinthians 9:10. Generosity of mind leads to generous giving. 2 Corinthians 9:11. Philippians 4:14-18.
 - [o] The pastor's logistical support comes from giving: He makes an issue out of the word never money, if he does his job God will provide the money. Pastor provides spiritual food and receives money for physical needs. Mutual blessing is thus assured, as the people show their appreciation for the ministry of the word. 2 Corinthians 11:7-9, Philippians 1:3-5, 4:10, 4:14.

CHAPTER 12**INTRODUCTION**

The great evil of civil war comes upon the tribes of Israel here and it will get worse over the following century with a major rebellion by Benjamin and the serious and powerful infiltration of the Philistines after 1200 BC. In the chapter before us the men of the West Bank tribe of Ephraim take issue with Jephthah over his handling of the war against Ammon. The men of Ephraim have no business being arrogant in this matter of the war against the Ammonites and they have no business attacking their brethren.

Factionalism has entered, and it is always a satanic sign – only the enemy produces this sort of argument. When surrounded by petty minded arrogant people you can be sure the Holy Spirit is quenched, grieved, or absent altogether.

This is a sad commentary upon the loss of the hope of Israel in Joshua's day, and explains why the tabernacle at Shiloh was falling into disrepair and the Mosaic Law was not being followed. If the feasts were being kept only a few were going because ill feeling between the tribes had reached crisis point and people would simply not risk journeying through Ephraim to worship at the tabernacle.

The tribe of Ephraim arrogantly wanted the leadership role, as the largest of the tribes, the centrally placed one, and the inheritors of the mantle of Joshua. They believed that they should be the tribe of the Judge. Even in Gideon's day the Ephraimites nearly declared war on the other tribes. Judges 8:1-3. Their pride will lead to their rebellion after the days of Solomon and will lead to their near extinction.

The tabernacle's presence amongst them was also a factor in their mental attitude, and would lead to their loss of this blessing under David, who would move it to his new capital in Jerusalem. Sadly the arrogance of Ephraim would continue through the years, and it will lead to the split in the kingdom after the death of Solomon, and the total loss of this tribe to the Assyrian conquest in 721 BC. Only a small remnant of Ephraim will survive by fleeing south into Judah at that time. 2 Samuel 19:41ff, 2 Kings 17:1-23, Isaiah 28:1-3.

JUDGES 12:1-15

1 And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire. **2** And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. **3** And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me? **4** Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites. **5** And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; **6** Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand. **7** And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. **8** And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. **9** And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. **10** Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem. **11** And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. **12** And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. **13** And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. **14** And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. **15** And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

REFLECTIONS

Verse 1. What arrogance and evil is this we read here? God has delivered the entire nation through the work of Jephthah and instead of gratitude from the other tribes there is suspicion that he is trying to rule over them, and hatred of him to the point where they plan to murder him and his entire family. This is what arrogance does to men, and we need to pay close attention to this episode for it is played out in our own churches and nations even today where arrogant and narcissistic men gather. One of the hallmark symptoms of what we call "Personality Disorder" is this behaviour, where they hate those they should feel grateful towards. Remember the Bible simply calls all "disorder/difficulty" as "evil". BY this "fruit" you know such people are spiritually in the enemy's camp!

When people believe they are special they will have hatred for the good works of others and try to pull the good worker down for sheer spite and envy. They want to be the only celebrities and they will fight all who excel and destroy them if they can. These people destroy businesses, churches and even nations in their arrogance. This is a great evil and the tribe of Ephraim do the work of the enemy here, and in their persistence in this evil they pay a terrible price. Proverbs 27:3-4, James 3:14-18, 4:1-3, 1 Peter 3:16-17.

Verses 2 – 3. Jephthah is polite but firm, for he has been a general for many years now and he doesn't have the nature of a Gideon, but of a tough warrior who smells a rat here, and sees the actions of Ephraim as the deliberate insult that it is. He has also just been threatened with his family's death and the loss of his own home. He doesn't threaten them, but firmly states the truth, and challenges them to acknowledge their wrong. He is calm before them, for he knows his army can defeat and kill them all if he needs to, but he seeks a better outcome for them all.

Within his words there is the recognition that Ephraim have played politics with the lives of all the other tribes over the recent months. They were called to the battle against the Ammonites but refused to respond to the call. They had their army ready all along, and wouldn't move to assist Manasseh and Gad, because they wanted the glory of the leadership, and they would not accept Jephthah. They have been play acting their support all along and now they want to seize the leadership when they hope that the people of the Gilead are exhausted after their long campaign against Ammon.

Verses 4 – 6. They seriously misread the strength and ability of Jephthah, but even worse, they do not see what the Lord is doing in the land. They trust their plots and plans rather than seeing spiritually what has actually happened. They do not recognize the importance of Jephthah's words about the Lord giving him the victory. They attack him and in so doing they place themselves outside the will and plan of God, and firmly under the discipline of the Lord for their evil. The men of Ephraim refer to the Gileadites as a mob of outcasts from the larger tribes, but the Lord has blessed them with victory over Ammon and He will also bless them with victory over their arrogant distant relatives.

The men of Gilead gather and attack the arrogant and insulting invaders from Ephraim who will not withdraw in peace. They beat them thoroughly, for the Lord is not with the evil Ephraimites. The fords are seized and all the stragglers of Ephraim are killed. The way they are identified is the peculiarity of speech of those from the Shephelah, that they cannot say the "sh" sound, but pronounce it "s". It is around 200 years since the conquest and such linguistic variations in populations can develop over this sort of time frame. It costs significant numbers of Ephraimites their life this evil day!

Verses 7 – 15. Finally Ephraim get a judge, by the name of Abdon, but he, like the others of this time only last a short time each. They are men who are used, but for very short time frames due to their weaknesses, which always apparently remain unresolved. Even this great man Jephthah only judges Israel for six years. He dies and is buried in the East bank, but the writer does not even have the record of where his body lies.

Ibzan who follows after him judges Israel from Bethlehem in Judah, and all he is known for is his polygamy, and so like Gideon he fails to fulfil his promise. He has thirty sons and thirty daughters, but he marries his boys to foreign wives and thereby betrays his latent paganism and the reason for his short reign. He only judges for seven years and possibly loses his role due to his polygamy and compromise with pagan nations in marrying his sons to strange women. After him Elon from the tribe of Zebulun judges Israel, and he judges for ten years before his removal or death. Next is Abdon of Ephraim, but he also is known only for his large family and sinful polygamous life style. He also only lasts eight years.

These short term judges are like so many pastors today, who spend seven years training and seven years in ministry and then disappear from the work of the Lord through some sexual sin that trips them up all too easily! We fall into uselessness and divine discipline when we do not walk in the filling of the Holy Spirit, and note, He is "holy", and those without the fruit of holiness are on a slippery slope that will always lead to more sin, to evil, to disgrace, and then to death.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Arrogance/Pride will always destroy good if it can. The men of Ephraim are like many narcissistic men today who will target the good performers in a business/trust/church and eliminate them as a threat to their leadership. Such character weakness will undo a good business/Trust and destroy it over time. The nation of Israel is destroyed by this sort of arrogance, and men like Jephthah have to kill large numbers of these arrogant men to just keep the status quo in the land.

Let us be careful of any people who are threatened by competence, efficiency, and success, for such men are like the "drunkards of Ephraim". In the church meeting such men/women must be opposed and their influence and power base destroyed, before they destroy the ministry of the church.

2. The men we meet here are "short term solution men". They cannot sustain the work of the Lord over time due to their weaknesses, which they will not deal with. Their work for the Lord is therefore short and ineffectual. We will see the disastrous mess the nation is in during the Philistine period and only the toughness of the first two kings brings order out of the chaos.

3. Let us support our godly and Holy Spirit filled pastors in their work and stand firmly against all the arrogant men and women who will do Satan's work against him if they are allowed. Let us be careful "fruit inspectors" of the lives of people who are appointed to any leadership role, Matthew 7:13-23, for any pride/arrogance is a "fruit" of the Old Sin Nature at best, and of Hell itself at worst.

CHAPTER 13**INTRODUCTION**

While most of this book is not chronological the time clock has turned a corner for Israel as we enter this chapter, for we are now after 1200BC, as it was around then that the Philistines (Proto-Greek "Sea Peoples") arrive in power. They were a group of proto-Greek type peoples, possibly fleeing from the carnage that occurred just before the times of the Trojan Wars. The Biblical record notes that they were from "Caphtor" (Egyptians had it as kftyw), or Crete, although this may cover the entire Aegean Islands area. 1 Samuel 30:14, 1 Chronicles 1:12, Jeremiah 47:4, Ezekiel 25:16, Amos 9:7, Zephaniah 2:5-6.

They flee from this region to the south by land and sea at the end of the late Bronze, early Iron Age around 1200 BC, focused upon the seizing of better lands and continuing their war centred culture. They loved warfare and their worship was a very sexualized form of the paganism common through the Eastern Mediterranean, and they modified it, after their arrival in Canaan, incorporating aspects of Canaanite paganism.

They appear to have come to the south between 1400-1200 BC with a great deal of rage, and my suspicion is that they were part of the great upheaval in the Aegean around this time and were possibly displaced either by the Mycenaeans, or the Dorians and the others who will become the classical Greek peoples.

They swept through what is now Turkey and exterminated the Hittite Empire sacking it's capital at Hattusus, and then attacking the great Syrian city of Ugarit, exterminating that culture on the Syrian coast. They then killed the last of the Canaanites on the coastal plain and settled in their cities, and even fought the Egyptians to a stand still off the Nile delta in the reigns of Merneptah and Ramses III. The solid evidence of their attacks are from the relief pictures on the walls of Ramses III temple at Medinet Habu near Thebes, where he records his battles against them in Syria and off the Egyptian coast.

Their appearance in those pictures certainly makes them look like the Cretans and other Aegean peoples of the time described by Homer. From the battles they fought and the cities they seize and destroy, their army must have been between 50,000-100,000 men. This was a mass migration, even bigger than the Exodus. They are reduced in size by the Egyptian battles, but they are still very numerous when they settled the pleasant coastal plain of Palestine. I see them as "Satan's Exodus" people, and as his major thrust to dislodge and destroy God's people, by then settled in the Shephelah.

Ramses III later uses them as his mercenaries, and subsequent pharaohs used them as Anti-Northern Power guards for the Palestine coast, and they become allies of Egypt in later years. Palestine takes it's name from one of their tribes. They are finally obliterated by the Assyrian conquest of Palestine in 700 BC, and Babylonian conquest of 605-586 BC, although remnants of them return under the decree of Cyrus in 535 BC, but in latter years their culture is absorbed by the Phoenicians, and they become just a part of the mixed race culture of the coastal towns from Tyre to Gaza.

They were from at least five sub-tribes themselves. The Egyptians named three of them as, tjekker, peleset, and the sherden. They were users of iron and bring Iron Age technology to Canaan and so they have military superiority for many years, with the Egyptians and Israelites still fighting with bronze weapons. They gain this technological superiority by their destruction of the Hittite Empire that previously had the monopoly on iron production and they learn the skills for iron smelting from the Hittites. They restricted this technology and forced the Israelites to depend upon them for their iron farm implements and it was over a hundred years before the Israelites learned the technology and were able to match them regularly. 1 Samuel 13:19-20.

They were determined to hold the Israelites down as their vassals, and they specifically targeted the religion of Israel, seizing the Ark for a time, and burning Shiloh to the ground. 1 Samuel 4:10-22. They had a system of government that was warrior aristocratic and certainly appears to be that of the protagonists of the Homeric stories.

They worshipped their chief god called Dagon, and then the husband and wife team of gods, Baalzebub and Ashteroth. These are the names that are recorded in the biblical account, and they may have been early Hebrew versions of the more Aegean names the Philistines arrived with.

The Philistines themselves may have adopted the local names of gods, which had parallels in most of the eastern area. They are Satan's best shock troops at this time, and their religion is vigorous and evil to an extreme.

JUDGES 13:1-25

1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years. **2** And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. **3** And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. **4** Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: **5** For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. **6** Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an

angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: 7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. 8 Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. 9 And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her. 10 And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. 11 And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am. 12 And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? 13 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 14 She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine, neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe. 15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee. 16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the LORD. 17 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? 18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? 19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. 21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. 22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. 23 But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. 24 And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. The Angel of the Lord enters the picture directly again to deliver His people out of the most serious threat to their spiritual identity to date. The next time we meet the Lord directly entering into the history of Israel will be with the birth and call of Samuel. 1 Samuel 1-2. This similarity and the contrast between the two men is important to note. The birth of Samson and Samuel are both in response to answers to godly women's and men's prayers, and each child is anointed to be a deliverer of his people.

The miraculous is present with both in their birth and call, and their early work is powerful, but only Samuel sustains this level of service. Both serve the Lord in power, but Samson lacks the character and spirituality to sustain his walk with the Lord, whereas Samuel gives us the example of consistent spirit filled service. The writer is clearly writing after Samuel has proved his path to be godly to the end, and the contrast is deliberate.

Notice the spiritual scene again in verse one. The people have gone down hill since the days of the last judges, none of whom had the character to serve long for the Lord. The entire nation is sliding into apostasy on their once godly heritage. The Tabernacle is not central to the nation any more, and no judge to date has made it so. By Samuels' day it will be too late and he will have to spend most of his ministry moving around to avoid capture by the Philistines.

Only David will restore the tabernacle to its place of centrality in national spiritual life, and he has to order a new one built, for all that remains is the Ark and the implements for the offering of sacrifices. 2 Samuel 6. Deliverance will come for the people through Samson, but the nation needs a spiritual revival of their ancestral faith for the deliverance to be sustained, and that must await the days of Samuel.

The story begins with the prayers of a godly man and woman who seek the Lord's place for themselves and seek the blessing of a son who will rise up to serve the Lord. Before she prays for a child Manoah's wife has set her heart on losing her child to God's service. This is the perfect picture for a parent. Check yourself out here believer. Do you desire any children you have to wear themselves out and die in the Lord's service?

Most of us are influenced by the philosophy of worldliness rather than spirituality. We express it in our desires for our children. We seek them to become wealthy and successful according to the standards of finance, not those of God. The so called "prosperity gospel" has gained great ground in our day, and is to be challenged, for it is a satanic lie! Many of the greatest men and women we meet in the scriptures are of humble circumstances, and many suffer greatly for the Lord's work, and they do not think they are judged because of it. Hebrews 11:32-40.

The writer identifies the man whose wife is barren, and gives us his family name and his tribe. This man is of the tribe of Dan, and these events occur before the tribe moves north to escape the Philistines pressure upon them and falls into idolatry there again. Judges 18. The man is Manoah, and his wife is unable to conceive and hold a baby. She is praying as is her husband, but the angel appears to the woman, indicating the perseverance and passion of her prayers, and, as we will see below, she was the most stable and logical of the two. It is not that her prayers were more powerful than her husbands, but that she was focused upon what she could do to become pregnant, and clearly had been praying that her

yet to be born son might do the Lord's work. The angel makes it clear that the child to be born is to be the deliverer of the people, and he is to be a life long Nazarite and the mother is to express her faith in this by immediately changing her own life style to avoid all the foods that the Nazarite had to avoid. Leviticus 11, Numbers 6:1-21. They had been eating and drinking normally, but also possibly having foods that were not "kosher" in accordance with Leviticus 11, and this has to stop immediately and all alcohol is to be stopped also.

Verses 6 – 7. This woman is a well taught biblical believer. She goes to the right person immediately, her husband. This is a principle of marriage that is vital to apply in all counselling situations in the church context. No woman is to be dealt with away from her husband, except where there are separate sessions before a joint session of counselling. Solutions are to be found to marital problems in the marriage. No opportunity is to be given for Satan to divide a husband and his wife spiritually, for he will always attack the divine institution of marriage.

This woman goes straight away to discuss this with her husband and seeks his counsel on the meaning of the appearance of the angel. She believes it is an angel, but as she does not have the angel's name, she has some concern about this, as the name of a being betrayed it's origin and belief system. She is thinking all the time, and does not want to be fooled by a superior being, for she seeks the Lord's path and that alone. No miracle, or supernatural appearance of any angel, is going to side track her from her worship of the one true God!

She knows this angel was "very terrible". In other words, it produced the greatest fear and awe she had ever known. No-one seeing a real angel is ever left feeling "warm and fluffy", they are left with awe and the "fear of the Lord". To encounter God in any form is to look beyond space and time, and that is to walk near to the edge of reason itself. If people claim to have seen an angel and they are boasting about it, are happy and relaxed about it, as it was probably a pleasant dream. Real Angels produce awe, never arrogance and self importance.

The appearance of an angel means the person is about to be asked to do a very special task with great danger involved in it! Angels do not come when we ask for them, they come when God has a job to be done that requires such a serious intervention in the affairs of man. The wife of Manoah repeats to her husband exactly what the Angel has required of her regarding life style change and she strongly indicates to her husband that their life style is to be changed immediately.

Verses 8 – 11. Manoah is also a clear thinking believer, exactly like his wife, and he immediately prays to the Lord about this appearance. He seeks the Lord's face in this, and the Lord's confirmation of the message and asks for any additional instructions that they need to apply. He does not doubt the angelic ministrations to his wife, but he requires of the Lord information about any other things they need to know, in order to do the task set them in a better manner. Proverbs 3:1-6, Matthew 7:7-11, James 1:2-8.

The Lord is testing this couple to see if they will deal with all they receive from Him together, or can they be divided by spiritual issues. Samson needs to be brought up in a godly home, and he needs to see the best possible marriage, in order that he might know the truth from his earliest years. The great tragedy of Samson is that he is brought up in the best possible household, but rejects the godly standards of his parents. Samson is a reminder to us that we can do the best job as parents and our children may still follow after evil when they reach the age of accountability.

The next appearance of the angel is as Manoah's wife sits in the fields. Now in this day people did not just "sit in the fields", they went there either to work or to pray. This woman is focused upon the Lord and prayer. As soon as the angel introduces himself again she seeks his permission to run and get her husband. Manoah questions the angel directly but politely. To speak to another man's wife in the open field was to invite censure or worse in the ancient world, and only an angel from God will be forgiven this cultural insult. This remains the case in the Arab world today; no strange man may approach and speak with any woman on the street without impugning her honour and hazarding his own and her life.

Verses 12 – 16. Manoah directly asks for specific child rearing instructions in order that they may do everything required to bring this young man up properly, that he may truly be the servant of the Lord. The angel repeats the seriousness of his previous instructions regarding the Nazarite status of the child and the need for the baby to be exposed to no alcohol or fruit of the grape at all during the pregnancy.

This is an interesting observation on the significance of life in the womb and the need for mothers to avoid all alcohol before conception and especially in pregnancy, and for her to be careful of what she eats through the pregnancy.

Manoah then offers to make a meal for the angel, just as Abraham had before. Genesis 18:1-8. Manoah will do as Gideon did and prepare a meal, but for a burnt offering for the angel to offer to the Lord God. Judges 6:11-23. The couple will work together to prepare a meal fit for their God and bring it and place it upon the large rock that is nearby the place Manoah's wife has been sitting. The angel has made it clear that he will not eat, but will accept a burnt offering to the Lord, but to the Lord alone. The angel will not accept worship for himself.

This is a sign of a true angel of the Lord, for the Lord God alone is to be worshipped, and no genuine angel will ever accept worship, unless it is one of the fallen angels (demons) of Satan. They know the angel is of the Lord, but they do not yet see that it is the Lord Himself, but they are obedient to Him. John 2:5, John 15:14, 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5.

Verses 17 – 20. The request for a name was proper in the ancient world, for by it the person was known and characterized. Manoah is careful to identify that they simply want to praise the right angel, not control him by his name, nor curse him by name. To have the name was to have the identity and was a serious thing. This couple have had

access to God's Word and they have read it and studied it. The answer to Manoah tells him that he is speaking with the Angel of Jehovah Himself. So he immediately prepares the meal as a burnt offering and lays it out upon the great rock, just as Gideon had done in his own tribal area many years before when his people faced the Midianite threat.

The angel then does something that while similar to the miracle done before Gideon is even more wonderful. Flame comes from the meal laid out and consumes it totally and the flames go up to the heavens. It is as if the meal has spontaneously combusted before their eyes, and then the most marvellous thing of all occurs. The angel enters the flame and becomes Himself a flame of fire and goes up to heaven that way, leaving only a charred rock behind. The couple do the right thing; they immediately fall upon their faces before the Lord their God and worship, for now they realise that this is who they have seen in angelic form.

Verses 21 – 25. The Angel of the Lord did not return, for he had done what was required and angels do not appear and interact with men to entertain them or reinforce things once they are said. The angel's words are to be followed and both people here understand this and they do apply the word into their lives.

Manoah is seriously afraid and fears he will die, but his wife is even more clear thinking than he has proved himself, (and this is probably the reason the Lord appeared to her both times) and she notes with logical correctness, that had the angel wanted to kill them he would have in the fire that came from their offering. Their offering was accepted and so were they; they have nothing now to fear from the Lord, and were required to simply obey all that they had been told. They have been spoken to for a purpose, and that purpose is to be worked out in their lives, not through their deaths.

The logic of Manoah's wife is absolutely correct. If we have been saved from sin and death, it is not to be then killed by the Lord shortly afterwards! If we have been saved while we were yet the enemies of God, we are not going to be treated worse now that we are His children, than we were as His enemies. Paul grasps this logic and discussed this concept himself in the following passages. Romans 5:6-11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Ephesians 2:1-10, Colossians 1:19-23.

The angel would not have showed them these things to obey just to kill them later. This is the logic we are to apply into the testing situations we may also face each day. We are to look for the things that God is doing with our life and rejoice in them, and then seek His paths through the difficulties. The child is born, and the parents bring him up in godly paths and the Holy Spirit begins to move upon him for blessing and guidance and he starts to listen to what God is saying to him. Samson's name means "sunlight", for he is to be light to his people in their time of spiritual darkness.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Manoah and his wife are both Bible saturated believers. Their thinking is logical in accordance with God's Word and so they can be instructed and understand quickly what the Lord wants of them. The wife is slightly more logical and clear thinking than the husband, but they work closely together and form a great spiritual team, as Priscilla and Aquilla will later. Let us work together spiritually with our life partners and so bring glory to the Lord.

2. Angels are the Lord's messengers to man when needed, but their appearance means something very important is about to happen. They will appear at times, but the genuine angel always brings glory to the Lord alone, and never receives worship for themselves. Angels produce awe when they are from God and the sign of the appearances of the false servants of Satan is that they produce other things than awe.

3. Obedience and holiness are always required of the people of God who wish to serve Him in spirit and in truth. Manoah and his wife must change their life style. They act on what they are told and they are blessed with their son. This boy has the best nurture possible and cannot blame his later sins on anything that occurred at home, only upon his own lusts, and his refusal to follow his parent's faith. He will come back to it, but only as he dies. Samson will illustrate that while men live there is always hope – keep praying for them!

REFLECTION UPON THE BELIEVER'S STABILITY

1. God is able to keep us and bless us (Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 7:25).

2. Stability comes when we know God; when we have grown up in his Word. Maturity brings with it stability (2Peter 3:18, 2Timothy 1:12).

3. The alternative to a stable life of faith is to be tossed about by every pressure; this occurs when there is no doctrinal application in the life (James 1:6, Ephesians 4:14, Revelation 3:8).

4. Believers need stability to stand fast against the wiles of Satan who is a danger to those with no doctrine: We are told to:

a) Stand fast in the word 1Corinthians 16:13.

b) Stand fast in our liberty Galatians 5:1 cf. Romans 14:1ff, 8:9-13.

c) Stand fast in one spirit (no pettiness) Philippians 1:27.

- d) Stand fast in the Lord (in fellowship) Philippians 4:1.
- e) Stand fast in doctrine 2 Thessalonians 2:5, 16,17.
- 5. Strength and stability comes in a close relationship with the Lord. By faith we stand: 2 Corinthians 1:24, Psalm 59:17, 62:7, 144:1.
- 6. God has supreme power at His fingertips for us. Isaiah 59:1.
- 7. Our faith should stand secure in this power, for we are kept by it in all things, therefore we should be confident. 1 Corinthians 2:5, 1 Peter 1:5, John 16:33.
- 8. God is able to make us stand through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the word in our lives. Romans 14:4, Jude 24.
- 9. Strength and stability come from the impact of the Holy Spirit's work upon the word in our life as we believe and apply it. e.g. Sarah Hebrews 11:11, Paul 2 Corinthians 12:8-10.
- 10. Profile of the stable believer under pressure 2 Peter 1:3-16.

CHRISTIAN LIFE: SUBMISSION

- 1. This means to humble oneself in willing service to another, with the connotation that it is for your good. Genesis 16:9, 1 Peter 5:6, Hebrews 13:17.
- 2. We must fully surrender ourselves to God. James 4:7, Romans 12:1-2 As the Lord made himself obedient unto death so must we. Philippians 2:18.
- 3. We are, in Christ to submit ourselves each to the other within the church. This involves putting the spiritual needs of others ahead of any personal interests. Ephesians 5:21.
- 4. Within the church believers are to submit to the teaching authority of the pastor as he preaches from the Word. Hebrews 13:17, 1 Corinthians 16:6, 1 Peter 5:5.
- 5. A wife is to submit herself to her own husband within their marriage. This involves respect for him as her spiritual leader and protector. Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:4 -5.
- 6. Children also are to submit in love to their parents' authority under God. Colossians 3:20.
- 7. All believers are to be in submission to the laws of their land, unless those laws violate the clear command of God. Romans 13:1, 2, Matthew 22:21, 1 Peter 2:13-17, exception example, Acts 4:15-20, 5:40-42.
- 8. Workers are to be under authority of their employers and their managers. Colossians 3:22-25, Ephesians 6:5-8, Titus 2:9, 10, 1 Peter 2:18-24.
- 9. Those in authority have a special responsibility to treat those under them with care and respect. Colossians 4:1

Notes

CHAPTER 14**INTRODUCTION**

Samson will not bring light to his people without a great deal of pain for himself and his parents. He is ruled by what he sees rather than what the Lord sees. He sees a beautiful woman and desires her, even though she is an unsuitable match, being a Philistine and a pagan of the worst sort. **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**. This is an example of being “unequally matched” and the writer makes the best of a bad situation by noting that it is within the Lord’s permissive will, for it produces an opportunity to judge the enemy. It is also another example of lust leading to catastrophe for many.

This chapter records Samson operating under the permissive will rather than the directive will of the Lord. He does not work as he should and deliver his people directly, but he gets side tracked by women, and finally destroyed by them. He will be used of the Lord in spite of himself, and finally, on the last day of his life he will return to the Lord in humility and repentance, and his mighty power will be restored, and he will die in his service doing a mighty work for God. He could have done so much more! His uncontrolled lust limits his effectiveness, as it did with earlier judges.

This last sentence is the challenge to us all, for each must examine themselves in this matter. Are we living under the directive will of God for our life and doing the best we can do, or are we living under the permissive will of God and getting the second best life? We have one walk through this world and we had better make the best of it. Samson is a picture of what might have been – but was not, because he didn’t walk with the Lord.

JUDGES 14:1-20

1 And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. **2** And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. **3** Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. **4** But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. **5** Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. **6** And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done. **7** And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. **8** And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. **9** And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion. **10** So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. **11** And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. **12** And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments: **13** But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. **14** And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle. **15** And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson’s wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father’s house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? is it not so? **16** And Samson’s wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? **17** And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people. **18** And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion? and he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle. **19** And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father’s house. **20** But Samson’s wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. There was no reason given in the text for Samson to go down to Timnath, a Philistine centre. It may be he went to sharpen tools at their iron works, but this is not mentioned. The writer notes that the Philistines “had dominion over Israel”, and reminds us that freedom was lost for God’s people and Samson may have been required to go down to Timnath to pay his taxes-tribute money.

Given his behaviours there my suspicions are aroused. He is certainly looking around and taking in the sights, especially the female ones. Just as Hamor and Shechem, and later Balak had identified that sexuality was the best way to destroy the nation Israel, so the Philistines recognized that intermarriage with Israel would be the best way to destroy their national integrity and spiritual power to resist them. Genesis 34:20-23, Numbers 25:1ff, 1 Corinthians 10:6-14.

Cross cultural marriages were expressly forbidden to Israel, and this prohibition remains in force today for all believers; we are simply told not to marry unbelievers. Exodus 34:16, Deuteronomy 7:3-4. The writer is trying to put the best spin on Samson's actions. God didn't need any "occasion" to judge the Philistines, but sadly the people of Israel did need something to bring them back to the place where they saw them as enemies! Samson's actions will raise the consciousness of Israel back to the reality of the Angelic Conflict, but he will suffer personally and greatly through this. This good purpose will be achieved by Samson's foolishness, so God does indeed use his actions. Romans 8:28.

Julius Caesar said, "I came, I saw, I conquered", but for Samson we could say, "he went, he saw, he was conquered". Samson lusts for this girl, and is obsessed by what he lusts after. He lacks the ability to moderate or challenge his lust patterns with logic and even self preservation, and for this he is to be blamed, for we are all challenged to confront and deal with our lusts. 1 Corinthians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:22. It is a matter of physical survival to be able to confront lust.

God will use this incident and bring judgment for the Philistines out of it, but it is not the best path for Samson, or his parents. He breaks their heart over time, and his life does not produce the spiritual revival for his nation that is needed, even though the final "body count" of the enemy is high. The enemy can breed another generation of fighting men over time, but had there been spiritual and religious revival the enemy could not have come back as they did within a few years. Only David will achieve this by leading large numbers to saving faith, and entering them into his bodyguard.

Verses 5 – 6. Samson goes back down to Timnath to assist in the grape harvest and his parents are also with him this time. He may be indentured labour, or be paying tribute money by his labour. He is a member of the "conquered people of God" and so may be required to work as slave labour for his masters the Philistines. On the way a young lion attacks the party. For some reason his parents do not see the attack at all and he does not tell them about it. (Maybe it occurred in the night). He kills the lion by breaking its jaw and tearing it apart as a strong man could do to a baby goat. This great feat of strength is the first example of the Lord coming upon him to fulfil a purpose.

Verses 7 – 9. The writer is spinning the story well, building each element that will later emerge as significant, and showing us the character of Samson in the process. He is a likeable fellow and we can see him doing the things he does here with a relaxed confidence. He is not put off by a swarm of bees any more than he is by a lion attack. He also is a man who thinks of doing good things for his parents and brings them the honey. He keeps all this to himself, and he has a plan, for even at this time he is a teller of riddles and he is constantly testing his own mind to come up with clever riddles.

He lives the life of a care free farmer and wit, but he is not prayerful, nor is he focused upon what the Lord is doing, nor seeking to be doing with his life. We are urged to be alert to the leading of the Lord, and alert to the attacks of the spiritual enemy. Samson is alert to neither and concerns himself with getting the beautiful girl alone.

Verses 10 – 14. Samson throws a bachelor party for thirty of his male "friends" to celebrate his wedding. These are the "friends of the bride-groom" and the tradition was to make merry together with the bride's male relatives before the wedding and then carry on after the bride arrived and the marriage was consummated. As we will discover he has many "friends" from amongst the Philistines of this place. He has been partying here before. The raucous gathering, probably alcohol fuelled, tells us that Samson is a party boy at heart and his parents are trying to please him, rather than rejecting his choice of evil. He is not living as the Nazarite rites prescribed and the words of the angel are not mentioned again.

Samson is full of bravado and good spirit, and tells a riddle, but his competitive nature is seen when he sets very high stakes for the winner. All high stakes gambling creates ill feeling, and even murder if the stakes are high enough. He is determined to out play them at their own game, and he nearly succeeds, but such a sport is not worthy of a man of God. He has no business partying with such men let alone making such dangerous deals with them. **Proverbs 1:7-19.**

The costs of the winner's purse here is significant; tens of thousands of dollars in value. It was a dumb thing to do with these enemies of Israel, for it placed them in a situation where they had to win against their conquered neighbour Samson. They must kill him if they lose, but he doesn't think about that – this is why such "bragadachio" is nearly always fatal to a quiet/humble and useful life. In Homer's works we see the heroes of these "Philistine like" peoples doing this sort of thing all the time, and each battle of wits leads to a battle with weapons, and numbers of good and bad men die. The great Chinese general Sun Tzu in his "Art of War" states that it is always advisable to give the enemy a way out of any battle lest they fight to the last man and overcome you in the end.

Samson has placed the Philistines in a place where they will not be good losers. They were a culture that did not know the meaning of lose; only of death with honour. They specialized in the blood feud. Samson is unthinking and fun loving, and that is **stupid** for a believer, and he will prove to be a carnal believer throughout, and a lesson to us all because of that. He enjoys the sport of the gamble and the wit of the riddle, and has no plan to achieve the Lord's will through it at this point. He is bumbling into trouble on all fronts through his lack of prayer and thought. We are not here on earth to play with our opportunities, but to seek the Lord's path and walk it faithfully – Samson just wants a good time!

Verses 15 – 17. Samson has set them seven days to solve the riddle and they cannot. It is a good one and he has them stumped, but he has not thought about their culture or their ruthless nature, or just ignores unpleasant things. They cannot allow this Israelite to win. They are happy to nullify his fighting against them by a marriage alliance with him, but they will never treat him as an equal, nor recognize him as one. The hatred of Satan's people for God's people is

total, but Samson will not recognize this fact. They do not ever want to recognize his equality, nor allow for genuine respect. They despise all who stand for God and seek relationships with believers only where they can abuse and use.

Their true nature and their true attitudes towards Samson emerge on the seventh day, when they cannot solve the riddle. They are direct with the girl Samson has married. Now the wedding party continues through this time, but the marriage has been consummated, and they are now living together above the place where the party is going on. The girl's character is now under test. Will she seek her new husband's support against her kinsmen and previous neighbours, or will she betray her husband?

The Philistine elder's message to her is clear. She is either to help them win the riddle or they will burn her house down with her entire extended family within it. Their words prove that this is not the sort of family to have married into, and nor is this culture one you can have "fellowship" with. She has been moaning all week about the riddle anyway, and Samson ought to have seen that he had married a beautiful but fatal lemon, and headed for the nearest Israelite hills!

He needs to run, but he loves this devious play actor. She keeps moaning and nagging and finally on the last day he relents and tells her the truth about the riddle. He is a fool in this, as her previous behaviour indicates she is not on his side at all, but with her people. He has proved the truth of Shakespeare's later comment, "Love (read "lusts") doth make fools of us all". No-one who moans and groans about everything is worthy of our time, and we must never wake up next to such people, for they will game play until they die! Psychologists joke about such women and men, saying, "If you want to live forever marry such a person. You won't live forever, but it will certainly feel like it."

The elders of the girl's city make it clear that they have organized and approved this wedding for political purposes and they intend to win the riddle. They ask, "Have you invited us to this wedding to make us poor?" They have accepted the contests involved in the riddle, but they now are worried about the serious cost of losing it.

Verses 16 – 17. This was the time for the wife to speak honestly with her new husband, but this girl is a game player, like the men of her city. She play acts and deceives Samson. He is foolish here, but this woman is a practised courtesan and plays the sexual-tease game well. **Proverbs 2:16-19, 6:23-35, 7:1-23.** There is a basic psychological rule of thumb in relationships, and it states that if any man or woman does the "weep and wail" routine to get you to change your mind, run for the hills immediately! Do not doubt this advice – it is biblical – and we will see the cost of not running.

All behaviourally or emotionally manipulative behaviours indicate a game player and such people will "play with your head" over time and always prove unfaithful to you in the end. Such people are manipulators of emotion and will play with your head if you stay with them. Leave such people immediately, certainly do not ever marry them! Leave them to a poor fool who wants their head played with for the rest of their lives!

This woman is dangerous to Samson's psychological health, because she lies to him rather than seeking his support against her neighbours. She weeps and wails and he tells her that he hasn't even told the riddle to his own mother and father, and so why would he tell her. Her response is to weep the entire seven days! Samson should ask for a refund of the dowry here, call the wedding off on the basis of marital infidelity, and leave town, but he weakens and trusts the woman. She immediately tells the answer to the riddle to her people, proving where her loyalty lies. She is not married to Samson to become an Israelite, but for him to be controlled by her people and be ruled by them.

Verses 18 – 20. The men wait until the sun is setting and come to the house with the answer to his riddle, and he roundly tells them that they have learned the truth by deceit with his "wife" who he now knows is unfaithful to him. The truth of this woman's nature and that of her city is soon seen, for within a short time she is given in marriage to one of the men who was at the wedding feast pretending to be Samson's friend. The indication here is of sexual infidelity by this woman well before her marriage to Samson's wedding guest.

Samson pays the riddle off by killing thirty Philistines in another coastal town and bringing the goods to the men of Timnath. He pays them in the goods taken from their own people. It is a foretaste of things to come and they probably know that this has occurred and so he is unwelcome in their town again. He lives with his parents back in the hills, but no mention is made of his seeking the Lord's face in prayer, nor visiting Shiloh to seek the Lord's face through the priesthood and the sacrifices that need to be offered.

He sits and he stewes over what has happened to him and the lost girl. It is this pride based self centeredness that is his weakness, and will open the door to such wasted opportunities later. We waste all time we spend in self centred agony over the hurt we feel we have faced unfairly. The Lord commands us through Peter to cast all our cares upon Him, and we are to do so, for only through worship is self centeredness resolved.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Samson could have done so much more than he did. His last act was heroic, but also tragic in its results for him. He becomes the figure or symbol of the life that might have been great, but only ends in tragic greatness. He will be "eyeless in Gaza", and yet his name means sunlight. He was meant to bring deliverance, but lacked the spiritual stature to bring it sustainably. He dies in service, but has spent most of his life living in self centred pleasure.

He dies in the Lord but did not live up to the possibilities that his parents opened the door for him to enter into. The great promise of his parent's good parenting style did not become a great life, because of his will and his decisions. He was

ruled by his sexual pleasures and so he did not achieve what he could have. Let us heed the lessons of Samson's life and choose life with God and reject the temptations to stray into sexual or other temptations in order that we might both live well and die well for the Lord.

2. When a couple do not trust each other with the deepest secrets of their hearts they ought not to marry. Our marriage partner ought to be our closest companion and confidante.

If a couple do not trust each other they need to assess their relationship well before they seek marriage. Any "trust issue" **must end a courtship before it ends the sanity of both or one of the partners.** No couple should advance into marriage if they have no trust, and if one or both moan and wail all the time. If a married couple do not trust each other they need to seek serious marital help – as it is the path of divorce unless fully resolved by spiritual growth by both.

3. The malice of Satan's people is consistently evil towards God's people, and we are to expect this to continue throughout our life. Do not seek the close company of the devil's people believer or you will be betrayed and abused by them. Satan's people seek to destroy Christian witness and life style and never will be any different, and we are not to be "unequally yoked" together in sexual or business relationships with anyone who is not a keen born again believer seeking the Lord's face as earnestly as we are.

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

Samson is child like, entitled, self centred, and I suspect narcissistic in his thinking, and does not quickly see the reality of the evil of others. He is focused upon externals rather than the spiritual realities, and so has no discernment. He is easily swayed by the good looks of an evil woman and if she looks lovely he thinks her character is good. His first wife is only a minor player to the one who is to come in the next chapter, but this first player has worked her last evil against Samson, and she will be eliminated awfully by her own people. He has failed to see the depth of the contempt of the Philistines for him as an Israelite. Ignorance is never bliss, it is just stupidity!

He still thinks he can return to his wife and live with her in carefree joy. He has forgotten that she betrayed his trust and was not honest to him about the riddle, or the threat of her neighbours. He has not seen the reality of her easy sexuality that allows her to go calmly from his bed to another's within days. He has not seen that she is a game player, who can weep and wail on cue.

He will be rudely awakened to this reality and take vengeance upon the people of Timnath, but these acts are still small scale and petty; they are not the acts of a mighty deliverer, and he still fails to seek the Lord's face and discover the real path he is to walk and walk it consistently. God gives him great strength and great victory with the jaw bone of an ass, and then water from the bone, but these great miracles fail to move him beyond his self centred path.

He still does not go to Shiloh and seek the Lord's face at the tabernacle and get his path really straight before the Lord his God. Hebrews 12:12-13. Great power and great miracles do not make for great service for the Lord, only seeking the Lord's path opens the door to true and lasting greatness in service for the Lord our God.

JUDGES 15:1-20

1 But it came to pass within a while after, in the time of wheat harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid; and he said, I will go in to my wife into the chamber. But her father would not suffer him to go in. 2 And her father said, I verily thought that thou hadst utterly hated her; therefore I gave her to thy companion: is not her younger sister fairer than she? take her, I pray thee, instead of her. 3 And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines, though I do them a displeasure. 4 And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. 5 And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives. 6 Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they answered, Samson, the son in law of the Timnite, because he had taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire. 7 And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. 8 And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam. 9 Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they answered, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. 11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. 12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. 13 And they spake unto him, saying, No; but we will bind thee fast, and deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee. And they bound him with two new cords, and

brought him up from the rock. 14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands. 15 And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. 16 And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. 17 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand, and called that place Ramathlehi. 18 And he was sore athirst, and called on the LORD, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? 19 But God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day. 20 And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 2. Some months after the last incident at the wedding Samson returns to Philistia with a gift for his wife of a young kid goat. This was a customary gift for the day, Genesis 38:17, and is his way of saying he is sorry for his absence, and is seeking reconciliation and fellowship. This is pathetic given the treatment he received from his wife during the wedding. He is besotted by her still, yet he has sulked up in the hills for many months before returning, so he betrays that he has the same sort of emotionally driven nature as her.

He tries to enter the house but his ex-father in law prevents him entering and then gives him the news. It is so casually spoken that it betrays the loose sexual morality of these people, and the offer of the younger sister indicates that women are simply objects to these people. The whole thing is insulting, and it is told by the writer this way, and is meant to be felt that way. The Lord has allowed this to happen to Samson to try to get through to him the ultimate evil nature of these people, and he does react to this news properly, but only for a limited time.

Verses 3 – 5. Samson's words here indicate that he had previously felt well disposed towards these people; he has certainly not seen them as enemy. He had respected them and valued, or admired their culture, and especially admired and enjoyed their sexually liberated women. He speaks as if all is changed now and that he is going to punish the Philistines for their evil towards him. The corner seems to have been turned, yet have the scales truly fallen from his eyes? This man is emotional in his thought patterns and sadly he will be back lusting after one of these evil women again. He doesn't pray, nor does he seek godly counsel at Shiloh – he builds no altar, and so he will be on one soon...

Samson's scheme is not an approved RSPCA scheme. He kills all the foxes by this means of destruction that he visits upon the Philistines. It is the time of the early harvest, so the grape and other harvests are yet to come in and the weather is very dry. Samson is a good farmer, at ease with bee hives and with the natural predators of the food of his people, the little foxes. He catches several hundred foxes, keeps them on his farm, and then on one day he ties brush grasses to their bushy tails and sends them one after the other into the fields of the Philistines where they burn the fields, and themselves to ashes. The entire Philistine crop is lost along a vast swath of their coastal farming region.

Verses 6 – 8. The Philistine lords have only one thought and that is avenging themselves upon those who have brought this calamity upon them. They burn the house of Samson's ex-wife, and she, her father, and entire family are all killed. These people have been following orders in enticing Samson, but the orders have backfired, and they pay the price. Their elders had to give permission for the girl to marry Samson, this son of Dan, and they were actively involved in the riddle at the wedding, so they have taken great interest in Samson from the beginning. You must understand that Satan is not loyal to his best servants, but betrays them in a heartbeat once they have outlived their usefulness. The only thing Satan's followers can be sure of is that they will be killed without mercy once their job is done.

The Philistine mob gathers outside the Timnite's house and burns him and his family alive. They are still rejoicing in this as Samson sees them doing the evil, and he waits for the mob outside the city and tells them that although they have avenged his humiliation and their own judgment, he will still take vengeance upon them for their barbarity. He then attacks them and slaughters them in large numbers, piling up their bodies high around him.

The phrase "hip and thigh" refers to the powerful seat of the warrior, the hip joint being the one that carry the force of every thrust in battle and the thigh being the most powerful muscle in the body. It is a phrase that means he slew them in strength that none could withstand. He is like Achilles of the Mycenaean peoples (who are probably related to the Philistines). Having slain many of these people he heads back up into the Shephelah and hides away in a cleft in the rock at Etam, possibly on the borders of Judah and Simeon in the Negev lands.

Verses 9 – 13. The Philistines head up into Judah and make camp there with the intention of destroying crops and cities in revenge for the attacks of Samson and his destruction of their crops and honour. The men of Judah are beaten carnal men, recognizing the rulership of the Philistines over them and content as vassals of this superior force. They quickly locate Samson and speak with him and make it clear that they will hand him over to the enemy. Samson is concerned that they have been told he is to be taken "dead or alive". Once again we confront the cowardice of Judah before these fierce pagan warriors and the self centeredness of Samson who makes the men of Judah swear that they will not kill him but hand him over alive.

No attempt is made to raise an army and fight, or more importantly, to speak of the Lord here. It is a sad commentary on how the men who descended from Caleb and other great warriors are seeing themselves as vassals only, not free men.

They have accepted their status as servants of pagans, and do not seek the Lord's deliverance. Samson allows himself to be bound with two new ropes tightly so he cannot move and more like a parcel than a man he is carried back to the camp of the Philistines.

Verses 14 – 17. As the men of Judah are seen carrying Samson towards them, the entire Philistine force bursts into song and screams of joy and exultation. They mean to cut him to pieces once he is delivered to them, but the Lord has other ideas. The spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson as he lies helpless before his enemy and he breaks the new rope as if it is burnt flax and he picks up the new jaw bone of a butchered ass (possibly a sacrifice, rather than food) that is lying on the ground and attacks the enemy force killing one "thousand" (Hebrew word here is "eleph" or group) of men. He sings a poetic ode of victory as he slays them. Once again the parallels to the men of Homer's "Iliad" stand out. We can see Achilles or Hector doing this sort of thing. This firmly dates this narrative to the right time period.

Now we have already been told that there are three thousand (Eleph – companies of) men of Judah there all armed and ready to capture Samson, yet they do not move to join in the slaughter of their enemy. At this point they see the Philistines as their lords and their protectors, not their enemies, and it will take a number of acts by Samson to change the mental attitude of his people back to seeing the truth about their pagan overlords. Samson kills all the men he can and then in exhaustion throws the jaw bone away. He renames the place, Ramath-Lehi, meaning the height of Lehi. This indicates that he slew the Philistines from a small hill upon which he stood and which they attacked.

Verses 18 – 20. His very self centred way of thinking is portrayed in his excuse for a "prayer" in verse eighteen. Of course the Lord is not going to let him die of thirst after he has defeated the Philistines. He cries out for water, rather than calmly walking into the Philistine's now empty camp and taking their water. His prayer is totally self centred and emotional, but the Lord answers his prayer in grace, just as he answers our prayers in grace and mercy, not according to what we deserve.

He receives a great miracle in that water emerges from the place where the jaw bone stuck in the ground where he threw it down. It was as though the water emerged from the jaw bone itself. He drank all the water he needed and his spirit restored and he leaves the field of battle in triumph with his enemies dead around the small hill. As a result of this feat of battle he is a judge of his people for twenty years and they come to him to resolve issues in dispute, but he does not lift them up spiritually and restore godly worship. What could have been? The writer wants us to keep thinking of this.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. We can be made fools by our love for inappropriate people. Satan's main weapon has been sexual temptation from the beginning and those who do not guard themselves in this area will fall into gross sin and their witness will be destroyed. Let us guard ourselves from immorality, for it destroys the body and the soul.
2. The malice of Satan towards all men is not to be underestimated. He hates mankind and will kill his servants with pleasure. He is an angelic being and so despises the inferior status of man. He uses and abuses his own people and then discards them. Let us remember the malice of this evil being and never be foolish enough to trust his people, nor drop our guard against him or his demonic forces.

REFLECTIONS UPON PRAYER

1. We may know the provision of God but we must communicate with Him in order to obtain this provision.
 - a) Prayer is the believer's means of communicating with God.
 - b) The Bible is God's way of communicating with man.
2. Promises Involving Prayer
 - a) Matthew 21:22 We should ask believing.
 - b) Matthew 18:19 The power of corporate prayer.
 - c) Psalm 116:1, 2 God is always available to hear our prayer.
 - d) Isaiah 65:24 God will answer while we are yet praying.
 - e) Matthew 7:7 We are commanded to pray.
 - f) John 14:13-14 We can ask for anything in His name.
 - g) Philippians 4:6 The prayer should be with thanksgiving.
 - h) 1 Thessalonians 5:17 We should pray without ceasing.
 - i) Hebrews 4:16 We can come boldly to the throne of Grace.
3. Prayer Divided into 4 Segments
 - a) Confession of sins (1 John 1:9)
 - b) Thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
 - c) Intercession for others (Ephesians 6:18)
 - d) Petitions for one's own needs (Hebrews 4:16)

4. Power of Prayer

- a) Individual - Elijah and the burnt offering (1 Kings 18:36-39)
- b) Corporate - the release of Peter from prison (Acts 12:1-18)

5. One Prayer that could not be Answered The prayer of our Lord on the Cross (Psalm 22:1-18)

6. To Whom are Prayers Addressed?

- a) Directed to the Father - (Matthew 6:5-9)
 - b) In the name of the Son - (Hebrews 7:25)
 - c) In the power of the Spirit - (Romans 8:26-27)
- The Son (Jesus) and Spirit are interceding for us.

7. Prayers can be Divided into Petition and Desire

- a) Petition - What you ask God for (e.g. a new car).
- b) Desire - The desire behind the petition (e.g. happiness because you have a new car).

8. Four Possible Combinations

- a) Petition answered - Desire not answered. Psalm 106:15 - The quails of the Exodus generation. 1 Samuel 8:5 - A King to reign over Israel.
- b) Petition not answered - Desire answered. Genesis 18:23 - The preservation of Sodom. 2 Corinthians 12:7 - Removal of the thorn in Paul's side.
- c) Petition answered - Desire answered. 1 Kings 18:36-37 - Elijah requests fire for the offering. Luke 23:42 -The penitent thief's prayer. Type c) represents the perfect prayer.
- d) Petition not answered - Desire not answered. Type d) unanswered prayer has 8 main reasons which are shown in paragraph 9.

9. Reasons for Unanswered Prayer

- a) Lack of belief (Matthew 21:22)
- b) Selfishness (James 4:3)
- c) Unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18)
- d) Lack of compassion (Proverbs 21:13)
- e) Pride and self righteousness (Job 35:12-13)
- f) Lack of filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18)
- g) Lack of obedience (1 John 3:22)
- h) Not in the Divine will (1 John 5:14)

Most of the reasons for unanswered prayer, is some form of sin in the life, which can be solved by confession of known sins as per paragraph 3 a) under the concept of 1John 1:9.

10. Intercessory Prayer

- a) This is one of the four factors in a prayer, which are:-
 - i) Confession of sins
 - ii) Thanksgiving
 - iii) Intercession
 - iv) Own needs.
- b) The power of intercessory prayer is taught in (1 Kings 18:42-46) the principle being found in (James 5:16-18)
- c) The power of prevailing prayer is shown in (Acts 12)
- d) The prayer for the unbeliever (Romans 10:1)
- e) Prayer for an unknown believer (Colossians 1:3-11)
- f) Prayer for the known believer (Ephesians 1:15-23)

NOTES

CHAPTER 16**INTRODUCTION**

Any weakness of the Old Sin Nature must be well guarded against or they will unhinge us totally over time. All of us have an Old Sin Nature, inherited from our parents, and within this part of our genetic inheritance there is an area of weakness and an area of strength. Its origin goes back to the fall of mankind with our ancestors Adam and Eve. It is the sinful consequence of the Fall. The weakness area predisposes us to sin more easily in some areas rather than in others, and the area of strength may predispose us to an aspect of asceticism or legalism that will lead us away from genuine worship and truth if we follow it. Our area of weakness leads to sin, while our area of strength leads us to false religion.

The Old Sin Nature is always Satan's potential ally within us all. If we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit we control the Old Sin Nature, and walk in the spirit rather than the flesh, but if we give way to our old lust patterns we destroy ourselves. Samson is a man who shows what happens when we lose the battle against our own Old Sin Nature. His weakness is narcissistic self centeredness and lust for sexual pleasure, and he falls again here in this chapter, and he finally dies as a result.

His death is heroic, but tragically pathetic, for he could have done so much more for his people had he simply controlled his lust pattern of behaviour. In this chapter we meet the historic woman most associated with cool evil; the Philistine temptress Delilah, and Samson comes for the last time to Gaza.

JUDGES 16:1-31

1 Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her. **2** And it was told the Gazites, saying, Samson is come hither. And they compassed him in, and laid wait for him all night in the gate of the city, and were quiet all the night, saying, In the morning, when it is day, we shall kill him. **3** And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron. **4** And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. **5** And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver. **6** And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee. **7** And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. **8** Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. **9** Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known. **10** And Delilah said unto Samson, Behold, thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: now tell me, I pray thee, wherewith thou mightest be bound. **11** And he said unto her, If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. **12** Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liars in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread. **13** And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. **14** And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web. **15** And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. **16** And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; **17** That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. **18** And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. **19** And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. **20** And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. **21** But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house. **22** Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. **23** Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. **24** And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. **25** And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. **26** And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. **27** Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. **28** And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord God,

remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. 31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. Samson enters again into the enemy's stronghold in Gaza. It is a really dumb thing to do, for he tempts judgment, by even entering this town, for he is well known, having killed large numbers of these people by this time. Is it arrogance and bravado that drives Samson to this point, or just sexual lust, or is it both? Is it that he thought as they thought, and they welcomed "champions" and worshipped them, even if they had been enemies in the past? We cannot know the heart of this man, except to say that he is thoroughly deceived within his heart and mind, and weak willed even though strong of body.

I have seen many men in my counselling practise over the years with what I refer to as "James Bond Syndrome", and I think that may be something like Samson's problem here. By this I mean they believe they are invincible and unable to be killed or caught by jealous husbands of the women they seduce. They fornicate, take recreational drugs, and drink alcohol and believe that they will get away with their sins forever, but the day of reckoning comes eventually and they suffer greatly, as do all around them.

Samson's evil this time is to enter into a sexual relationship with a very cool and evil prostitute who has sex with him to enable her men folk to kill him. This is most likely a sacred prostitute of the Philistines, as they worshipped Astarte the goddess of fertility, and did so by sexual acts. The evil of this action of Samson is two fold; first he violates the divine institution of marriage by fornication, and adultery, and then he violates his faith by entering into a relationship with a totally evil pagan fertility priestess. Satan hasn't changed his tactics – "sexual liberation" = slavery and death always!

Samson certainly is protected by God here and he out thinks and fools the guards left to hold the gates against him. They think he will stay all night in the prostitute's house/temple precinct but he rises at midnight and quietly leaves the city, carrying the gates and the locking beam with him. He carries them all the way to a small hill by the road to Hebron. It is a great feat of strength, but it is wasted strength and foolhardy courage. It is a drunken teenager's act rather than that of a man who is called to liberate his people from the bondage of these people. He should not be having sex with them at all, and he certainly shouldn't be wasting time and risking his life for a night of sex with a prostitute!

Verses 4 – 9. He is a wanderer this man. He is not operating as a judge and staying in a place where the people can find him and use him, but that may be because the Philistines are after him! Having said that, there is no reason to head into enemy territory and watch the ladies in the fields again, but that is what he does. He should be raising a guerrilla army in the hills, not wandering in valleys chatting up beautiful pagan girls, but that is what he is apparently doing regularly. There is no reason for him to be in the valley of Sorek except to "check out" and lust after the pagan girls! He ought to be avoiding the Philistine areas except when he is going to kill them. This is what we now call addictive behaviour, and he is acting like all who get addicted to pornography; he lusts for more and more.

He sees a beautiful girl in this place called Delilah. Her name means the "weak or pining one". This may be a significant clue to her nature; she appeared to be weak and vulnerable, but she was actually made of steel. Many strong men are drawn to women who appear to be weak, docile, fragile and vulnerable, when actually they are just rampantly evil and solid steel personality disorders looking for a fool to abuse for the rest of his life. This girl is ruthless and she seduces Samson, and has sex with him, and hooks him into her web of control. He will do anything for her and he is blinded to the reality of his situation. God is very gracious to us all, but the days of grace and mercy eventually end.....

The Lord protects us in sinful situations up to a point, but Samson has been pushing his luck for years now and the Lord now leaves him with the consequences of this foolishness, although he will have at least four opportunities to see the truth and flee even now. He has lots of opportunities to escape this woman but he stays in the place of danger. Let no person blame the Lord for Samson's awful plight later in this chapter. Proverbs 2:10-19, 5:3-20, 7:4-23, 22:14, 23:27, 1 Corinthians 10:6-13.

The Philistine Lords are sure that there is a secret to Samson's strength, and they think in terms of their own witches with their potions and spells. They offer Delilah a significant amount of wealth to betray Samson. This girl is another play actor like his first wife, but at least she is being paid to do the deed. The value of the silver is significant. 1100 pieces of silver is equivalent to twenty years wages for an ordinary person in the ancient world. It is worth while for Delilah to betray Samson, although still she could earn more as his support and companion, for he could have won for her far more loot than she is offered here had she joined him and fought her people.

She is direct with Samson, and he should have had a déjà vu experience here, as his first wife was behaving this same way. Sadly he doesn't get it, and from my clinical experience, men ruled by lust and drawn to these sorts of women tend to replace one dysfunctional one with another! Samson will suffer greatly because of his refusal to face the facts of this woman's evil. She nags and nags and nags to get the truth about the secret to his strength, and each time she "yells

her warning” that the enemy are upon him is “a tiny clue” that Samson should get, but he doesn’t. Each time he tells her something false it is applied, the enemy attack, and the warning is yelled, and he kills more Philistines, but he doesn’t kill Delilah as he should. There are always plenty of these woman or men about, but they are addictive, and Samson is hooked on her as well as the alcohol, drugs and sex that she will offer....

He has evidence of her treachery, for only she is told each thing that might make him weak, so Samson has the knowledge to identify her as the source of the attacks in the night, but he doesn’t act. He foolishly believes that this girl is different, and if he loves her passionately enough she will relax into his arms and soul. He believes she will truly love him as he believes he is entitled to be loved. His narcissistic sense of “entitlement” will undo him. Ask yourself, why would a woman who loved you want to bind you and cause you harm? Why doesn’t Samson get this? Satan truly blinds the minds of those who he has enslaved, and this man is well bound mentally and emotionally by playing with evil, well before his hair is cut.

Verses 10 – 14. Time and again he fools the Philistines, but each time his resistance is being lowered by Delilah, and she is getting nearer the goal of all her scheming. She is working on wearing down his resistance and she is winning, for he is getting tired of the game, and is lulled into a false sense of security with her through her cries of warning each time the enemy come. He must know within himself that she is the one who has called them in each time and is behind it all, but he ignores the truth and satisfies himself in her arms. She uses sex as her hook and weapon and she is skilful and Samson wants her sexually, and in his focus on sex he loses all else.

Verses 15 – 19. The ultimate challenge she gives is “prove you love me by doing this”. Anyone who ever hears these words needs to run very fast in the opposite direction, for such a statement indicates a game player and a dangerous partner who seeks to abuse and use, not love and adore. The words of this woman Delilah are to be heard and remembered, and whenever anyone sounds like this woman, you are urged to run for the hills! This is pure evil, driven by money lust, where her sexuality is being used as a prostitute uses herself.

Samson has played the fool with sex and he is being played for a fool here, but the game here is fatal. He trusts her, when all the evidence is that he cannot trust her, and so he is shaven and captured easily. She calls the lords of the Philistines to her house and they bring the silver for her as a reminder of the stakes that are being played for. She doesn’t miss a heart beat and nurses Samson to sleep on her lap, possibly drugged in his wine, and he is undone. Getting drugged/drunk is always condemned in the Scriptures, for it renders you useless in the Angelic Conflict.

Verses 20 – 24. Samson has been so long away from the Lord, and so long in the company of evil men and women that he didn’t even know that the Lord was not with him any longer. This is one of the saddest verses in the Old Testament, for it shows the low state this great man had sunk to, and the evil men who now pounce upon him will show him the mercy he showed their compatriots in the past. He is bound and has his eyes put out immediately. They are taking no chances with him this time and carry him away blind to the city of Gaza.

Delilah is left to enjoy her wealth without any man snoring beside her. He is bound with brass chains and shackles and made to grind wheat like an ox. He pulls the lever of the wheat grinder making flour all day for his enemies and they mock him daily for his stupidity in being caught so easily by the guiles of a money hungry woman. Like will always capture like; and every personality disorder has a parallel one in their partner. Feel no sadness for either, for each of them are equally guilty of bad choices. Samson’s lust for sex was matched by Delilah’s lust for money and money won. Love was never there at all, just deception on Delilah’s part, and fatal delusion on Samson’s part.

While this is happening his hair starts to grow again and the enemy do not notice this. They are the fools now. They are busy patting themselves on the back for their great coup in capturing Samson, their great enemy. They are so busy mocking him and praising their god that they do not see what is happening. It is always dangerous to celebrate victory while your enemy still lives. They are all very happy with the capture of Samson and the fact that their gods are, they think, proven superior to the God of Israel. They plan a great number of sacrifices and a great feast in the honour of their god for their victory over Samson. It would appear that this is about a year after Samson’s capture, possibly on a special pagan feast day for them.

Samson must have felt terrible about the things he heard around him, but not now for narcissistic reasons. I suspect the first of his self centeredness went out of his life when they poked his eyes out one by one, and the last was squeezed out each and every day he pulled the grinding wheel through that last terrible year of his life! This is a man who now knows that he has allowed the Lord his God to be mocked because of his sinful stupidity and evil behaviours.

He is now deeply saddened for what he has done, and what he has allowed to happen because of his stupidity. Simple sorrow at sin is not enough to be forgiven and restored to usefulness, for it may simply be sorrow that the person has been caught. Genuine sorrow and genuine repentance fully comprehends the impact of sin upon the Creator as well as the creature. His sorrow now is godly sorrow, and it works out to true repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10. In his genuine repentance he is fully restored to usefulness for one last action. He cannot be saved now, but he can still serve to death.

Verses 25 – 31. The pagans are all enjoying their celebration feast in the great temple of their god Dagon, and all the people are drunk and happy with their success. The drunken lords of the Philistines who are there, call for Samson to be brought to them, in order that they may mock him more thoroughly.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered a number of temples with two central pillars holding up the roof of Philistine temples. This one is particularly large as the writer will record that there are more people killed in the collapse of this building than in all Samson's life to date. This must be a building that holds hundreds of people on two levels and none found to date would hold this number. This is a vast crowd and they are all mocking this man who had caused them such grief, and now such light hearted fun. A young boy guides him by the hand to between the pillars and then is dismissed, and we all hope left the building.

Samson now prays his last prayer. It is a prayer of a contrite heart and repentant spirit. He knows he has failed through his life due to his sinful patterns; he makes no pathetic excuses for himself. He asks for the Lord to return once more to him and give him the strength he needs to deal with the mockers of God. He is not concerned about their mockery of him, but that his actions have allowed God to be mocked hurts him most deeply. He has the genuine fruit of repentance.

God's testimony to his forgiveness is evidenced by the answer He gives, and provides Samson will all the strength he needs to bring the entire temple down by pulling the two central pillars over and starting a chain reaction with all the pillars holding the building falling like nine pins. He is buried within the building with all the Philistines, but apparently the way the pillars fall his body is able to be found in the midst of the ruins, and his family come and take his body home to their family burial plot where he is laid alongside his father. His parents have died of a broken heart, for their son did not do what he could have done, but at least he died in a final act of judgment upon the enemies of God and His people.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. It is never too late to return to the Lord and be forgiven. This man is still alive and he knows that God hears his prayers, even though he has been foolish to an extreme. God hears our genuine prayers and while a person lives there is hope for them to repent of their evil and come back to God. Do not value sincerity, value truth and godliness!
2. Sexual sin is foolishness, for it mocks those caught in it, and enables pagans to mock God. Satan's main tool to destroy lives is adultery. Lust fuels further evils, and always ends in despair. Sustainable sexual pleasure is found only in a loving and faithful relationship of a right man and his right woman. Anything else is evil and will lead to death.
3. No-one gets away with their sins. Samson was feeling very pleased with himself right up until the moment he went to sleep on his lovers lap. He was dreaming of their next embrace, but awoke to find he was judged and mocked and his lover hated him. Deception is Satan's tool and we are easily deceived when we start to believe we are special enough to get away with sin; no-one ever does. A sense of entitlement to anything is a sign that the Old Sin Nature Pride centre is ruling the life and that person is heading for disaster.

REFLECTION UPON THE POWER OF THE OLD SIN NATURE

1. We are born with a nature, inherited from Adam, which is against God and prone to sin (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12).
2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race by physical birth (Psalm 51:5, 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).
3. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).
4. Names for the old sin nature:
 - a) Flesh - Galatians 5:16
 - b) Old Man - Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9
 - c) Carnal - Romans 7:14
 - d) Sin - Romans 5:12
 - e) Heart - Jeremiah 17:9
 - f) Member - Colossians 3:5.
5. The believer continues to have an old sin nature after salvation (1 John 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:1).
6. The believer under the control of the old sin nature is called carnal (Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
7. The old sin nature frustrates true production of the Christian life (Romans 7:15).
8. The old sin nature has two tendencies (Romans 6:6)
 - a) Area of weakness - pushes us towards lawlessness and sins (Hebrews 12:1)
 - b) Area of strength - pushes us towards asceticism and self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).
9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:56, Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

10. Victory over the old sin nature is by achieved by considering your old life dead, surrendering to God, confessing sin and relying upon the filling of the Spirit (Romans 6:6,11, Colossians 3:9-10).

TRUE REPENTANCE

1. Two words are translated repentance in the New Testament:-

a) Metanoia - META - to change , NOIA - the mind, which means to change one's opinion or mind about something or someone.

b) Meta Melamai - to feel sorry for - an emotional reaction because of acts undertaken.

2. Repentance in salvation is to change one's attitude toward the person and work of Christ. (Luke 13:3,5, 15:7, 10, 16:30, 31, Acts 17:30, 31, 20:21, Romans 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9)

3. Repentance is used in salvation mainly for the Jews. The Jews had seen Christ as a great teacher, a wise man, a prophet. They repented and now recognised him as the Son of God. In the case of the Gentiles, the word believe is used. (Acts 16:31) as they had no previous ideas about the person of Christ.

4. The Fruit of Metamelamai, such as penance and sorrow does not save. e.g. Judas repented of his actions and went to eternal damnation.

5. However, "Godly sorrow" works to produce true repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)

6. The Holy Spirit is responsible for repentance in salvation. (1 Corinthians 2:14, John 16:8-11) It convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment.

7. The Believer is told to repent from dead works or human good.

8. When God repents it is symbolic (Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, Judges 2:18, 1 Samuel 15:35, Jeremiah 15:6, Amos 7:3, 6, Hebrews 7:21)

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiveness is by the death of Christ (Matthew 26:28, Revelation 1:5)

2. Divine forgiveness is to all who believe in Christ (Acts 10:43, Acts 16:31)

3. The penalty of sin was paid by Christ on the cross. (Hebrews 9:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21)

4. When a believer sins his fellowship with God is disrupted. God forgives these sins upon confession and cleanses from the unknown sins in the believer's life as well as known sins. (1 John 1:9)

5. Jesus Christ is our propitiation. (1 John 2:1,2)

6. In human forgiveness we are told to forgive others even as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). This can only be accomplished by the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:22,23)

7. Steps towards restoration of fellowship

[a] Examine yourself for genuineness of motivation. [2 Corinthians 14:5]

[b] Act on what you see [Romans 4:7-8]

[c] Deal with any sin by confession. [1 John 1:9, Psalm 66:18]

[d] Forget the sin which you have confessed. Do not proceed into a pattern of guilt.[Philippians 3:13-14, Psalm 103:10-12]

[e] Resume your active spiritual walk. Avoid areas where you might be tempted by the sin which so easily besets us. [Hebrews 12:12-13]

[f] Be reconciled to others once you have been reconciled to God. [James 5:16]

[g] Get moving and grow up. [2 Peter 2:17-18]

CHAPTER 17**INTRODUCTION**

The worship of the pagan gods was conducted in temples built for the pleasure of the participants of the religion, but also there were rituals that were acted out in the home using small shrines containing statues of the gods and goddesses. These rituals involved prayers, and offerings of bread and sweet cakes and wine. The corporate worship in the temples was often associated with eating, drinking and various sexual acts, while in the home it was quiet, dignified and prayerfully family oriented. REMEMBER - Satanic religions are not all awful and obviously sinful – he always caters for all tastes, the better to deceive all, each in their own area of weakness.

Satan is devious, deceptive, and clever beyond our thoughts, and has aspects of his religious experiences to suit all tastes. His goal is to distract mankind from their search for truth; to stop them finding the omnipotent God by getting them to concentrate on the small and pleasant things of nature worship. Satan knows that if people feel what they think is “holy”, “spiritual”, or are just filled with self satisfaction or pleasure, then they are less likely to search out the true God of the Bible. He makes his religions accessible, pleasant, distracting, and easy to practise.

He deceives men into thinking they are acceptable to God as they are, and he makes few onerous demands for most, just encourages them to be “sincere” and loving.... He also has his ascetic-legalistic branch of religion for those who are perverted in their thinking, and like to suffer. Some deceived people believe that they must be constrained in some way to “truly worship” and he has his legalistic systems for them. He caters for all tastes, and will do anything to stop men facing and finding the truth. His religion is that of the “broad way”, and it leads to destruction. God’s call is to the narrow way, but it alone leads to life. Isaiah 43:11, Matthew 7:13-14, John 8:12, 23-24, 31-44, 10:7-18, Acts 4:12, 16:31.

We move towards the sad ending of the book of the Judges. It is sad because judgment is coming, and it is so tragic, for it didn't have to occur, but the men and women of Israel chased after delusion – to their destruction. Bethlehem becomes the focal point of the book from here onwards. The moral and spiritual decline of the people towards the end of this period of history is terrible. The corruption grows to the point where open idolatry has become the norm and sexual immorality has become commonplace, and the perpetrators of violent rape and murder are protected by entire tribes.

This chapter introduces the story of Micah (not the biblical prophet of the same name) who practises idolatry in Mt Ephraim (Joshua's home place) and later leads astray the tribe of Dan (Samson's tribe). The first and the last judge before Samuel are thus united to highlight the moral and spiritual decline of the people. Once we have been told of the tribe of Dan's move north in chapter 18, the story will be told of the Levite and his concubine, and its aftermath. The last part of the book of Judges has then Bethlehem as it's focal point. Commentators call this section the “Bethlehem Trilogy”.

It is the place from where Messiah will come, but the prophecy of Micah is several hundred years away. At this point it is a seat of evil and apostasy. The death place of Rachel the idolater has become the hotbed of idolatry and immorality. The light will shine out from the deep darkness, and the Messiah will come from a place associated with great pain and suffering due to the evil that was covered up there. The first indication of the bright light that is to come from Bethlehem will be seen first in the third Bethlehem story, that of Ruth. Genesis 35:16-20, Judges 12:8-10, Ruth 1:1-2, Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1-8, 16.

JUDGES 17:1-13

1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. **2** And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son. **3** And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. **4** Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah. **5** And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. **6** In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. **7** And there was a young man out of Bethlehem Judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. **8** And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem Judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. **9** And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. **10** And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in. **11** And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. **12** And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. **13** Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. The Mosaic Law had made it very clear to Israel that they were to make no graven images and place them alongside the worship of the Lord. The pagans had their temples, but also their household shrines. Israelites were to have no household shrines, but were to worship in spirit and in truth with solemn prayers to the Lord and regular gatherings at the tabernacle.

Inter-tribal hostility and enemy action kept people from walking to Shiloh and worshipping there twice yearly as they were supposed to do, and so the people desired to be like the others around them and have their own household shrine. They still kidded themselves that these shrines were to worship the one true God of Israel, but the truth was different; they were steadily sliding away from God into idol worship, and were easily enticed into complete paganism from there. Exodus 20:1-4, Leviticus 26:1ff, Deuteronomy 4:16-25, 5:8, 7:5, 25, 12:3, 27:15. All pagan remnants of evil religion were to be destroyed; smashed to pieces.

Human beings are made to worship. Worship of the greater power is natural for mankind. We naturally look up at the heavens in awesomeness and when overwhelmed by the reality of our smallness we lift up our voice in prayer or praise. Even pagans do this. If you listen to some of the great evolutionists describing “nature” they literally deify it and they speak in loving and worshipful terms about the “evolved universe”. They reject God as the mind behind the universe, but they worship the universe instead. The bulk of mankind is deceived well by the enemy, but they still worship, it is just in Satan’s way and it leads to death and judgment through its fatal deception.

This deep yearning to worship the Creator or Creation may be expressed in a bone fide way, or in an inappropriate way. God established a proper way for worship to be done back at the gates of the Garden of Eden and it was to be done by blood sacrifice alone. Cain is the first man to reject God’s way and opt for a more pleasant and less blood soaked system, but satanic system. Man had to come to God only one way, and that was through the blood of an innocent sacrificial victim.

This spoke of sin, redemption, and all the great doctrines of salvation. Such worship alone was acceptable to God. Genesis 4:1-12. Anyone coming to God any other way than that which was laid down by God was not accepted. This absolute standard set the revelation of the Lord in the scriptures apart from all the religious counterfeits of Satan. We come by the blood shed on our behalf, not by any other means, and Satan’s main attack on truth through the centuries has been at this point. John 14:6.

Once again this chapter opens and we are back in the territory of Joshua, by Mt Ephraim. We are in the heart of the Israeli “Bible Belt”, yet something has happened over the last 200+ years. Micah (not the author of scripture and true prophet of God) is introduced to us as the man who stole and hid his parents 1100 shekels of silver. As we have seen, this was the price paid to Delilah and equates to about 20 years work, although it may be much more, given that the Levite is offered ten shekels of silver pay for each year of service, plus his clothing, food and board. It is a significant sum and the mother had dedicated it to the Lord. It is only then that we realise her “lord” that she speaks of may in fact be Baal-Berith, not the Lord God of Israel at all.

To dedicate wealth to the Lord meant to give it away, and pass it over to the Lord at the tabernacle in Shiloh. This woman wanted to dedicate it to the “Lord” who she worshipped, and yet make a special household shrine in which was a finely crafted silver statue of the god – her “lord”. Some of these have been found in archaeological diggings and they are finely worked and beautiful representations of a temple, and each contained a free standing statue of the god to be worshipped.

Why has the son taken and hidden the great pile of coins? We are not told specifically. Where did they get them from? We are not told, but the specific amount and proximity in the book of the two stories may point to Delilah. Did the men of Ephraim attack the Philistines in the Valley of Sorek after the collapse of the temple of Dagon in revenge for the death of Samson and did they take the coins from a now dead Delilah? We don’t know the answer to these questions, but there is a great story here, for few in the ancient world could save such a horde of coins in their life time from subsistence farming.

The son returns the silver to his mother because he fears her “curse” if he is discovered a thief. He has simply hidden the money, not spent it on anything and so he is praised by his mother in the Lord’s name (Jehovah) and she then recounts that she intended to make an image in “Jehovah’s” honour and establish a house shrine to the Lord. This was, as we have seen forbidden, yet this woman is using God’s name to establish idolatry. In this we see the satanic religious push through the centuries, to use God’s Holy Name, and yet to practise idolatry, adultery, and false theology.

Satan is clever and if he can get simple believers to do wrong things in God’s name then he has succeeded in moving them from the absolute standard of the scriptures. She wants her son to organize the making of the image and passes the silver back to him for him to get the shrine and the idol made. The mother now “trusts” her son, as he is a repentant thief! Can you see how bad the family dynamic is here? The signs of evil are here. The fruit of the Old Sin Nature is here, not any fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence. **Galatians 5:16-26.**

Verses 4 – 6. The son however gives the silver back to his mother, and it is she who heads out to the local “foundry” and organizes the casting of a silver shrine and a silver or gold god to stand in the shrine. Two hundred shekels of silver are used to overlay the shrine and hollow cast the god statue. The statue of the god may indeed be a Baal figurine, as the Philistines regularly made, or it may be a golden calf to stand for the bullock offering. Exodus 32:1ff, Leviticus 3-4.

Now we are told later that the Philistines had a monopoly on the working of metal in this time so as to control the making of iron weapons. **1 Samuel 13:19-22**. If this state of affairs existed during their ascendancy then the only people who could have made this shrine and the god figurine were pagan Philistine metal smiths. This means that the mother of Micah must go to the pagan silver smiths to cast her shrine to worship the “Lord God of Israel” through. This contradiction is the warning of the falsehood and idolatry involved here. Nothing other than paganism can emerge from paganism! The whole process here was wrong from start to end.

The process for the establishment of an alternative religion is begun with the work at the foundry, but 80% of the silver is not used for the casting work, it is used to develop the other aspects of the religious worship services. Ornate garments are made for the priest of the shrine, an ephod, and teraphim are made to make the priest appear really special and holy. The ephod was the high priestly garment or breastplate, but the teraphim were little household gods, and reference to them indicates that “dress up religious paganism” is here fully blown.

Micah establishes his own son as the household priest over time. This is a shock, for it tells us that Micah is quite old when he takes his mother’s wealth and hides it, and she is very elderly for one of her grandsons to be the priest. These are not young and foolish believers, but older believers who ought to know better. Notice the writer’s point – that there was no king in Israel and without any standards being taught nationally everyone was doing what they thought was right. There was a subjective standard for life and worship, and it was wrong! God does not want, and is not interested in sincerity, but in obedience to the revealed Word of God!

Verses 7 – 9. Here we meet the first “wandering Judean” and he ought not to have been wandering, for while he was from the tribal area of Judah he was a Levite. The Levites were assigned areas to live in that they might be called from thence annually to serve at the tabernacle. **Joshua 21:9-19**. The town of Bethlehem **was not** a city for the Levites to live in, so we know from the outset that this man is out of the geographical will of the Lord for him.

He is also out of the operational will of the Lord; for he is not operating as a priest in the tabernacle, but he is wandering about looking for a job or role outside of the one assigned to the families of Levi. This is a man who is seeking a path through life that is different to the one God had appointed for him. All such people will find the enemy has a job for them to do! This man shows how people with a genuine godly call can walk away from it and get into increasingly evil ways.

Verses 10 – 13. The Levite is immediately hired for ten shekels of silver plus all living expenses. He is happy with this allowance, which tells us that the 1100 shekels of silver may equate to several hundred thousand, or even a million or more dollars in our terms. The Levite becomes a member of the family of Micah and becomes the priest of the cult centre Micah has established in his home. Micah “consecrates” the Levite and makes him his priest.

Micah betrays his attitude to his new religion; that it is a “prosperity gospel” religion, designed to be a good luck process for him. By having this religion in his home he hopes to have prosperity in his life and farming operation. With 1100 shekels of silver he didn’t need anything else, but he wants more. Remember, if the higher value of the 1100 shekels is right, this is at least 50 years wages and the family can live comfortably well for the next generation without any work at all. He could have secretly hidden the money and lived off it all his days, but he has done something publically that is going to make him high profile, and therefore a target for theft and murder in the dangerous days he lives in.

With this amount of money they can retire now, so why do they seek more prosperity? Money lust and possibly also power-reputation rules this man, just as sexual lust ruled Samson. That is the writer’s point here, that all lust destroys us over time. Only obedience to the Word of the Lord will keep us safe and give meaningful life and work, and prosperity of soul that we can enjoy. Satan loves people to lust after what they do not have, for then they will do anything to obtain what they lust for. Remember – the “prosperity gospel” is satanic – it’s never been God’s policy!

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Idolatry is a danger to man all through history. To worship a thing instead of the Lord God who made all things is the height of foolishness. God seeks correct worship, not man’s inventions.
2. Money lust destroys just slightly slower than sexual lust. All lust that is out of control is destructive. Healthy sexual behaviours between a husband and wife are good, for they are safely contained in a trusting and healthy relationship, but all lust outside of the divine institutions is destructive. Let us be careful of any lust fuelled activities, for they have addictive power and will drive people to do things that later disgust them. Let us guard ourselves against lust.
3. Being in the geographical and operational will of the Lord is vital for a meaningful and valuable walk through this life. We need to ask each day, whether we’re thinking the Lord’s thoughts regarding each situation we are in. We need to ask, are we walking where the Lord wants. We need to ask whether we are doing what the Lord requires in each place. God seeks our obedience to His will in all aspects of our daily life.

REFLECTION UPON THE TRUE NATURE OF SALVATION

1. Salvation is the gift of God by grace through faith.

2. We cannot work for salvation - we must receive it as a gift. (Ephesians 2:8, 9, Romans 4:4-5)
3. The only means of salvation is by trusting that Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried and raised from the dead. He therefore paid the penalty for sin, and conquered death. (Acts 16:30-31, John 3:16, 14:6, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
4. We are saved so that we can serve God. (Ephesians 2:8-10) Our good works show that we have been saved.
5. Salvation includes many other doctrines such as Imputation, Justification, Redemption, Propitiation, Reconciliation and Sanctification.

IDOLATRY

1. Idolatry is forbidden (Exodus 20:3,4,23; 23:24; Deuteronomy 4:28; 5:7; 6:14; 7:16; 8:19).
2. In the Ten Commandments, the first commandment prohibits mental idolatry, the second commandment prohibits overt idolatry.
3. Idolatry is spiritual adultery, an attack on the believer's love towards God (Jeremiah 3:8-10; Ezekiel 16:23-43; 23:24-30; Revelation 17:1-5).
4. Idolatry of mind precedes idolatry of practice. Mental idolatry occurs before overt idolatry (Judges 2:10-13; Ezekiel 14:7).
5. Idolatry occurs when the creation, rather than the Creator, is worshipped (Romans 1:18-25).
6. Demons function through idols and practices of idolatry (Zechariah 10:2).
7. Idolatry is the devil's communion table (1 Corinthians 10:19-21).
8. Idolatry is related to sexual sins under the phallic cult (Ezekiel 22:3-18; 23:37-49). Consequently idolatry has a adverse effect on both soul and body (1 Corinthians 6:9).
9. Idolatry causes the national judgment of destruction and enslavement (Isaiah 2:8; 2:18-20; 21:9; 36:18-20; Jeremiah 2:27-30; 3:6-11; 7:17-20; 17:1-4; Ezekiel 6:4-6).

NOTES

CHAPTER 18**INTRODUCTION**

The message of the writer of the book of Judges is just how bad things were before the kings brought order. We must remember the writer is a publicist for the new kings, to remind the people just how bad things had got in the days of "personal freedom" under the judges. Many people in the days of the kings hankered for the "good old days" when the tribes all operated solely under their own elders, but the cost of this "freedom" was significant to them all. The loss of life, liberty and the elimination of their happiness were the regular accompaniments of their life under the judges.

The cost of kingship to Israel was felt in significant taxation of all the tribes to keep a regular court, and standing army, and it's associated government structure. The people didn't like these taxes and the requirements for additional levies of soldiers at times, but as the writer points out here in these last chapters, the alternative was far worse. Deuteronomy 17:14-20, 1 Kings 12:1-18.

Samson, of the tribe of Dan, has failed to deliver the people from regular Philistine aggression and so the Danites as a tribe have to face the fact of their impotence against their enemies. A major section of the remnant of their tribal survivors of Philistine aggression decide to head north to a new territory beyond the Sea of Galilee, and they send out spies to look at the area.

This is an area that was part of the "Promised Land" and so had been Israel's to seize for many years, but none had moved to claim it and dispossess the pagan inhabitants. This group from the tribe of Dan will move on mass northwards and seize the land, but sadly they will take the false religion of Micah with them, and there begins a systematic apostasy in this day, with further isolation of the north from the true worship at Shiloh.

JUDGES 18:1-31

1 In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel. **2** And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there. **3** When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here? **4** And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. **5** And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. **6** And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go. **7** Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man. **8** And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye? **9** And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them: for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good: and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land. **10** When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land: for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth. **11** And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed with weapons of war. **12** And they went up, and pitched in Kirjathjearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjathjearim. **13** And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah. **14** Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do. **15** And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him. **16** And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate. **17** And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war. **18** And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye? **19** And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? **20** And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people. **21** So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them. **22** And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan. **23** And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company? **24** And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee? **25** And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household. **26** And the children of Dan went their way: and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house. **27** And they took the things which Micah had made,

and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire. 28 And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Bethrehob. And they built a city, and dwelt therein. 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel: howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first. 30 And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 10. The legacy of Samson's failure as a judge to recall the people to true worship at the tabernacle is seen in the impotence of his people against the on going Philistine pressure upon them. The writer makes it clear that all the things that will unfold for Dan down the years are related to this apostasy, and while Samson is not specifically named and blamed, he was guilty of great evil by his neglect of revival. His failure to act consistently to spiritually deliver his people is the main causative factor in what unfolds before us here in this chapter. The people of Dan had failed to win and hold the land allotted to them by Joshua. Joshua 19:40-50.

Failure to hold what God gives is **solely related to disobedience to the plan of God** and points to a failure to walk in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 3:1-17. The Lord in grace will bless them still and they will seize and hold this northern area for several hundred years, until the Assyrian crisis in 725 BC, but like Samson they will follow their lusts and never be what they could have been had they valued spiritual status rather than wealth and human power.

With no king in Israel to raise and lead the required army, there was no lasting victory over the Philistines. They were simply too fierce, courageous, well organized, and co-ordinated. The tribal council of Zorah and Eshtaol in one of the areas of Dan decide to check out the far north for suitable land that can be won more easily from the pagans. Only two towns and their areas are involved in this migration plan, and many of the tribe of Dan stay put in their originally assigned area and become absorbed into Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah. The two town councils involved seek an easier life than the one allotted to them by Joshua, but there is no "easy life" in the spiritual walk we are called to complete. Matthew 7:13-23. When people seek an "easy option" it is an indication that they do not remember the "Fall", Genesis 3:17-19.

There is no mention of prayer, nor of seeking the Lord's face at Shiloh for this mission to the north. They are not walking with the Lord here, and when we walk without reference to the Lord we will tend to discover Satan has a plan for us also! On their journey north the five men stay with Micah at Mt Ephraim. They do not either know or apply the truth of God's words, and they seek counsel and practise worship at the shrine of Micah and admire his priest. They actually know this young Levite when they hear his voice as he intones his prayers, and they enter the sanctuary of Micah and discuss with him how he got there.

This tells us that this young man had previously "plied his trade" as a wandering semi-pagan priest in Dan and that he had done so to draw attention to himself and get money from his priesthood role. He wasn't just travelling through Dan at the time; he was looking for work as a paid priest. This was, and remains, a disobedient, and falsely "spiritual" priest. The priests were of the family of Aaron only and the other Levites were to support worship in the tabernacle, and they were not to seek money for their service and they were not to function as priests. God's work was not to be a money making racket. Matthew 21:13, Luke 19:46, John 10:7-10.

The young Levite now is requested to pray to "the lord" (the correct name of the Lord – the Tetragrammaton - JHWH is used). The Danites seek the Lord's will, yet they ought to have gone to Shiloh to seek that, not ask a man who has an imitation ephod on, and worships at a shrine that has possibly a golden or silver calf in it, or even a statue of Baal-Berith. They use the name of the Lord, but they take the Lord's name in vain, for they are becoming a part of a false religion here. Exodus 20:1ff, Leviticus 1:1-5, 17:1-5, 26:1-13.

God's Word was clear, but the Levites have failed through the years to teach these things, and some, like the young Levite here, are determined to make money out of God's work without teaching God's Word. The Levite uses the name of Jehovah in his quick answer to them, telling them to advance down their chosen path, for the Lord has opened the door for them to the land they seek. He has given them the message they want to hear, as do all false prophets.

He is "doing his own thing", and has decided that there are several ways that God can be worshipped, when the Lord made it clear that the Israelites were to worship at the door of the tabernacle only, and that Aaron's sons alone were to be their priesthood. False prophets and teachers have abounded since the beginning, and they speak the pleasant words men like to hear. They speak in God's name but they do not know God. Psalms 5:5, Jeremiah 27:9ff, 28:1-17, Matthew 7:21-23, 2 Timothy 2:19. Every liberal preacher with their dog collar on speak of God, yet deny his Word still!

In this case the Levite tells them the truth, and all satanic religion has truth in it, and the false prophet may speak truth at times, all the more surely to entrap the hearer in greater evil further down the road. Sadly the tribe of Dan will follow evil all the way and their tribal area will become a centre of golden calf worship. A recent excavation has uncovered a later altar in the Hebrew style that may be a part of the evil that started right here. 1 Kings 12:28-33.

The men arrive in the far north to the town of Laish, where they discover a carefree Phoenician-type people. From recent archaeological excavations around this area, there has been found a classical Minoan tomb with some beautiful

examples of Minoan and Mycenaean pottery, which all point to the Phoenicians or people like them coming through here at some point, with some staying here amongst the local population.

The spies discover that the people of this area are mixed in race and culture and they have no military organisation controlled by a “magistrate” who can order military training and control military preparedness. This is a town that is not ready to defend itself. They had no alliances with any other towns for military assistance, and they were a long way from Sidon and Tyre where help could have come from. The five spies cannot believe their luck in discovering this place.

They race home to the towns of Dan that sent them and they report the good news that they have found an easy prey to “knock over”. Notice their words to their people in verses 8 – 10. They cry aloud to their city council elders that they must arise quickly and head north with all speed before someone else sees these foolish people at Laish and seize this land before the Danites arrive.

They have to really urge their people to move, which is a testimony to the depression that slows these people’s responses to the news. When people have had the spirit beaten out of them and they need real enthusiastic leadership to become warriors again. These five men are the warrior leaders they need, and unlike Samson they will have the follow through ability to focus on the goal and seize the pagan city. They have to urge their people to stop being slothful! They possibly have to urge them to train and get fit for the march before they head away. Hebrews 12:1-15.

Verses 11 - 20. Some reading my words above may have felt I was a little harsh in my assessment of the young Levite, but the incident here tells us that this is a young man who is after what we call, “the main chance”. He very quickly accepts the offer to join the Danites and is “glad” at the prospect of being a tribal, rather than just a family priest, and the words of Micah and the others indicate clearly that the religion being practised here, although in the name of Jehovah, is polytheistic.

The Lord said, many years later that, “the strong man armed keeps his house”. Matthew 12:29, Luke 11:21-22. Whenever people have gold and silver and publicize the fact, they had better have a private army ready to defend their goods or a tougher character than them will come and seize their goods. This happens first to Micah here and then to the carefree people of Laish.

The Danites have six hundred men under arms, plus their wives, children and animals in tow. They are a significant company, and assemble for their march north in the safer territory of Judah in the hills behind the town of Kirjath-Jearim. The camp area covering probably fifty to one hundred acres is called from that point onwards “Mahaneh - Dan” – or the war camp of Dan. It is a place that is out of sight of the Philistines and beyond their immediate reach and gives the tribal contingents time to organize for the march, and plan and practise their defensive manoeuvres for the march.

They march up the main road which runs past Mt Ephraim. They must have had the other tribe’s approval to pass through their territory or else there would be trouble for them in doing this. They arrive close by the settlement where Micah lives. This is a settlement with significant men folk in it who can strap on arms, but not 600 men. The writer tells the story in such a way as to indicate the sheer threat and coercion in their seizure of the entire shrine of Micah.

The reference to both the main shrine (graven image), the idol (the molten image), and the small idols (teraphim), tell us that this is indeed a full pagan shrine, although still technically dedicated to the Lord God of Israel. This is the most subtle form of paganism, for it masquerades as true worship, just with an “ever so slightly different form of worship”. The changes made are all satanic and start the people so fooled by it on a slippery slope of evil.

The five warrior leaders of Dan now speak to their people and suggest that they turn aside and seize the entire shrine of Micah for themselves and take it north as their good luck charm religion. This suggestion and the agreement of the eldership tells us that this subgroup of the tribe had long ago rejected the very thought of going down to Shiloh and wanted their own form and place for the worship of God.

The family of Micah must have been terrified by the appearance of these 600 men at their main gate. Micah has quite a complex of buildings, with a great courtyard and a perimeter wall with its great gate, and clearly he has a security force, and may have had a hundred or more soldiers himself, but he is seriously outnumbered here. He has been playing the aristocratic landowner and lord of the manor, and has enjoyed his big complex with his guards and private temple, but he has not considered the envy of powerful others. The problem with the “prosperity gospel” is that others are always more prosperous than you are, and they are often more ruthless.

They greet/salute the house of Micah and the Levite there at the gate. Micah may have been away at their time of arrival but he arrives shortly after they leave. The writer repeats that there were 600 fully armed men there, all ready for war in a second. The five spies peel off from the army of Dan and push past the priest and seize the entire shrine’s contents and head back to the wagons with the goods. The fact that five men are needed to carry away the entire shrine tells us that it is significant and wealthy. The Levite stands, in full regalia at the gate with the 600 armed Danites. They then turn and speak with him. They make him an offer that would be hard to refuse for a pagan who believes he has the right shrine to worship at. He can join them and be a tribal priest, or possibly die with the family of Micah, or live on to serve them in an empty shrine with their money gone also possibly.

Now we do know Micah has enough money hidden to buy another shrine and idol, so the Levite could stay and work with Micah still, but he wants promotion as most prosperity gospel preachers do. Judges 17:2,4. There is no issue for the

young priest, for he can be priest now for an entire sub-tribe. From priest he has just been made bishop or even arch-bishop and he loves the increase in influence and power and possibly the pay. He is told not to answer a word, cover his mouth, and he does so and literally grabs the idols and runs to the middle of the marching army of Dan and heads north with them.

Verses 21 – 31. The Danites form up their wagon train and it leads the way, with their army behind, as they expect trouble from the Ephraimites when they gather their pursuit army. Micah arrives back some time after the Danites leave and quickly heads off with all the local men he can gather in hot pursuit. The pursuit army overtakes the army of Dan after a while and they cry out to the Danites to stop and reason. The army of Dan turn into battle order to face Micah and ask sarcastically, “What ails you that you are wanting to fight with us?” Micah answers back with all the hurt pride and anger he has, that they have stolen his “gods”.

He makes it clear that the things stolen are the most important things he has in his household. The Danites are blunt and tell him that if he doesn't go away and stop bleating in their ears then a few of their angry young men will come across and kill him and his entire household. Like all good highway men they are saying – “Your goods or your life”. Micah realises that their army is far too strong for him to attack and even though his pride is hurt, he possibly thinks of the rest of the money he has hidden and heads home to make a new idol shrine. There is no repentance here!

The Danites continue to head north and after a number of days they arrive at Laish. The inhabitants have no idea of what is coming and their gates are open and unattended, and the men of Dan fall upon them in field, and street, and homes, and kill them all. They burn the city with fire and then rebuild it for themselves once it is “purified” by the fire. They then however defile the rebuilt city by making it a centre of idolatry, and one of the first buildings rebuilt is the temple and they make it a shrine to Jehovah of Israel, but at it's centre is the shrine of Micah. The Levite is not mentioned as the priest of this shrine, although he may have been in the earliest days, but over time the priesthood becomes totally secular, with a family of Manasseh becoming the priests of the area.

Now this small section here of Judges is clearly added to after the time of the captivity, and may have been added by Ezra after the Exile's return from Babylon in the 450sBC. The books of the Old Testament get their final form at that time. From this addition, it may be that the family of Jonathan became the priests of the rebuilt shrine and altar (that has been recently excavated) from the days of Jeroboam, as is recorded in 1 Kings 12. The days of the Levite and Micah may be as early as 1150, and the day of Jeroboam's rebuilding of the shrine at Dan is around 975 BC. Just in case you had forgotten, the writer then adds that the shrine here is totally out of order, as the people of Israel should have been regularly going down to Shiloh, for that is where the Lord had directed them to go to worship at this time.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The doors will always open onto opportunities for apostasy. Satan is always ready to deceive, distract and distort truth into error. An “open door” into a thing is no proof that the Lord is in the plan. Be careful in your prayers for guidance, and ensure that the path you take is holy, biblical, and Holy Spirit fruit filled. If the fruit of the Holy Spirit do not accompany a path, then it is not the path of God's choice for you! Be alert to evil's deceptive power.

2. There have always been men and women who seek to make merchandise of religious experiences. There has never been any shortage, at any time in history, of religious hucksters. Some are as obviously venal as the recent television evangelists who have made millions from fraud perpetrated on God's foolish people, but others are more quietly “spiritual” and may fool even careful believers by their apparent but pagan piety.

Jesus words in Matthew 7 are to be used as the guide always; “by their fruit you shall know them”. Fake religion will have fake, or counterfeit spirituality, but will lack the humility and genuine fruit of the Holy Spirit. Search for the fruit in the lives of people before you spiritually commit to any person or group in any way.

3. Evil and sin do not stay stationary; they flow downhill and make the person ensnared by them worse and worse over time. Let us set our guard against the wiles of the devil lest he destroy our lives. Let us get our armour on daily to stand against him. Ephesians 6:10-18.

REFLECTION UPON TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

1. The gift of prophecy and the office of the prophet are distinguished in scripture. In the Old Testament there were those who had the office of prophet, and served in an official capacity within the worship system of Israel but there were also those who at times were given the gift of prophecy to give a special prophecy even though they were not full time prophets. Elijah was a man with the office and the gift, where-as David had the gift at times but not the office.

2. The roles of the person with the office of prophet were many and varied:

a) Aaron was a preacher (Exodus 7:1).

b) In Nehemiah's time the prophet-preacher had a role to exegete the Word of God clearly so that the people would know the truth (Nehemiah 6:7, Hosea 6:5).

- c) As revivalists they were to call people to repentance (Judges 6:7-12, Zechariah 7:7-12).
- d) They were to oppose apostasy so that those who were likely to be misled by a false teacher would have no excuse (1 Kings 18:36-39, 40, 2 Chronicles 25:15, Ezekiel 2:5, 2 Kings 20:11).
- e) They were encouragers of the people (Ezra 5:2).
- f) They were sometimes song/worship leaders for the people (1 Samuel 10:5).
- g) They led in prayer at worship (2 Chronicles 32:20).
- h) They were the advisors to the kings and they were associated with coronations (1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Kings 11:28, 29, 2 Kings 9:1-6, 2 Chronicles 12:5, 2 Chronicles 12:6, 15:2-7).
- i) They were spiritual advisors or seers for the kings; they "saw" the immediate future and so were able to advise the kings of the right decisions (1 Samuel 9:9, 2 Samuel 24:11, 1 Chronicles 21:9, 24:29, 2 Chronicles 19:2, 33: 18, 2 Kings 17:13, Isaiah 29:10).
- j) They were fore-tellers of significant future events (2 Samuel 7:5-16, Amos 9:11, Isaiah 9:6,7, Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 34:22ff, Micah 5:2, Daniel 9:26, Zechariah 13:8, Joel, Zechariah 14) and many more.
- k) God intended them to be the shepherds and vine-dressers of the nation. As such they were to be the type of Christ, who is referred to in the Old Testament as "the great prophet" (Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Zechariah 13:5-6, Matthew 21:11, Luke 7:16, 8: 18-20, 24:19, 23-26, John 7:40,41).

3. There was no "set" formula for the prophets to follow, but certain things were established as "tests" for the people to be sure the prophet was genuine.

- a) The prophet had to have a spiritual life witness that was like Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10 - 12).
- b) God spoke to the prophets by dreams and visions. God spoke to Moses face to face but he was an exception (Numbers 12:6-7).
- c) The prophet had to be totally confident of his message, as he was judged by God if there was any falsehood in it (1 Kings 22:13, 14, 2 Kings 5:8).
- d) There were to be no secret prophecies, everything was to be open and clear, so that all the people might be warned of God (Jeremiah 23:25-29).
- e) The prophet had to be specific in his message and had to be obeyed literally (2 Kings 5:10-19, note especially verse 13).

4. There were always false prophets; in fact the great prophets of the Old Testament were always outnumbered by false prophets in their own day (Jeremiah 2:8, Ezekiel 13:1-23). Our Lord warned us that there will always be false prophets about (Matthew 7:15 - 23). NOTE THE LORD'S WORDS here in that the personal walk of the prophet is to be paid attention to. No spiritual fruit in their life = no truth in their words. God allows the false prophets to operate without immediate judgement upon them, so that believers are always presented with an obedience test, to see whether we will obey the scriptures or follow our own lusts to judgement. False prophets will abound at times of poor Bible teaching. Weeds only grow in poorly cared for soil (Hosea 4:5, 6, 9:7, 8).

5. Tests that believers must apply when confronting a person claiming the gift of prophecy:

- a) The words of the prophet will never contradict the Word of God (Jeremiah 23:33-36, 2 Peter 2:1-3, 1 Corinthians 14:32).
- b) The prophet will never call people away from genuine worship of God (Deuteronomy 13:1- 5).
- c) The prophet will always be specific and the prophecy will be able to be tested (Deuteronomy 18:20-22, Jeremiah 28:9).
- d) Any prophet who asked for money was to be treated as false (Jeremiah 8:10).
- e) Any prophet who was a drunkard was to be treated as false (Micah 2:11).
- f) Any unconfessed sin of envy, jealousy, strife,.....etc in their life , they were false! (Jeremiah 23:11).
- g) God's prophets were generally men alone, not in groups (1 Kings 22:5-8, 18:22).
- h) Does the prophecy accord with scripture? (1 Corinthians 14:37, 38, 2 Kings 23:2).

CHAPTER 19**INTRODUCTION**

We left Micah moaning in Mt Ephraim about his lost shrine and Levite, (who was from Bethlehem-Judah), and we now pick up with another Levite heading south from Mt Ephraim to Bethlehem-Judah to try to get back his lover. The other connection between this story and the last is the number six hundred, for that is the total number of the men of Dan, and also will be the number of the survivors of the men of Benjamin after this next evil is played out.

This is the second story in what is known as the "Bethlehem Trilogy" from the time of the Judges. It is not clear at what time the events described in this story occurred, but my suspicion is that this event and the civil war with Benjamin may have occurred well before the Philistines arrived. The stories here are grouped by theme, not necessarily all by time sequence.

This story is even more blood-thirsty than the previous one, but it leads to greater evil still, with the near destruction of the entire tribe of Benjamin. Six hundred men of Dan marched north, and we find that six hundred men of Benjamin are the sole survivors in the south of their tribe after the civil war that will be the flow on from the evils of the Levite and the tragic death of his lover. This story illustrates the deepening effect of evil within a social group over time.

The Bible teaches throughout that there are no such things as "private sins", for all sin and evil overflows into society and has influence on others. In this case the moral and religious sin of the Levite provides the catalyst to judge the moral and religious sins of the tribe of Benjamin.

JUDGES 19:1-30

1 And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehemjudah. **2** And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehemjudah, and was there four whole months. **3** And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him. **4** And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there. **5** And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way. **6** And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry. **7** And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again. **8** And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart; and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them. **9** And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you tarry all night: behold, the day groweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home. **10** But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him. **11** And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. **12** And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel; we will pass over to Gibeah. **13** And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah. **14** And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. **15** And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah: and when he went in, he sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging. **16** And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of mount Ephraim; and he sojourned in Gibeah: but the men of the place were Benjamites. **17** And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city: and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou? **18** And he said unto him, We are passing from Bethlehemjudah toward the side of mount Ephraim; from thence am I: and I went to Bethlehemjudah, but I am now going to the house of the LORD; and there is no man that receiveth me to house. **19** Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses; and there is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants: there is no want of any thing. **20** And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street. **21** So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink. **22** Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him. **23** And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. **24** Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing. **25** But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go. **26** Then came the woman in the dawning of the day,

and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light. 27 And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way: and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold. 28 And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place. 29 And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coasts of Israel. 30 And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. Once again the writer begins by reminding us that he is writing after the reign has begun of the first king to emphasize the importance of good government; his purpose is, to ensure the evils he is about to recount do not happen again in the nation. The book of Judges can be seen as propaganda for the house of Saul and later of David, for it leads us to Benjamin and to Bethlehem. These last stories illustrate that the life before the kings brought order, was “nasty, brutish and short!”

Once again we have a Levite “sojourning” on the sides of Mt Ephraim. He may be in a Levitical city, but this is not noted and the same suspicion falls upon him as did upon the previous young Levite; namely that he is out of God’s geographical will for his life. He is not living in such a manner as to be called up for service in the tabernacle; he is not serving the Lord in his God-chosen field. He has in fact chosen his own free loving way of living and he takes a lover from the town of Bethlehem in Judah. Now to take a woman from that area he had also to be a wanderer, rather than the farmer or worker that he was called to be within a Levitical city. People didn’t travel for no purpose in the ancient world, it was just too dangerous, and this man’s visit to Bethlehem is left as an enigma.

He had no legitimate business mentioned in the text that would have him going to Bethlehem and certainly not taking a lover from there back home to Mt Ephraim. If he loved and adored the girl, then he ought to have married her properly, not just invited her to join his disobedient wandering life style and escape with him to the north. The girl is clearly quite loose sexually and shortly after living in Mt Ephraim she starts to “play around” with the local men, and then flees back to the south when it gets too “hot” for her. Remember, under the Mosaic Law, the penalty for adultery or fornication of any sort was death.

The Levite is a weak willed man, for a man of principle would deal with his sin, accept the rebuke of her actions, and seek forgiveness from the Lord; he would certainly not chase the immoral woman down to Bethlehem again. If she is from an immoral town, heading there again is going to expose him to danger and immorality again. There are partners that in business or as a life partner you simply don’t want to have if you seek satisfaction and relaxation, and this girl is not worth the effort, but keep thinking about the facts given us here, for the Levite is no better than the girl.

The basic rule regarding sustainable marriage is that any pattern of adultery on the part of either partner breaks the trust that is essential for a stable marriage, and the innocent partner ought to seek divorce and head away with God’s blessing and understanding. The exception to this is if the sinful partner is restored to the Lord and deals thoroughly with their sin. Unless this occurs the immoral person will simply return to their sins later when everything quiets down.

Any pattern of sin must be thoroughly cleansed out of the life or the person will simply return to their old evil again and create more distress and disaster for their partner and children. If life change does not occur sustainably the marriage and the family remains an unsafe place for the innocent. Evil and sin cannot be “patched”, they must be spiritually cleansed from the life or the destruction will just be more complete later. Distress through the impact of sexual sin is bad enough, but if the complete spiritual remedy is not applied the distress can gradually become a disastrous and lasting tragedy. Matthew 9:16-17, 12:43-45, 1 Corinthians 7:15, 2 Peter 2:17-22.

The Levite/“husband” heads south with a servant and two asses to carry his de-facto wife back with him if she will come. He is a “husband” in God’s eyes, for any sexual relationship connects us with a person as a partner in God’s sight. It is either marriage or adultery, and if it is adultery it is to be confessed, turned from, and dealt with in a most serious manner. 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. The Levite has waited for four months before pursuing after her, and perhaps the delay is due to his not knowing for sure where she is, or possibly it is due to his character weakness and hesitancy, we cannot be sure. He will certainly prove himself a weak character, and a thoroughly perverted evil fellow.

We will see below that this man is a weak willed man, finally not prepared to lay his life on the line for his woman, although he is ready to have others fight and die for him! He is entitled to ask for the death penalty for adultery for this woman in accordance with the Mosaic Law, and also for the death of her lovers, but he is at least merciful and forgiving. Exodus 20:18, Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:18, 13:10-11, 22:21. He is not going to ask for any punishment, but for her to return to him and live with him formally now as his wife. He goes south with a message of forgiveness, not of judgment, but he has not dealt with his own character weaknesses, and so he heads into danger without the spiritual alertness he needs to protect himself and his wife.

His lover meets him at her father’s house, hears his “peaceful words”, and knows she is safe from the death penalty. Once she hears these words of forgiveness, he is brought into that house, and the father in law is literally overjoyed that he is there in such a spirit, and invites him to stay. The father of this girl knows her promiscuous habits, the right to have

the death penalty asked for, and so the prospect of having her forgiven, and then settled down and married to a respected member of the nation is perfect. The news for the father is the best he could hope for. There are however sinister undertones running just under the surface in this place and it's neighbouring cities. Immorality and evil have gotten hold here to a deep level, and the alcoholism of this father is a clue to the debauchery of the people, and where his daughter has learned her immorality.

The great evil of alcoholism in the home is the likelihood of sexual abuse and debauchery. It is not uncommon for the daughters of alcoholics to be sexually abused early in their lives, as alcohol opens the door to many other evils. It is also not uncommon for the children of alcoholic homes to seek love and attention in the arms of others; hopelessly trading sex for the love/care they have not known at home. This girl is the victim of an alcoholic home, but she has been making bad choices regarding lovers, and she is old enough now to take charge of her own life, and she is 100% responsible for choices at this point. Alcoholism in a family destroys the moral fibre of that family and often destroys the second generation unless salvation comes to that family. The need here is for spiritual revival for all the people involved.

Verses 4 – 9. The Levite is a culpable victim of his own weaknesses, just as his father in law is. He finds it hard to say "no", and he enjoys feasting and drinking a little too much, and sadly for the lover, like all alcoholics he doesn't stop drinking once he starts. This meeting was not the time for partying, but for spiritual revival and prayer for a totally different life-style. He tries to leave on the third day, which would be appropriate, but he is enticed by the food and wine to stay longer and for the next two days he starts drinking with his father in law in the morning and keeps drinking until it is too late to leave the city gate. On the fifth day he finally gets enough "courage" late in the day to say, "we're going", and they stagger off along the northern road. It is dumb, and like most dumb decisions it proves fatal!

The Levite is also clearly drunk as they wander along, and drunken men with beautiful women in tow attract trouble, as other men see them as "losers" with women that they can be relieved of! Immoral evil men also see the wives or girlfriends of alcoholics as sexually "easy" and fair game for seduction or rape. Don't be offended at my bluntness in this matter, for it remains true amongst the evil men that still inhabit the bars and dark places of this evil world of ours. This story is simply an example of the sort of satanic thinking that dominates those who have chosen the broad way to evil as their path, and all those who are in the grip of evil are constantly looking for weak people to abuse, as they have been abused themselves. Matthew 7:13-14. Remember, our author here writes this to warn us all of fatal sinfulness.

Come to terms with this hard truth believer, and so keep yourself away from the company of evil men as the Bible commands. Proverbs 1:7-19. Evil men seek evil not good, and their company will always place you in some form of danger. Keep yourself from too much wine, or from the controlling influence of any substance that is taken into the body. Live in the power of the Holy Spirit; do not give yourself to any other power. While a little wine may gladden the heart, Psalms 104:15, those who sit with wine beyond the second glass get into deep troubles. Proverbs 20:1, 23:30-35.

The only time wine was to be used in quantity was for those facing terminal illness as it was the only tranquilizer they had for such a person in such a place of despair, but it was never to cloud the mind of anyone who had serious decisions to make. Proverbs 31:4-7. This Levite is in no condition to protect his wife, nor is he in any state to make good decisions about their safety overnight on their journey. He is a sitting duck for evil men, and sadly his wife is easy prey to these men.

Verses 10 – 14. The day is far gone by the time they are passing Jerusalem and the servant realises the danger they are in if they stay in the open. Lawlessness was rife in this time with many robbers on the roads, who would attack and murder all they met. The only safe place was behind strong walls where armed guards kept the gates. The strongest city was Jerusalem, but it had been retaken by the Jebusites a century at least before and was securely held by them.

It would possibly have been safe, but the Levite does not want to spend the night in a pagan city due to their sexualized religion; yet this is hypocritical given his own choices. His moral scruples are a little strange to hear, and totally fake, given that he is living like a pagan with his mistress! Such hypocrisy always places the hypocrite in a dangerous place. In Jerusalem many travellers stayed the night in the Inns and he would not have stood out, but in a smaller town he will stand out more. He is a drunk hypocrite, and such fools are always in danger.

He has one false hope however, that is that all will be well in a Jewish town, but he will be proved tragically wrong. Now there were four Levitical towns in Benjamin, and he should have been able to stay with another Levite in their home in any of these towns. Joshua 21:17. The tradition of hospitality was such that he could have expected to be provided a room to stay in by another Levite. Anathoth is about the same distance as Gibeah, and Geba is about the same distance as Ramah, and yet he mentions non-Levitical towns on a different road to his servant as the places to head for.

This is another clue that this Levite is way out of fellowship from his Levitical relatives and from his Levitical role at the tabernacle, and so he is unable to approach a Levitical town for hospitality. The only other explanation is that his drunken state makes him embarrassed about heading for a Levitical town. Either way, it is his being out of the will of the Lord generally in his life as a Levite, and his presently sinful state that robs him of safe options this evening. His physical and spiritual status robs him of the only places of safety for him in Benjamin.

Verses 15 – 19. The Levite has run out of time, and as the sun sets the gates of walled towns and cities were closed securely for the night and none were allowed in after that time. He enters the town and sits in the market place,

which was a sign for the locals to ask him to lodge the night. Hospitality was expected but his clothing tells either he was a Levite or from Ephraim and so he is not welcomed on either count.

Perhaps the man's drunken state also means most steer well away from him, but whatever the reasons, this man is not welcomed in Gibeah until an Ephraimite arrives in from the fields. He is a man living away from his family also and this is a strange thing, and possibly indicates some sinful life events that have caused him to move away from his tribal area. This man certainly does not have great moral courage, as we will see below, nor any real morality himself, except where homosexuality is concerned. This man is however a drunk also, and it may be the drunken state of the Levite that draws this man to him, or maybe he is wearing Ephraimite clothing?

The way the Levite introduces himself tells us even more about his weak character. He does not introduce himself as a Levite, but as an Ephraimite, nor does he introduce his wife as such, but as a "handmaid". He also speaks as if he is going to the tabernacle at Shiloh, but this is the first mention of this, and the way it is recorded makes me think the writer believes that to simply be a "super spiritual" statement to try to win support from the locals. He mentions that he has straw and food and wine and so he will not inconvenience anyone by staying with them. What is baffling here, is that he has not set up return places to stay on his way back when he headed south in the first place. Is it the fact that he headed away from Bethlehem late in the day that has caught him out so thoroughly unprepared? His bad decision then is about to be compounded by another bad decision, and things get far worse.

Verses 20 – 24. The old man's welcome tell us that, like Sodom in the past, it is not safe to lie on the streets at night in this town. He urges them to come inside quickly and tells them that he will provide all they need if they stay with him. The feeling here is similar to that from the days of Abraham when the angels stay in Sodom one thousand years before, and sadly it is the same evil that they now will face in the night. Genesis 19:1-13. The old man provides food for the asses, washes the feet of his guests and places food and wine before them all.

Once again the Levite shows he lacks all self control when it comes to alcohol and they both drink to the point of being "happy drunks". It is a bad decision to drink alcohol, or take any medication of any sort that renders you unable to defend yourself, in a strange and potentially dangerous place. The tragedy that is about to unfold is possible only because neither man is able to adequately fight and defend themselves, even if they were physically fit enough, and of enough moral fibre to do so. Drunkenness is universally condemned in scripture because it renders the man or woman incapable of moral or military action when required.

The town of Gibeah is racially Jewish but sadly it has become spiritually pagan, with the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth the preferred faith now. The men are literally "men of Belial"; servants of the Satanic worship of Baal. This involved all forms of sexual perversion as part of it, and these men want homosexual sex with the Levite, who is the first "fresh meat" for them for a long time. This is pure evil at the level of the Sodomites, and it will lead to a similar judgment upon these towns that have fallen this far into satanic religion and immorality. The reason for the old man to get the Levite off the street quickly now becomes obvious.

The old man is now however well drunk, as is the Levite, and the old man does not believe they can resist the men of Belial by force, although that is exactly what they should do. They also have a male servant who can be armed. Three fit, strong, and sober men holding the door could defend this house, and if they die doing it they do so with honour and in righteousness, but sadly they have rendered themselves unfit to protect their women folk! The most disgusting thing to me as the father of daughters is the offer of the old man's daughter for rape by these evil men, and the Levite throwing in his mistress as part of the deal for the men to be left alone. Any man who is not prepared to fight to the death for his woman is unfit to be married to her! Any father who offers his daughter to be raped to protect his own hide is as evil as the attempted rapists! This place is no better than Sodom, and these men are pathetic and as evil as the rapists!

Verses 25 – 30. These verses are some of the hardest to read for the sheer cowardice of these men. The callous gang rape of the woman is awful and leads to her death, but her pitiful attempt to return to the house from which she was cast by the cowards is heart rending. This woman tries to get back to the very men who have cast her aside for abuse. Her dead hands are touching the thresh hold, a sign of seeking forgiveness and mercy. The Levite is sober in the morning and walks out the door to see the woman lying there. He callously, and also casually, orders her up, but her lifeless body remains still. He knows there will be no justice in this town from the elders, for perhaps his host has heard them as part of the pack rape gang. He picks up her lifeless body and leaves town.

He heads straight back to Mt Ephraim and then does an awful thing, but a thing designed to shock even the most hardened man out of his moral stupor. He cuts the body into twelve pieces and sends the pieces to all the coasts of the land and asks for the elders to decide what needs to be done to men who do such things. All I can think is that every part of her body was burnt with branding irons of the evil pagan gods that the Benjamites served. He will also have left out his own drunken culpability and cowardice.

There was however something awful and shocking about each part of this corpse that carried the branding marks of the evil things done to her. Deuteronomy 7:1-6, 11:16-17, 12:30-32, 13:1-18. The Law of Moses made it very clear what was to happen when anyone from the children of Israel left off their practise of true faith and followed Belial, and this is the worst sort of evil – one we see in today's world with "snuff movies" – sexual abuse movies that end with the murder of the prostitute used for the acting. Our own world is due to be judged for the same evils we see here.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Being out of the geographical will of the Lord opens you to dangers, and being also out of the operational will of the Lord compounds the risk of your being in imminent danger. This Levite is not in the right place for his service, and he is clearly not on a serving roster at the tabernacle. Both things conspire against him, for he is denied the normal places of refuge in danger amongst his brethren. Bad decisions also compound dangers and the threat of real harm coming to you.

The Lord will not protect us from our own deliberate acts of stupidity and disobedience. The Levite has also made one further bad decision in getting drunk each day, and especially that last day in Bethlehem, and has compounded that by getting drunk again in Gibeah that first night. Let us guard our souls by careful actions that keep us, and all who are dear to us, safe from harm. Let us not by our actions expose others to harm.

2. Having made a bad decision the Levite could still exercise courage and fight for his life at the door of the house with his servant and the older man to help him. He is an old man, but he has been working in the fields, so he is strong. They fail in their lack of courage to die for others rather than to live in disgrace. Courage is strongest when you stand in the place of God's calling, for then you are secure, and can live or die in God's hands. These two men take comfort in wine not the Holy Spirit of God, and wine is of no help when trouble comes. They are a disgrace!

3. Evil men are capable of anything, no matter what their parents stood for. The greatest evils are often done by men of Christian backgrounds. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide, protects man from great evil. Let us walk carefully through this evil world and have our spiritual armour on every day we live.

Notes

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

The war with Benjamin was a catastrophe for all Israel. It indicated just how evil the majority of the men of Benjamin had become, but it also indicated just how seriously the evil was taken by the others. There was hope in the midst of this terrible situation, for the rest of the people were going to be obedient to the Lord's words to Moses, and actually deal with apostasy at the level they had discovered it. Deuteronomy 13. The Philistines were coming and they would have destroyed Israel totally and easily if this evil paganism had not be removed.

The fact that this religious and moral evil had gotten to the level described here is a shock, yet the enemy seeks to tranquilize and hide evil until it is overwhelmingly powerful. Fake religion that masquerades as the real thing is his preferred option, with evil and sin just out of sight. It is often shocking to realise just how dark the days have become.

The sins of the Benjamites are deep in their culture now, and they are ready to fight the entire nation to preserve their wickedness. It is only when most are dead that they repent of their evil. Sadly churches can also go this way, and sometimes the church has to literally die, or the vast majority of it's sinful members die or leave, before it is revived. Let us pray for the revival that is needed in our own lives and churches before any problem deepens to this level of evil. There is future hope however in the midst of this great apostasy, for the very town where this evil has burst out, Gibeah, will be the place where the first king will live and serve God from, even though there will still be men who follow evil there. 1Samuel 10:24-27.

JUDGES 20:1-48

1 Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was gathered together as one man, from Dan even to Beersheba, with the land of Gilead, unto the LORD in Mizpeh. 2 And the chief of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand footmen that drew sword. 3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness? 4 And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. 5 And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. 6 And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel. 7 Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel. 8 And all the people arose as one man, saying, We will not any of us go to his tent, neither will we any of us turn into his house. 9 But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it; 10 And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel. 11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man. 12 And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? 13 Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel. 14 But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel. 15 And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered seven hundred chosen men. 16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss. 17 And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war. 18 And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up first. 19 And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. 21 And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men. 22 And the people the men of Israel encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day. 23 (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until even, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And the LORD said, Go up against him.) 24 And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. 25 And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword. 26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. 27 And the children of Israel enquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28 And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand. 29 And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah. 30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. 31 And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite of the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways. 33 And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baaltamar: and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows of Gibeah. 34 And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore: but they knew not that evil was near them. 35 And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men: all these drew the sword. 36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten: for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah. 37 And the liers in wait hastened, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city. 39 And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons: for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle. 40 But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven. 41 And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them. 42 Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them; and them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them. 43 Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. 44 And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour. 45 And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon: and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them. 46

So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valour. 47 But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand: also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 7. The people gather at their last great ancestral camping place, where Joshua briefed them, at Mizpeh. This gathering place and the fact that all the people gathered, and that there was no interference from the Philistines indicates to me that this must be an early, rather than a late event in the time of the Judges. It is another clue that the writer of Judges has grouped stories for their significance and themes, not necessarily by their chronological order. The Philistines would not have allowed such a gathering to occur, and it would not have occurred under their rule over Judah, for the people were forbidden arms. Judges 15:9-12.

Also if such an army could be gathered, then they could have all advanced and slaughtered the Philistines on mass. The gathering at Mizpeh, over the other side of the Shephelah may indicate that they were trying to avoid the Philistines, but this is such a significant war that I cannot see it occurring without Philistine interference if they were around. The rebuilding of the tribe of Benjamin also has occurred by the days of Saul, and this would take at least a hundred or more years to occur. As we will see, the High Priest of the day is mentioned in verse 28, and we have an early date from that reference that seals the argument.

The time is probably early in the century after their arrival, (possibly around 1350), and the gathering place is the primal centre of the early settlers entry into the land, around forty to fifty years before. The gathering is significant, with four hundred "elephs", (translated thousands, but likely sub-groups, or contingents, of probably no more than ten or so each). This is still a very large army and all the tribes are represented here, and they hear the words of the Levite whose horror message has roused them. The fact that the army includes both east and west also indicates this occurs well before the days of the civil war in Gilead. Judges 12.

The Levite gives an edited message of the events of that awful night; his message leaves out his drunkenness, his cowardice, and makes it sound as if he was overwhelmed by the crowd, rather than pushing his wife out to the mob and then slamming the door on her. Having told his story he asks for the elder's opinion of what ought to happen as a result of Benjamin's evil.

Verses 8 – 11. The entire congregation decide that the guilty inhabitants of Gibeah must be wiped out for their great evil. A selection of the army is made, so that the small attack group contains members of every group from the 400 groups that responded to the call. This is not a large army that surrounds Gibeah, for it is a small place, although built on a hill with commanding views, and this group's job is to contain the place, and allow none to escape. This army group may number around 4000+ men, and they are absolutely united and well led and co-ordinated.

The army selects their best soldiers for the battle against Gibeah, and the rest head away to secure provisions in case this is a protracted war and then they return to their main camp to await orders. They will quickly be called to Gibeah when the entire forces of Benjamin gather there and break through the Israelite lines to relieve the garrison and base themselves also at the hill top. There is a suspicion amongst the elders of the other tribes that Benjamin may resist and the war may go a lot longer than simply the levelling of one town and the elimination of the evil ones from amongst it's people.

Verses 12 – 19. The tribe of Benjamin is thoroughly aroused by the army of the other tribes, and also by heralds from the united army who come to every settlement of the Benjamites to warn them of the great evil that is amongst them, and call them to repentance and judgment of their own. The call is for the "sons of Belial" alone to be given over for execution and for the evil to be dealt with thoroughly lest it destroy the rest. This indicates the strong Mosaic basis for the actions taken so far, and calls Benjamin to account. It also challenges the inhabitants of the four Levitical towns of Benjamin to return to the Lord themselves, and preach the truth amongst the Benjamites, backing the call of the other tribes to return to godly rulership.

I may be too harsh on the Levites in Benjamin, for they may have been teaching the truth, but they have certainly not been requiring the elders to face the evil amongst them and judge the guilty ones. Failure to expose and deal with evil does not protect anyone from awfulness it simply delays judgment and makes it more awful when it falls. It is like pretending you do not have cancer when it is only a small tumour, for all that occurs is that the tumour grows and becomes terminal!

The Benjamites answer to the appeal for judgment in all their towns is to rise up to arms to fight their brethren, and they gather an army of twenty three contingents (elephs), each numbering in excess of a dozen men. They gather at Gibeah, break through the holding force, and prepare to fight against the combined tribes to protect their brethren under siege in the walled city. The Gibeah force numbers around 700 men themselves. These are men drawn from the city and it's associated walled villages around about.

The Benjamites also had a specific force of 700 left handed men who could use their sling shots with incredible accuracy. These weapons were the pistols of the ancient world, being able to be used faster than a bowman could fire arrows,

although at shorter ranges. Stones thrown by sling shot would kill or knock out any enemy hit in the head by them. The slingers were used ahead of the army to bring down the first rank of enemy soldiers, especially those without helmet or shield protection.

Benjamin is outnumbered twenty to one, but they are still determined to fight, and they are seriously good warriors, ready to die for their pagan relatives/neighbours rather than hand them over for death, and they are on top of a well defended hill fortress. The elders of Benjamin have failed their people, and all the old people of the tribe will be slaughtered as a result of this war, with all the women and children. The failure of the elders of Benjamin to act in accordance with the Mosaic Law will have terrible consequences for themselves, and for the rest of their people.

The two sides are now drawn up in battle array and during the “stand off” the Israelites of the united army do the right thing; they send their elders north to Shiloh and seek the Lord’s counsel at the door of the tabernacle. This to me is just another indicator of the very early date of this event, as later on this simply does not happen with the tribes, especially as we have just seen, in Judges 18, with Dan. The word of the Lord is that Judah is to take the lead in the battle against their neighbours Benjamin. The armies now all stand ready for the battle that will sadly come in full force and destructive power.

Some commentators spend a great deal of time talking numbers of men involved here, but with the uncertainty of the usage of the word for thousands (eleph) such discussion is without hope of real certainty. Where we have numbers under a hundred or a thousand we have specifics, but above a hundred we have “groups” that may be any size, but are probably over a hundred each.

Verses 20 – 27. The first day of battle sees the slaying of over 23 “elephs” of the Israelite army. They had 400 “eleph’s” or contingents and they lose 23 the first day with 100% casualties. The battle goes for Benjamin, even though the Lord has ordered the battle be fought. This is a reminder to us that adversity does not mean we are doing something wrong, nor that defeat means surrender is the right course of action. Adversity, and even early defeat, is to be expected where the devil fights against us, but we are to claim the promise of 1 John 4:4, and persevere in the battle.

Once again the Israelites do the same correct thing when they face defeat; they go back to the Lord and seek the Lord’s answer regarding the correct course of action. With tears they deal with any sins of their own that may be hindering their victory and then they accept the Lord’s orders and prepare for the second day’s battle. The second day goes no better for Israel. They are half hearted in their fighting, seeing the Benjamites as their “brothers” and not seeking to harm them, whereas the pagan Benjamites are fierce in their hatred of their righteous brethren and kill another eighteen contingents of the army of Israel. Ten percent of the army of Israel is now dead on the field of battle over two days. They go back to the Lord and seek the Lord’s will.

Verses 28 – 32. The date of the events here is set now at around 1350 BC, very early after the settlement of the land. This is a shock, for it means within two generations of the Exodus that Benjamin has given themselves over to idolatry and the sexual evils of Baal worship. The people of Israel are still hesitant to really declare total war upon their brethren, but the word comes again through the high priest, the elderly Phinehas that they are to attack again.

At this point the generals of the Israelites see that the way to destroy Benjamin is to draw them away from the hill upon which Gibeah sits, and so they order their forces to fall back in good order and they prepare to ambush the Benjamites when they are far from the safety of the fortress. This was the same strategy they had used just forty or fifty years before at Ai and yet the Benjamites are so over-confident that they have forgotten their discipline and their own history. Joshua 8. Elements of the Israelite army are hidden in the fields close to Gibeah and the rest will feign retreat. It will cost them some lives, but will achieve the best result.

The battle arrays are formed and once again Benjamin sallies down the slope and hits the ranks of Israel they see, and drive them back up the road towards Shiloh, and they succeed in killing about thirty men. This low number is an indication of the smaller scale of the actual fighting involving several thousand men, but not hundreds of thousands. It also indicates that the retreat is well handled by the officers in charge of the units. Most Israelites retreat up the road and only a few are caught and slain.

The key to satanic religions is their appeal to lack of discipline, and so people who worship the counterfeit religions of Satan lose their ability to moderate their emotions over time. The Benjamites are too confident and are enjoying the slaughter of their brethren and this is their weakness. They have given themselves over to evil, and yet the Lord has allowed them to get victory three times in order to test their spirits, and see if they will make peace with their brethren and deal with their own evil. They have received grace to this point, but they persist in evil and deepen in their hatred of their brethren, and their desire remains to kill as many as they can, and so the Lord turns the battle upon them.

Verses 33 – 38. The plan is exactly that which destroyed Ai and it is executed possibly by the sons of the first generals who had learned this from their fathers who fought that first battle. The hidden Israelite forces have gone to ground in the fields close by Gibeah during the previous night and they wait until the forces of the Benjamites are well away from the city pursuing the other Israelites up the Shiloh road. Then these “liers in wait” jump to their feet and enter the city of Gibeah and destroy it with the sword and fire.

The archaeological evidence is of a considerable fire that destroys this city around this time frame and the ash layer is very thick indicating that these men pile up all flammable material they can fire to really turn the flaming city into a

beacon. The fire is so great that a significant smoke signal is sent out to the army of Benjamin as to the fate of their people. They hasten to return to the city, but as they turn back the hidden forces of the Israelites turn upon them and all they can do is flee into the Judean wilderness.

Verses 39 – 48. The result of over confidence in battle is death, for once you have committed to an attack against superior numbers you either keep them running or you are destroyed totally. The army of the Benjamites numbered 26 elephs (23 from other areas and three from Gibeah and its surrounding towns) and by nightfall few remain alive hidden in the hills. Over 25 elephs are destroyed totally, leaving only the remnants of a few elephs alive, which number around 600 men. This gives us the rough calculation for the eleph at this time at between 100 – 600 men.

Six hundred survivors hide at the rock of Rimmon. They stay in hiding there for four months. While they hide there, possibly with a watching force of Israelites to ensure they stay put there, their towns and all that is within them are put to the sword. This order was only given when the people were all totally given over to idolatry. It is a terrible thing that an entire tribe has fallen into such evil in such a short time that the only way to eliminate the evil was to exterminate the people. Even this will not be sufficient, for by 300 years later in the days of Saul the Benjamites will have “sons of Belial” amongst them still. 1 Samuel 10:26-27.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Evil can quickly overwhelm any group if it's leadership turn a blind eye. The only protection against evil is the regular preaching of the truth. Evil is not to be ignored as if it is matter of privacy; it is a matter of survival! Let us not ignore unpalatable things, but face them and resolve all evils and sins so that blessing can replace the cursing that flows from satanic deception.
2. Evil decisions will compound and others will be affected by them. The elder's failure to act to deal with evil in the tribe leads to the loss of all the people in the tribe. Many casualties are caused in the other tribes also and I cannot help but think their neighbours in Judah may have been affected by the same evil and their casualties may be a result of their own sin.

CHAPTER 21**INTRODUCTION**

There is more death and disaster, and some foolish oaths taken before the war with Benjamin is over. The impact of the paganism of Baal-Berith has gone deep amongst the people of the land. Two groups will lose their girl children and one of those groups will lose their lives to provide wives for the survivors of Benjamin. The survivors of Benjamin will be given young wives, and the hasty oath taken at Mizpeh will be kept. This tribe of Benjamin will reseed from the 600 survivors and within a few hundred years they will be plentiful again and produce the first king for Israel, Saul of Gibeah.

From the very place where evil sprang, Saul will arise and judge the nation and start the process of confronting the Philistines. Over 1350 years after this time another man of Benjamin will arise in Israel and lead them to truth; his name will be Saul of Tarsus, Paul the great Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 13:21, 26:4ff, Romans 11:1, Philippians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 10:21-31. From the surviving men and the captured women Paul will descend and will lead the believing Jewish people into a full knowledge of the grace of God that his tribe received on the day we will read of in this last chapter of Judges.

JUDGES 21:1-25

1 Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife. 2 And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; 3 And said, O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel? 4 And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5 And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death. 6 And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. 7 How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by the LORD that we will not give them of our daughters to wives? 8 And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up to Mizpeh to the LORD? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabeshgilead to the assembly. 9 For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead there. 10 And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. 11 And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. 12 And they found among the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead four hundred young virgins, that had known no man by lying with any male: and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan. 13 And the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them. 14 And Benjamin came again at that time; and they gave them wives which they had saved alive of the women of Jabeshgilead: and yet so they sufficed them not. 15 And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. 16 Then the elders of the congregation said, How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing the women are destroyed out of Benjamin? 17 And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel. 18 Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters: for the children of Israel have sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin. 19 Then they said, Behold, there is a feast of the LORD in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. 20 Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; 21 And see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22 And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come unto us to complain, that we will say unto them, Be favourable unto them for our sakes: because we reserved not to each man his wife in the war: for ye did not give unto them at this time, that ye should be guilty. 23 And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them. 24 And the children of Israel departed thence at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from thence every man to his inheritance. 25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Hasty oaths were still to be honoured, and under the Mosaic system of Law the uttering of oaths was to be held a very serious thing. The reason for the great evil in Benjamin was their not taking seriously the Law of the Lord, and so the remedy had to be Mosaic Law based. The oaths they had taken were unnecessary and should not have been taken, but once taken, they had to be kept. They didn't need to take an oath to obey the Lord they just needed to obey. This oath was an example of emotionalism and it leads to trouble for two groups especially; emotionalism in religion always leads to trouble. Emotion is given by the Lord to be enjoyed, never to be our guide.

The men of Jabesh-Gilead had been disobedient to the call to arms, and are to be judged totally. The reason for this extreme punishment must have been related to their own paganism, in addition to their refusal to fight. They had taken a

solemn oath before Moses that they would join their brethren to fight their enemies and would obey the Law, even though separated by Jordan, so they were in violation of their promise, but their disobedience probably went even deeper, to involvement in the same false religion as Benjamin. Numbers 32:20-24.

The second group to suffer from the vow will be the men of Shiloh itself; possibly mixed Levite and Ephraim. They had possibly been the ones to take the leadership in the vow making, and so they must give their daughters to Benjamin. They may also have been compromised in their religious observance, as we will see below. To take an oath was a serious thing, and no oath was to be entered into lightly, for it bound the person to keep whatever they said they would keep. We are to remember this today. Numbers 30:1ff, Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Matthew 5:33-37.

The weeping over Benjamin was bone fide, for they were their brethren and it was an awful thing that a tribe should disappear, and it was not the Lord's will that they did. Nearly the entire tribe has been exterminated because of their worship of Baal-Berith and those surviving are, they hoped, restored to true worship. The eleven tribes gather at the door of the tabernacle again and offer the sacrifices for forgiveness for their own sins and seek the Lord's answer to the dilemma they now face regarding the Benjamites. They cannot allow pagan girls to be given them as wives, for paganism was what they have dealt with. The girls to be given to Benjamin need to be believers in the God of Israel. They bring their tears to the right place; to the altar of the Lord God to seek the Lord's answer through the blood of the sacrifice shed for them and for Benjamin.

Verses 5 – 7. The congregation had made another oath when they gathered, that any tribe or sub-tribal group that did not come at the call of the elders would be put to death. This was publicized and yet the main city of the Gilead did not respond with even a token force that would have delivered them from the vow. This will be the means by which they deliver Benjamin from extinction. They will punish the Gilead city that rejected the call and through that provide wives for Benjamin.

Verses 8 – 15. The procedure is very careful to ensure that not even one man came from Jabesh-Gilead. The entire assembly is asked if any are there, to ensure that none responded, or that none were amongst the casualties of battle. The order is to exterminate the inhabitants of this city and bring the virgin women alive to the camp at Mizpeh. Four hundred women are found from the city and are brought to the camp at Mizpeh as wives for the Benjamites. They are still around 200 women short to meet the needs of the tribe of Benjamin.

The sadness of the total loss of this tribe drives the action here. From a trauma studies point of view the carnage that all have endured in this war is awful. The death of so many is too hard for us to take, and yet it was ordered by the Lord, because the families of Benjamin had entered into such great evil that they had come to the same sexual pollution as the local Canaanites. They were to be wiped from the earth in exactly the same way as the Lord will wipe the earth clean on His return. Revelation 19:1-21. This slaughter of Benjamin will cast a great cloud over the land for many years to come.

Verses 16 – 25. There was an annual feast of the Lord at Shiloh and from this gathering they will taken the women required for Benjamin. This was possibly not a formal feast that had been required under the Law, but was a harvest feast of some sort. Some commentators identify this as the feast of Passover, and tie the dancing back to that of Miriam in Exodus 25:20, but this is a long shot.

My suspicion is that this is a feast that is not a bone fide Mosaic one, and so the young girls here are not being sent to the feast by families that are 100% Mosaic Law focused, and possibly has some pagan fertility worship compromise at its heart. If this is correct, then the girls are being saved from emotional religion and grounded in the truth that flows from the Judgment of Benjamin. The girls dance in the vineyards and mainly they come from Shiloh itself. Dancing in vineyards was an activity associated with Bacchus the pagan god of wine, and it was not a Hebrew custom, so my suspicions deepen that while not being pagan yet, these girls families were encouraging synchronistic compromise religion at least.

My suspicion remains that the people of Shiloh had started to compromise their faith by adding in "fun rituals" that were not biblical and will over time lead them all astray, and so their daughters are lost to them. They had not begun to practise false religion, but were showing two indicators here that they were drifting away from truth. The first indicator is their addition of this "festival". There is a danger in adding in semi-pagan rituals to spiritual activity because they are fun things to do, but do not teach anything biblical. Youth groups need to beware of entertainment that does not prepare them for the Angelic Conflict! They will not be aware if the Pastors are not teaching the Word of God!

I am not opposed to fun, but I am opposed to anything that takes people away from quiet contemplation of the truth, when that is what has occurred. The second indicator of error here is that there was any "dancing festival" this year at all. Given the war and the carnage in Benjamin, no-one ought to have been dancing in vineyards a few miles from the desolated towns of their brethren! This was a time of national mourning, not of any festivals; all such things ought to have been cancelled. Luke 6:21-25, James 4:9-10.

The girls arrive and enter into their dancing. They ought not to be doing this at this time and so their emotionalism makes their parents liable to accept whatever happens, for they have not exercised control over their girls. The girls dance and the men of Benjamin grab a girl each and take them back to the wasteland that is Benjamin and rebuild their cities and their tribe. These girls should have been confronting the truth of the judgment of God upon Benjamin, not dancing to celebrate anything, and so they end up there rebuilding the desolated places of Benjamin in the Lord's name.

The writer ends this chapter and the book itself reminding us that all the things that have happened here were the results of sin and evil. The book of Judges does not give us the path of righteousness, but the path of judgment. The entire book illustrates the principles behind, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-32. Israel had been told not to act in self centeredness, but in absolute obedience to the commands of the Lord through the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 12:8, Psalms 12:3-6,

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. There is a time for dancing and a time for mourning. We ought to be careful of our demand today for people to be happy all the time. This is not natural or correct, for there is a time for tears and real sadness in the church. Let us accept the Lord's viewpoint upon our world and upon the sin and evil in it.

2. God's grace was towards Benjamin, even though they didn't deserve it. They brought the great war upon themselves by their refusal to punish evil, and they suffered great evil. From Benjamin comes Saul of Tarsus and we give thanks that the mercy and compassion of Israel leads to the birth of this man. Grace and mercy brings great grace to emerge to bless the entire world from that judged tribe. God be praised that the awful themes of this book end with grace and mercy, for these things are the sole reasons for Benjamin and the rest of Israel surviving at all. They are the sole reason for our own survival! Let us thank God that we do not get what we deserve, and let us serve in accordance with the Laws of the Lord, not "as we think in our own eyes".

NOTES