

## Judges — Chapter One

Judges 1:1-7 **"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adonibezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adonibezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adonibezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so GOD hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died."**

"And it came to pass after the death of Joshua, that the children of Israel asked of Jehovah, saying, Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them? And Jehovah said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up; and Jehovah delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they smote of them in Bezek ten thousand men. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek; and they fought against him, and they smote the Canaanites and the Perizzites. But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their food under

my table: as I have done, so GOD hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there." (ASV)

The time frame for the events in this book are given in verse one — after the time of Joshua. In the book of Joshua, one sees the initial conquest of the land take place. Now one sees what would be called today a "mop-up" operation. Israel then asked of the Lord who was to lead in the conquest because they had no central leader as they had in Moses and Joshua.

Judah is chosen to take the lead, to be the first to clean up its territory. Judah asks Simeon for help in conquering its their enemies. This is natural and proper when one considers that Simeon was given its territory within the territory of the tribe of Judah. They fought against the Perizzites, led by one, Adoni-bezek ("Lord of Bezek"). Judah and Simeon were successful in their battles, as one sees ten thousand of the enemy slain and Adoni-bezek fleeing. When they captured Adoni-bezek, they cut off his thumbs and great toes. Why? Clark says this was done

*"That he might never be able to draw his bow or handle his sword; and great toes, that he might never be able to pursue or escape from an adversary"* (Clarke, p. 103).

This was retribution for the same cruelty he had shown to kings which he had captured (seventy in all). Note that Adoni-bezek considered his punishment just when he said, **"as I have done, so GOD hath requited me."**

Judges 1:8 **"Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire."**

"And the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem, and took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire." (ASV)

Note the past tense of this verse: **"The**

children of Judah **had fought against Jerusalem.**" It is believed by most that the Israelites only held this city for a short time. They destroyed the city with fire, and afterwards the Jebusites recaptured the city and held it until the time of David. Others, like Clarke, believe the city was taken, but that the Israelites never did take the fortress on Mount Zion until the time of David (Clarke, p. 104).

Judges 1:9-11 **"And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites, that dwelt in the mountain, and in the south, and in the valley. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron: (now the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba:) and they slew Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir: and the name of Debir before was Kirjathsepher:"**

"And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites that dwelt in the hill-country, and in the South, and in the lowland. And Judah went against the Canaanites that dwelt in Hebron (now the name of Hebron beforetime was Kiriath-arba); and they smote Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmi. And from thence he went against the inhabitants of Debir. (Now the name of Debir beforetime was Kiriath-sepher.)" (ASV)

Three areas were designated in Judah: (1) Mountain, (2) south, and (3) valley (low country). The mountainous area was the area around Jerusalem, Hebron, et cetera.

*"The south was the Negev, or desert country, which began a few miles south of Hebron and terminated at Beersheba. The lowlands, more properly the Shephelah, were the foothills lying between the coastal plain of Palestine and the Judaeen range of mountains"* (Coffman, p. 15).

Judges 1:12-15 **"And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.**

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

"And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kiriath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife. And it came to pass, when she came unto him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she alighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wouldest thou? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing; for that thou hast set me in the land of the South, give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the nether springs." (ASV)

It should be remembered that some of the material found in the book of Judges is a retelling of events which have already taken place during the time of Joshua. This is one of those sections and can be revisited in Joshua 15:13-19.

Why did Achsah ask for springs from her father? With springs to provide water, the city the newlyweds received was far more valuable; and would adequately provide for their needs.

One is reminded that in the way the Israelites used the word "**brother,**" Othniel could have been a younger nephew of Caleb's. Numbers 13:6 shows that Caleb's father was Jephunneh, and in the present text Othniel's father was Kenaz.

Judges 1:16-21 **"And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father in law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went**

**and dwelt among the people. And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they slew the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with the coast thereof, and Askelon with the coast thereof, and Ekron with the coast thereof. And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak. And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited day."**

"And the children of the Kenite, Moses' brother-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt with the people. And Judah went with Simeon his brother, and they smote the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. And the name of the city was called Hormah. Also Judah took Gaza with the border thereof, and Ashkelon with the border thereof, and Ekron with the border thereof. And Jehovah was with Judah; and drove out the inhabitants of the hill-country; for he could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron. And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses had spoken: and he drove out thence the three sons of Anak. And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day." (ASV)

Moses' father-in-law was Jethro, who was a Midianite. The Kenites were probably a branch of that family. These kinsmen of Moses helped the Israelites and dwelt among them. They settled in the area of Jericho, which the "**city of palm trees**" indicates.

Judah also helped Simeon in taking the cities left to it. The text tells of Judah's capturing Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron. These were chief cities of the Philistines, and the

coasts would be the areas around these cities. Note the change in this verse. At first the Lord was with them, and they drove the Philistines from their chief cities. Then they fail to completely destroy the Philistines (Philistines were the people of the valley). Why? There can only be one answer for their failure: they became (at some point) disobedient to GOD. He had promised to be with them and give them victory over their enemies, but only if they remained faithful to Him.

Again, Caleb is mentioned as receiving Hebron, where he successfully destroyed the descendants of Anak, who were giants.

One sees the failure of the Benjamites to drive the Jebusites from Jerusalem. This lends credence to the idea that some portion of Jerusalem may not have been destroyed when Judah burnt the city. Or, it may be that after the city was burned, the Jebusites returned and the Benjamites tried to drive them out but failed. Instead they allowed the Jebusites to live among them in clear violation of GOD'S commands.

**Judges 1:22-26 "And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Bethel: and the LORD was with them. And the house of Joseph sent to descry Bethel. (Now the name of the city before was Luz.) And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will show thee mercy. And when he showed them the entrance into the city, they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let go the man and all his family. And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz: which is the name thereof unto this day."**

"And the house of Joseph, they also went up against Beth-el; and Jehovah was with them. And the house of Joseph sent to spy out Beth-el. (Now the name of the city beforetime was Luz.) And the watchers saw a man come

forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Show us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will deal kindly with thee. And he showed them the entrance into the city; and they smote the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man go and all his family. And the man went into the land of the Hittites, and built a city, and called the name thereof Luz, which is the name thereof unto this day." (ASV)

The house of Joseph signifies the tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh (on the east bank). Members of Joseph's family were sent to "**descry**," i.e., "*to spy out*" the city of Bethel. An interesting event is recorded in the text. Joseph's descendants saw a man leave the city, and in exchange for his selling out the city, they granted him and his family safety. They indeed captured the city, after which they allowed this traitor to go free. He took his family to the land of the Hittites, where he built a city and named it Luz (after the city he had betrayed). Ephraim and Manasseh disregarded GOD's command not to make any treaties with any of the people of the land. GOD had commanded them to destroy all the inhabitants. Instead of trusting GOD and asking His guidance in capturing the city, they turned to a traitor to accomplish their goal. They made an agreement with this man which allowed him and his family to live contrary to GOD'S commands.

**"When the LORD thy GOD shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy GOD shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make**

**marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly"** (Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Judges 1:27-28 **"Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and her towns, nor Taanach and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and her towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and her towns: but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out."**

"And Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its towns, nor of Taanach and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Dor and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Ibleam and its towns, nor the inhabitants of Megiddo and its towns; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was waxed strong, that they put the Canaanites to taskwork, and did not utterly drive them out." (ASV)

Manasseh is especially spoken of here as not driving out the inhabitants of its land. As already stated above (Deuteronomy 7:1-4), Manasseh violated GOD'S law in its failure to destroy all of these people. Consequently, those who were allowed to live became a thorn in the side of Israel.

Judges 1:29-36 **"Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho,**

**nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out. Neither did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, nor the inhabitants of Bethanath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Bethshemesh and of Bethanath became tributaries unto them. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley: But the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became tributaries. And the coast of the Amorites was from the going up to Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward."**

"And Ephraim drove not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Zebulun drove not out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became subject to taskwork. Asher drove not out the inhabitants of Acco, nor the inhabitants of Sidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob; but the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. Naphtali drove not out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, nor the inhabitants of Beth-anath; but he dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to taskwork. And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the hill-country; for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley; but the Amorites would dwell in mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim: yet the hand of the house of Joseph prevailed, so that they became subject to taskwork. And the border of the Amorites was from the ascent of Akrabbim, from the rock, and upward." (ASV)

These verses record more disobedience on the part of Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan.

The truth is that all of the tribes violated GOD'S instructions with regard to cleansing the land of all the people. They allowed them to live among them, and eventually the Canaanites false gods were adopted by many of the Israelites. Just as we see with Dan, these nations caused many problems. Why did GOD allow this to happen? Because He gave them free moral agency. The Israelites could choose whom they would serve, and as long as they served GOD, He gave them victory. They were defeated by their enemies now, because they had turned from fidelity to the GOD who had delivered them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and had previously given them victory over all their enemies. Their disobedience was now to prove quite costly.

## **Judges — Chapter Two**

**Judges 2:1-5 "And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed My voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD."**

"And the angel of Jehovah came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And He said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you: and ye shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall break down

their altars. But ye have not hearkened unto My voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of Jehovah spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto Jehovah." (ASV)

**"Angel of the Lord:"** The angel referred to here is thought by some to be a prophet, since the word **"angel"** means *"messenger."*

Further, the angel says, **"I will never break My covenant with you,"** and He never did. Only the party who violates the conditions found in that covenant has broken it. GOD did not violate His covenant, but Israel broke its covenant with Him. How? In verse two GOD shows that Israel had made leagues (treaties) with the inhabitants. This was contrary to GOD's will.

**"And when the LORD thy GOD shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them"** (Deuteronomy 7:2).

Further, Israel had been told to throw down the altars and was forbidden to worship the gods of these people.

**"And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place"** (Deuteronomy 12:3).

But Israel had not obeyed GOD, as its silence attested to when GOD said, **"ye have not obeyed My voice: why have ye done this?"**

What was the punishment for disobeying GOD? Verse three states that GOD would no longer drive Israel's enemies out of the land. Further, these enemies would now be able to

inflict pain upon the children of Israel. Before, Israel's enemies could not stand against Israel, but now they would be able to conquer Israel.

Upon hearing the Lord's words, the people responded in sorrow and even offered sacrifices to GOD. But it was too late, they deserved punishment, and now they would receive it. One might liken this to someone who committed a crime and then truly expresses sorrow to the judge for committing the crime. But the crime has been committed, and the consequences must be paid.

It is not known what the name of this place had been (some speculate it was Bethel), but it now gains a new name, Bochim. The name Bochim means, *"weeping or weepers."* It is obvious that the people recognized their sin, and apparently at this time were sorrowful, but the consequences of their sin would have to be paid.

Judges 2:6-10 **"And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that He did for Israel. And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."**

"Now when Joshua had sent the people away, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of Jehovah that He had wrought for Israel. And

Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Jehovah, died, being a hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill-country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor yet the work which He had wrought for Israel." (ASV)

Here is a brief accounting of Joshua's speech to the Israelites, and his death is mentioned again. The point of this retelling seems to be that the people heeded his pleading and teaching as long as he lived and as long as those who were his contemporaries lived. But after their deaths, the text says, **"there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD."** Why did they not "know" the Lord? The first possibility is that their fathers had not taught them as they should, much like Eli and his sons. Or it may have been that the sons, like Eli's sons, were just not interested in following the path set before them by their father. Joseph saved the Egyptians from the famine, and Pharaoh was grateful. But years later there was another Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. He could have gone back into the archives to learn about Joseph, but he did not. He simply chose not to know Joseph. The same thing is a possibility here. But in either case, whether it was the neglect of the parents or the unwillingness of the children to learn (or both), one can see the wisdom of Moses' words to Israel with regard to training their children.

**"Therefore shall ye lay up these My words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door**

**posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth"** (Deuteronomy 11:18-21).

**Judges 2:11-13 "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD GOD of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."**

"And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baalim; and they forsook Jehovah, the GOD of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the peoples that were round about them, and bowed themselves down unto them: and they provoked Jehovah to anger. And they forsook Jehovah, and served Baal and the Ashtaroth." (ASV)

The term **"Baalim"** is the plural for Baal, as the term **"Ashtaroth"** is the plural of Ashtoreth. The reason for this is that there were different forms of these gods. Baal was the primary male god, and Ashtoreth was the primary female god. Thus, whatever form the chief male and female gods of worship were in a locality, they are represented here in the plural. This indicates that Israel worshiped many of these gods. In doing so, **"the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord."**

The people of Israel is reminded that GOD brought them out of the land of Egypt, and it is He whom they were to serve. When one goes back to Deuteronomy chapter twenty, one finds GOD telling the people the same thing one finds here.

**"And GOD spake all these words,**

**saying, I am the LORD thy GOD, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy GOD am a jealous GOD, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me" (Deuteronomy 20:1-5).**

GOD has always demanded that His people put Him absolutely first. The heathen had the idea they could (and should) serve many gods. Like the Athenians who built an altar to the "**unknown GOD**," they did not want to offend the gods. But the fact is that man cannot divide his loyalties in this matter.

**"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve GOD and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).**

*"BAAL (Bay' uhl) Lord of Canaanite religion and seen in the thunderstorms, Baal was worshiped as the god who provided fertility. He proved a great temptation for Israel. 'Baal' occurs in the Old Testament as a noun meaning, "lord, owner, possessor, or husband," and as a proper noun referring to the supreme god of the Canaanites, and often to the name of a man. According to 1 Chronicles 5:5, Baal was a descendant of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, and the father of Beerah. Baal was sent into exile by Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. The*

*genealogical accounts of Saul's family listed in 1 Chronicles 9:35-36 indicates that the fourth son of Jehiel was named Baal.*

*The noun comes from a verb that means to marry or rule over. The verb form occurs in the Hebrew text 29 times, whereas the noun occurs 166 times. The noun appears in a number of compound forms which are proper names for locations where Canaanite deities were worshiped, such as Baal-peor (Num. 25:5; Deut. 4:3; Ps. 106:28; Hos. 9:10), Baal-hermon (Judg. 3:3; 1 Chron. 5:23), and Baal-gad (Josh. 11:17; 12:7; 13:5).*

*Baal worship revolved around two themes that represented the conception of Baal his worshipers held. Baal was both the sun-god and storm-god. He was worshiped as sun-god when the people wished to express thanks and gratitude for light and warmth and fertility. Worship of Baal as storm-god took place to appease the destructive nature of Baal, demonstrated by drought and storms that devastated the vegetation of the worshipers. The efforts to appease Baal whenever adverse conditions prevailed culminated in the sacrifice of human beings, usually the firstborn of the one offering the sacrifice. The victims were burnt alive, a practice in the Old Testament termed 'to pass through the fire' (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Baal worship was as diverse as the communities in which he was worshiped. Each locality had its own Baal, who was named after the city or place to which he belonged. Baal was considered the owner or possessor of the land on which his followers lived.*

*Baal Worship in Israel. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, under the leadership of Ahab of the household of*

*Omri, was led to worship Baal as the state god (1 Kings 16:31). The prophets Elijah and Elisha delivered the condemnation of God concerning Baal worship and tried to rid the land of the idolatry (1 Kings 18:17-40; 2 Kings 1:9-16).*

*The worship of Baal infiltrated the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The reform movement of Hezekiah was reversed when Manasseh became king (2 Kings 21:2-16), as he reinstated Baal worship, along with worship of Assyrian gods and other gods.*

*The conflict between Baal worship and the worship of the Lord God is described in the Book of Hosea. The judgment of the people of God for their idolatry, and their restoration is disclosed in Hosea 2. The Bible writers affirmed the supremacy of Yahweh and condemned the worship of any other gods beside Yahweh" (James Newell, Holman Computer Dictionary).*

*"ASHTAROTH (ash' tuhrahth) is the plural form of Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war and the daughter of the god El and the goddess Asherah. 1. The Old Testament uses the plural form, Ashtaroth, more than the singular form, Ashtoreth. The only references to Ashtoreth come in 1 Kings 11:5,33; 2 Kings 23:13. The Hebrew scribes replaced the vowels of the name Ashtart or Ashteret with the vowels from the Hebrew word for shame, boshet, to bring dishonor to the memory of the goddess. This exchanging of vowels formed the word Ashtoreth. The Greek form of the name is Astarte.*

*In Canaanite mythology, she appears to be the sister of the goddess*

*Anath and the spouse of the god Baal. Anath also was the spouse of Baal, as well as the goddess of love and war. Some confusion, therefore, exists with regards to Ashtaroth's relationship to Anath. Anath and Ashtaroth may have referred to the same goddess, or they may have been two separate deities. Among the people of Palestine, Ashtaroth may have taken over Anath's role. The Egyptians gave the title 'Lady of Heaven' to Astarte, Anath, and another goddess, Qudshu. In Moab, Astarte was the spouse of the major god, Chemosh. The Babylonians and Assyrians called her Ashtar and worshiped her as goddess of fertility and love. The people of the Ancient Near East during the Hellenistic and Roman periods referred to her as Aphrodite-Venus.*

*Apparently, the word 'ashtaroth' at one time meant 'womb' or 'that which comes from the womb.' This word, 'ashtaroth,' appears in Deuteronomy 7:13 and 28:4,18,51 to describe the young of the flock. This use may demonstrate the link between the goddess Ashtaroth and fertility.*

*The biblical writers often coupled Baal with Ashtaroth as a designation of pagan worship (Judg. 2:13; 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3-4; 12:10). In addition to her worship by the Canaanites, the Old Testament mentions the people of Sidon (1 Kings 11:5) and the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:10) as reverencing her. At Beth-Shan, the Philistines erected a temple to Ashtaroth (1 Sam. 31:10). The reference to the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 7:18) may have Ashtaroth in mind, but this is uncertain. The Israelites worshiped her, and the biblical writers specifically refer to Solomon's leadership in promoting the worship of Ashtaroth (1 Kings 11:5).*

*She was only one of many foreign deities revered by the Israelites. Josiah destroyed the shrines built to her (2 Kings 23:13).*

*2. Egyptian documents dating from the eighteenth century B.C. onward refer to a city called Ashtartu or Ashtarot in the region of Bashan. Joshua 21:27 mentions a city with the name Be-eshterah in Bashan, while a man named Uzzia is called an Ashterathite (1 Chron. 11:44). Og, king of Bashan, reigned in the city of Ashtaroth (Deut. 1:4; Josh. 9:10; 12:4, 13:12, 31; 1 Chron. 6:17). The sons of Machir received it as a part of their inheritance in the land (Josh. 13:31).*

*Once the city is called Ashteroth-karnaim (Gen. 14:5) or 'Ashtaroth of the two horns.' A seventeenth century B.C. stone mould for making bronze figurines of Astarte was uncovered at Nahariyah. She was represented as a woman with two horns on her head. Many other clay figurines of Astarte have been found at sites throughout Palestine. The city's name, Ashtaroth, may reflect that she was worshiped by the citizens of this settlement.*

*The city is located at modern Tel Ashtarah about 20 miles east of the Sea of Galilee. It was located on a major branch of the Via Maris, or Way of the Sea and in the King's Highway, the major highway for traffic east of the Jordan" (Scott Langston, Holman's Computer Dictionary).*

**Judges 2:14-15** "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went

**out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed."**

"And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of Jehovah was against them for evil, as Jehovah had spoken, and as Jehovah had sworn unto them: and they were sore distressed." (ASV)

GOD'S anger was hot against the children of Israel because they served the Baalim and the Ashtoreth. The punishments He inflicted on them were: (1) Delivering them to the spoilers and (2) Selling them to their enemies. There are two separate things involved in these verses. The spoilers seem to be those who made raids on the land and took the Israelites possessions from them. The selling into the hands of their enemies was a captivity. Notice, in both cases, Israel could not stand against its enemies.

Previously GOD had protected the Israelites and provided them with everything they needed. Now, not only does He not provide these things, but He is now working against them. Everything they try to do fails. All of this happens just as GOD warned them it would: (See Leviticus chapter twenty-six and Deuteronomy chapter twenty-eight.). They had been warned, and now they would suffer the consequences for not obeying GOD. The consequences would be exactly as GOD had said they would be.

**Judges 2:16-19** "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the

**commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way."**

"And Jehovah raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those that despoiled them. And yet they hearkened not unto their judges; for they played the harlot after other gods, and bowed themselves down unto them: they turned aside quickly out of the way wherein their fathers walked, obeying the commandments of Jehovah; but they did not so. And when Jehovah raised them up judges, then Jehovah was with the judge, and saved them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented Jehovah because of their groaning by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. But it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they turned back, and dealt more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their doings, nor from their stubborn way." (ASV)

When the people suffered at the hands of the spoilers and of those to whom were they sold, then GOD would send a deliverer, called a judge. What were these judges? Did they sit at a bench and render decisions and verdicts in trials? They were leaders, generals, and governors over the people. These judges would be raised up by GOD for the purpose of overthrowing the Israelites' oppressors.

But notice the people did not truly turn away from the evils in which they were participating. They continued to follow after the false gods. Notice, too, that this is called

going "**a whoring.**" This is appropriate from two standpoints: (1) GOD'S people have always been likened to His bride. Thus when they became unfaithful to Him, they were guilty of whoredom. (2) Much of the worship of the false gods of that time involved acts of immorality. Thus, Israel figuratively and literally was guilty of whoredom. They refused to follow their fathers' lead in faithfulness to GOD, and as the generations passed, they became more addicted to the sensuality of worshiping false gods.

Notice when GOD raised up one of these judges, He did so through His mercy. Also, remember He had made promises to Abraham regarding the promised seed. This is why His mercy was so often extended to them during these times. They would not be completely destroyed (as they deserved), because of the promise made to Abraham that Christ would come through their lineage.

The text also states that GOD was with the judge. It is interesting that it does not say He was with Israel. Apparently it was the judge who gained GOD'S favor, and as soon as the judge died, the text shows that the people would return to their old ways, and even become more steeped in their evil.

**Judges 2:20-23 "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, Because that this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered He them into the hand of Joshua."**

"And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel; and He said, Because this nation have

transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations that Joshua left when he died; that by them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of Jehovah to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. So Jehovah left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua." (ASV)

From previous studies, one remembers GOD had declared He would gradually drive the Canaanites out. This would keep the land from going wild and the wild animals from increasing to the detriment of the Israelites. As He had promised, they conquered the land little by little. But then they rebelled against GOD, and now He refuses to drive their enemies out any more. One is reminded that at the death of Joshua, there was still work to be done in eliminating the Canaanites from the land.

The Canaanites left in the land would now test the Israelites to see if they would follow GOD.

### **Judges — Chapter Three**

**Judges 3:1-2 "Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;"**

"Now these are the nations which Jehovah left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as beforetime knew nothing thereof:" (ASV)

The nations these verses speak of are named in verse three. Why were these nations left, when GOD had promised Israel He would drive all of them out and give the land to Israel?

*"(1) To prove them, whether or not*

*they would obey the Lord, and (2) to teach those ignorant of it the art of war. (3) A third reason is also given, namely, that of punishing Israel for their disobedience"* (Coffman, p. 31).

How could there be Israelites who did not know what it was like to be at war? Israel still had enemies in the land which it was supposed to eliminate. This indicates the Israelites (for some time) had stopped fighting and settled for co-existence with their enemies. Israel put the Canaanites under tribute contrary to GOD's law (Joshua 16:10; 17:13; Judges 1:28).

**Judges 3:3-4 "Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath. And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which He commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses."**

"namely, the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entrance of Hamath. And they were left, to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of Jehovah, which He commanded their fathers by Moses." (ASV)

These verses are a summary of the people left in the land because Israel had not completely obeyed GOD. Since the Israelites had not driven the Canaanites out as commanded, GOD allowed the Canaanites to continue in the land to test Israel. What were they testing? To see if Israel would remain faithful to GOD. GOD knew the nature of the children of Israel, He knew they were extremely sinful, and He knew that the sinful person will always try to get the righteous to give in to his lifestyle. If the unrighteous can get the righteous to give in to his lifestyle, then there will be no one left to condemn his

actions (at least until the judgment day).

**Judges 3:5-6 "And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods."**

"And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons and served their gods." (ASV)

These verses simply show the value of the Israelites — they failed the test.

**"But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous GOD: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods."** (Exodus 34:13-17)

*"The people of GOD not only mixed their worship with that of the heathen, but also mixed their blood by their marriages" (Zerr, p. 345).*

All which has been said so far in the book of Judges is a preface for the rest of the book.

**Judges 3:7 "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their GOD, and served Baalim and the groves."**

"And the children of Israel did that which was

evil in the sight of Jehovah, and forgot Jehovah their GOD, and served the Baalim and the Asheroth." (ASV)

Many believe the word "**groves**" signifies the female deity and its plural [*"Asheroth"* (ASV) and *"Asherahs"* (NKJV)]. This is very possible because of the way the word "**groves**" sometimes refers to an image of a female god. The word "**groves**" is also used in the Scriptures to represent a place in a wooded area where these gods were worshipped. *"Pliny assures us that trees, in old times, served for the temples of gods"* (Clarke, p. 111). (When I was in Vietnam, I visited a number of villages where the people believed that the spirits of their departed ancestors lived in the trees around their village, and the people tended to act in a worshipful way toward those trees).

The picture one sees is of the children of Israel giving themselves to these false gods with the Canaanites whom they did not drive out of the land.

**Judges 3:8 "Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years."**

"Therefore the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years." (ASV)

**CHUSHANRISHATHAIM :**  
*"Mesopotamian king who oppressed Israel until he was defeated by Othniel the son of Kenaz (Judg. 3:8). The name of this Mesopotamian ruler means Chushan of double iniquity. It probably was a derogatory epithet rather than his actual name"* (Holman Bible Dictionary, Computer version).

Winter says the name Chushanrishathaim signifies *"double wickedness"* (Winter, p. 356).

Coffman says it means, "*Ethiopian of double iniquity or Nubian of double-dyed wickedness*" (Coffman, p. 36). It is probable this was a name given to him by his enemies. All one knows of this king is found in these verses.

**MESOPOTAMIA:** "*Strictly speaking, Mesopotamia (from the Greek 'between the rivers') is the designation of the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Mesopotamia applies more generally to the entire Tigris-Euphrates valley. At times in antiquity the culture of Mesopotamia dominated an even larger area, spreading east into Elam and Media, north into Asia Minor, and following the fertile crescent into Canaan and Egypt*" (Holman Bible Dictionary, Computer Version).

In clear language Coffman shows the outline which will be seen throughout this book.

*"First there is ease and prosperity for Israel; then they forget GOD and serve the pagan gods; GOD becomes angry with them and delivers them into hardship and oppression; GOD pities them and raises up a saviour in the person of a distinguished Judge. Again Israel enjoys prosperity till that judge dies; and then the cycle is repeated"* (Coffman, p. 36).

The Bible teaches that GOD is a jealous GOD.

**"For the LORD thy GOD is a consuming fire, even a jealous GOD"** (Deuteronomy 4:24).

It is no wonder GOD's anger is **"hot against Israel."** Israel had been an unfaithful wife to GOD.

Judges 3:9 **"And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger**

**brother."**

"And when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah, Jehovah raised up a saviour to the children of Israel, who saved them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother." (ASV)

After being oppressed for a time the people began to cry out to GOD. In other words, they realized the error of their way and turned back to GOD for help. The man GOD raised up to help them was a natural choice — Othniel. He had already shown his bravery in capturing Kirjath-sepher and was now chosen to deliver the Israelites.

Othniel's name means "*God is powerful.*" It is mentioned again that he was Caleb's younger brother. The term **"brother"** should probably be understood in the general way the Hebrews used it to signify a kinsman or member of the same tribe.

Judges 3:10-11 **"And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim. And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died."**

"And the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and Jehovah delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand: and his hand prevailed against Cushan-rishathaim. And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died." (ASV)

The **"Spirit of the Lord."** When one looks at all of the accounts where this term is used, it indicates that the one about whom it was said had miraculous abilities, possibly in the realm of super human strength (as in the case of Samson). It also indicates divine guidance for these men (and one woman). It should be remembered that these judges were more than great warriors; they judged (ruled) the people for given amounts of time.

Sometimes they were not warriors (cf. Deborah). Great wisdom would be needed to govern these rebellious people.

Note that the victory is not attributed to Othniel but rather to the Lord's delivering Chushan-rishathaim into Othniel's hands. The peace which Othniel brought lasted for forty years and then the text says he died. The mention of his death is significant, because it marks the time when the people would again turn away from GOD. This is the case with all the judges. Following the judge's death, the Israelites repeatedly disobeyed GOD, turning to idols again.

**Judges 3:12 "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD."**

"And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah: and Jehovah strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah." (ASV)

The cycle begins again, with Israel violating GOD'S laws. GOD strengthens the hand of the Moabite (Eglon) against the Israelites. It is observed that GOD caused Eglon to be victorious over Israel. Clarke says the name Eglon means "*Little calf*" (Clarke, p. 112).

**Judges 3:13 "And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees."**

"And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and smote Israel, and they possessed the city of palm-trees." (ASV)

To help him defeat the Israelites, Eglon recruited the children of Ammon and Amalek. From Genesis nineteen, one remembers these were the children of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his daughters.

Notice that Eglon did not possess all of Israel but only the area in the vicinity of Jericho referred to here as "**the city of palm trees.**"

**Judges 3:14 "So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years."**

"And the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years." (ASV)

Here the text simply tells the length of the Moabite oppression — eighteen years. Eighteen years does not seem like a very long time, but a great deal can happen in eighteen years. Simply consider the first eighteen years of a human being's life, and think of all the changes that take place. Or look at the technology which has developed in the last twenty years and how it has changed one's life and lifestyles.

**Judges 3:15 "But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab."**

"But when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah, Jehovah raised them up a saviour, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a man left-handed. And the children of Israel sent tribute by him unto Eglon the king of Moab." (ASV)

Again one sees the Israelites were seeking aid and comfort from GOD. This time GOD raised up a man named Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin. He is sometimes referred to as "*Ehud, the left handed dagger man.*" It is said that a "**present**" was sent by the Israelites through Ehud. This present was probably the tribute money demanded by the Moabites and it is so rendered in both the ASV and NKJV.

When one talks about Ehud's being left handed, there are several things to consider. First, it was not unusual for fighting men from the tribe of Benjamin to be left handed

(Judges 20:16). Second, the margin of my Bible has this note regarding "**lefthanded:**" "*shut of his right hand.*" This indicates that something may have been wrong with Ehud's right hand.

Zerr tells us, "*The original language here indicates that something had deprived him, or at least hindered him in his use of the right hand*" (Zerr, p. 346).

Coffman comments on this saying, "*The last word here in the Hebrew is literally, 'bound of his right hand,' indicating that Ehud's right hand might have been crippled or injured. At any rate, it was 'tied up' or 'bound'*" (Coffman, p. 39).

Others consider this to mean he was ambidextrous. It would seem that the former is the idea, that his right hand was injured in some way, possibly even permanently.

**Judges 3:16 "But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh."**

"And Ehud made him a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he girded it under his raiment upon his right thigh." (ASV)

Here one is given information concerning the weapon which Ehud would use to kill Eglon. It is said to be a dagger, sharpened on both sides (edges). The length of it is said to be a cubit. Clarke says it was but a span (Clarke, p. 113), basing his observation upon the rendering of the Septuagint version. The text of all three versions listed above call it a cubit, a length of approximately eighteen inches. This dagger was strapped to his right thigh, in order to be easily drawn by the left hand. It was concealed from sight under his garment. One might ask how a foreign subject could be allowed to see the king and not be searched for a weapon (and how his weapon would not be found if he were searched).

Perhaps Josephus was right when he relates that Ehud became acquainted with Eglon and obtained his favor and confidence (See Winter, p. 361).

**Judges 3:17-18 "And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present."**

"And he offered the tribute unto Eglon king of Moab: now Eglon was a very fat man. And when he had made an end of offering the tribute, he sent away the people that bare the tribute." (ASV)

The next bit of information one has is that Eglon was very fat. When Ehud gave the king his "**present**," he sent the people away who helped him bring the present.

**Judges 3:19 "But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him."**

"But he himself turned back from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king. And he said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him." (ASV)

The word "**quarries**," in this text comes from a Hebrew word which signifies idols, or as the NKJV states it, "*stone images.*" Every commentary and dictionary which this writer consulted show this to be the meaning of this word.

"*Image, idol, graven image*" (Thayer, CD Rom Version).

"*It is an image or idol which has been cast or molten, carved or graven; a stone quarry*" (Zodhiates, CD Rom Version).

Ehud sent his helpers away and tarried

(this writer presumes feigning interest in these idols). He then turned back, telling the king he had a secret message for him. Eglon told his servants to keep silence. This was either a cue for them to leave, or there are specific instructions given which are not revealed (for they do leave him and Ehud alone).

**Judges 3:20 "And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from GOD unto thee. And he arose out of his seat."**

"And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting by himself alone in the cool upper room. And Ehud said, I have a message from GOD unto thee. And he arose out of his seat." (ASV)

The "summer parlour" was a room set off from the rest of the building. It was designed as a place where a person could relax from the heat and get away from the commotions which may attend a home (or in this case, a palace). It is a place especially designed for privacy, and according to Clarke, usually had a private entrance as well as one which connected it to the primary residence (Clarke, p. 114).

Ehud had spent some time viewing the idols, and then told Eglon he had a message from GOD. This would seem natural to the king, who arose to receive this message. Why did Eglon arise? Possibly it was an act of reverence for the message he thought he was about to receive, or maybe he arose out of alarm. Nevertheless, Eglon's arising made Ehud's task easier.

**Judges 3:21-22 "And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly: And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out."**

"And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his

body: and the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, for he drew not the sword out of his body; and it came out behind." (ASV)

It had already been stated that Eglon was a very fat man. The force of Ehud's thrust with the dagger was such that the dagger did not just enter to the hilt but went beyond the hilt, probably engulfing the entire weapon.

Then one is told "the dirt came out." Notice that in all three of the versions quoted above, the wording is different: "the dirt came out" (KJV), "it came out behind" (ASV), and "his entrails came out" (NKJV). The reason for this is that the original here is difficult to comprehend. Coffman lists three guesses which are commonly held for these words:

*"(1) It refers to an anal discharge, (2) that it means the sword penetrated even through the king's back, or (3) that the sword penetrated the intestines and that the discharge came through the opening by the sword"* (Coffman, p. 42).

**Judges 3:23-25 "Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them. When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour were locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber. And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened them: and, behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth."**

"Then Ehud went forth into the porch, and shut the doors of the upper room upon him, and locked them. Now when he was gone out, his servants came; and they saw, and, behold, the doors of the upper room were locked; and they said, Surely he is covering his feet in the upper chamber. And they tarried till they were ashamed; and, behold, he opened not the doors of the upper room: therefore they took the key, and opened them, and, behold, their

lord was fallen down dead on the earth." (ASV)

As Ehud left he locked the doors behind him. The text implies that Eglon's servants saw Ehud leave and went to attend to their master. But they found the doors locked. Did they not know that Ehud had locked the doors? The only explanation seems to be that there must have been a device which allowed Ehud to lock the door, much like self-locking doors today. If Eglon's servants had observed Ehud locking the door from the outside, they would have surmised something was wrong from the beginning. But they thought the king was taking care of his personal needs and did not disturb him.

Covering his feet is variously interpreted to mean either taking a nap or using the bathroom. When sufficient time had passed, they realized something was amiss, found a key, opened the door and found their master dead.

**Judges 3:26-30 "And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years."**

"And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirah. And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the hill-country of Ephraim; and the children of Israel went down with him from the

hill-country, and he before them. And he said unto them, Follow after me; for Jehovah hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they smote of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, every lusty man, and every man of valor; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years." (ASV)

Looking at the whole picture, one sees Ehud crossing the Jordan to deliver the "tribute" to Eglon. There, he killed the king, and while Eglon's servants tarried, Ehud escaped back to the west side of Jordan. Once at Mount Ephraim, he called for the Israelites to rise up and overthrow their oppressor. Notice that he told Israel that GOD had delivered its enemy into its hands. He speaks of this as having already happened. Coffman quotes Hervey as saying,

*"By seizing the fords of the Jordan they cut off all communications between the Moabites east of the river and the occupation forces in Israel. The enemy could neither escape into Moab nor get any help from Moab. Thrown into confusion by the sudden death of their king, and the overwhelming enthusiasm of Israel's attack, the Moabites lost ten thousand men, thus bringing to an end the Moabite oppression" (Coffman, p. 44).*

This victory gave Israel peace for eighty years. None of the other victories in the book of Judges caused peace to last this long in Israel.

**Judges 3:31 "And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel."**

"And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who smote of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox-goad: and he also saved Israel."

(ASV)

*GOAD: "A rod, generally about eight feet long, with a pointed end used to control oxen. During the time of the judges, the Israelites hired Philistine blacksmiths to 'sharpen the goads' (1 Sam. 13:21), either by fashioning metal points for the pointed ends or making metal casings for the blunt end which might be used to knock dirt clods from the plow" (Holman's Dictionary, Computer Version).*

The brevity of this account is striking. Here is what one knows: (1) The judge — Shamgar, (2) The oppressor — the Philistines, and (3) The weapon — an ox goad. No details are given. Did he kill these Philistines in one battle or over a lifetime? How long was the oppression and how long did Israel have peace after the deliverance?

## **Judges — Chapter Four**

**Judges 4:1-3 "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel."**

"And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, when Ehud was dead. And Jehovah sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." (ASV)

After Ehud died, the Israelites returned to their pattern of sin and even became worse in

it. Because of their sins, GOD sold them into the hands of Jabin, king of Hazor. When one considers this carefully, one comes to realize that GOD allowed them to be conquered; in fact, He had a hand in making sure they were conquered by these people. One must also realize that Israel sold itself into this slavery. When one chooses to serve Satan, he in essence sells himself to do Satan's bidding. Remember, the Israelites got exactly what they deserved in this case.

Joshua had formerly defeated a king named Jabin from Hazor (Joshua chapter eleven). This is not the same Jabin. It is not known if this was simply another king who bore the same name, or if the ruler of these people took the name Jabin as a title, much like the Egyptians used the term Pharaoh. As for the city of Hazor, it was a chief city of northern Palestine situated near Lake Hazor. It was in the territory of the tribe of Naphtali.

*HAZOR: "Place name meaning, 'enclosed settlement.' 1. Hazor was located in upper Galilee on the site now known as tell el-Qedah, ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee and five miles southwest of Lake Huleh" (Holman Bible Dictionary, Computer version).*

The text says Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron which signifies they were war chariots. These chariots made him very strong and hard to defeat. Israel was oppressed for twenty years by Jabin. Barnes tells one the word "**oppressed**" is the same word used of the Israelites when they were in Egypt. This indicates that their servitude was extremely harsh. Again one sees the Israelites came to their senses and cried to the Lord for relief.

**Judges 4:4-10 "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and**

**the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD GOD of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him."**

"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in the hill-country of Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said unto him, Hath not Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, commanded, saying, Go and draw unto mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thy hand. And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding, the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for Jehovah will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh; and there went up ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him." (ASV)

The first thing one notices about Deborah is that she is a "**prophetess.**" In other words, GOD chose her to speak for Him (inspiration). But the next thing one notices is that she was not raised up to deliver Israel, as is stated about other judges. She was already in the position of being a judge when GOD sent her the message that it was time to free His people from their Canaanite oppressors.

The people came to her regarding matters of judgment or to seek her advice on other matters. It is from her place in Mount Ephraim that she sent for Barak, whom GOD had chosen to be the military leader who would deliver Israel. She informed Barak that it was GOD who had made the call to arms, and it was GOD who had determined the strategy for this war. Barak was to take the army of Israel (10,000 men) to Tabor and the river of Kishon. Of this river (and the area around it) one is told:

*"In normal weather this river is merely a dried up wadi; but in the instance of a rain, it becomes a roaring river. Of course, Sisera knew that; and, if it had been the rainy season, he would not have deployed his chariots in such a dangerous location. This indicates that it was certainly an unexpected and untimely rain that turned the battle into the advantage of the Israelites"* (Coffman, p. 53).

This river is also called the River of Megiddo, an area where many great battles have been fought down through the centuries.

In verse eight one sees that Barak refused to go unless Deborah went with him. Barak was hesitant, maybe because of his own inabilities, his extreme cautiousness, or his lack of faith. His reaction was very similar to those of Moses and Gideon, as well as others in the scriptures, who for one reason or another hesitated to fulfill GOD'S instructions.

Deborah informed Barak that she would certainly go with him, not as a military commander, but as an encouragement to him.

Nevertheless, she informed him that the glory of this victory would not belong to him, but rather to a woman. At this point one needs to notice something good about Barak. Once Deborah said she would go with him, Barak did not hesitate to do what the Lord required of him. And, this was done by him even though he was told a woman would receive the credit for the destruction of Sisera, the cutting off of the head, so to speak, of the Canaanite army.

Verse ten says Barak called the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to join him in this battle. Were these the only tribes which participated in this war? Apparently not when one considers "the rest of the story." In her song of chapter five (vs. 14-15), Deborah mentions Benjamin, Machir (Manasseh), Zebulun and Issachar. Further, she rebuked those on the other side of Jordan, as well as the tribes of Dan and Asher for not helping (Judges 5:16-17).

**Judges 4:11 "Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh."**

"Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, even from the children of Hobab the brother-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far as the oak in Zaananim, which is by Kedesh." (ASV)

The Kenites normally lived in the south of Israel, in the tribe of Judah. This verse shows why this Kenite happened to be in this area with his wife, Jael. They had simply separated themselves (for whatever reason) from the rest of the Kenites and moved to this region.

**Judges 4:12-16 "And they showed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that**

**were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon. And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off his chariot, and fled away on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; and there was not a man left."**

"And they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor. And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles, unto the river Kishon. And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which Jehovah hath delivered Sisera into thy hand; is not Jehovah gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. And Jehovah discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot, and fled away on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; there was not a man left." (ASV)

From this text, it appears that the Kenite showed Sisera what was taking place, i.e., the armies of Israel were gathering at Tabor. Because of this information, Sisera gathered his chariots and arranged them at the river Kishon. In this chapter the information is not given which showed what happened to the chariots, but from the next chapter one learns that a great rain came, and thus the chariots were made useless in the mire which resulted from the heavy rains.

At the right time GOD sent Barak and his

army against Sisera, whose defeat was sealed. The battle quickly turned in favor of the Israelites, whereupon one sees Sisera flee. Jabin saw how hopeless the situation was and probably thought that if he fled on foot, he would be overlooked and be able to escape. Meanwhile the army of chariots is destroyed so that not one man escapes, i.e., except for Sisera. With the leader still on the loose another army might be raised; he needed to be found and destroyed before victory could truly be claimed.

**Judges 4:17-22 "Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples."**

"Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not.

And he turned in unto her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. And he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael Heber's wife took a tent-pin, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the pin into his temples, and it pierced through into the ground; for he was in a deep sleep; so he swooned and died. And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And he came unto her; and, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the tent-pin was in his temples." (ASV)

As Sisera fled, he came to the tent of Jael. It is interesting that he did not go to the tent of her husband, as the women had their own tents in those times. Possibly he thought of the sympathetic nature of women and thought he would be safe in her care. Or possibly he thought no one would think to look for a mighty warrior hiding in a woman's tent. He must have felt safe here because there was an apparent treaty between Jabin and the Kenites.

Jael invited him to come into her tent and covered him with a rug (blanket). Sisera was tired because a chariot leader was not used to being on foot, fleeing from an enemy. He asked Jael for water to quench his thirst, but she gave him milk and butter (5:25). She gave him that which would slack his thirst and give him strength. He was tired, his stomach was filled, and he was under a warm blanket — sleep was natural under those circumstances, even for one fleeing from an enemy. Before sleeping, he gave her instructions to lie if anyone came looking for him. This indicates that he intended to sleep for a while.

While Sisera slept, Jael took a tent-peg and drove it through Sisera's head, even to the point of pinning him to the ground. She

then went outside to wait for Barak and then showed him Sisera's body. In ancient times it was considered absolutely shameful for a warrior to die at the hands of a woman. Surely, as Barak viewed the sight in the tent, the words of Deborah must have rung in his ears.

**Judges 4:23-24 "So GOD subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan."**

"So GOD subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prevailed more and more against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan." (ASV)

The victory was attributed to GOD. Barak had not given them victory, nor had Jael. They were simply the instruments GOD used to accomplish His goal. Notice that these verses indicate this was not the end of the war, i.e., this victory over Sisera. But this was the first battle of a war which saw the ultimate defeat of Jabin and the Canaanites. After this war the Canaanites were never again portrayed as having dominion over, or even being a threat to, the Israelites.

## **Judges — Chapter Five**

**Judges 5:1-2 "Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."**

"Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, For that the leaders took the lead in Israel, For that the people offered themselves willingly, Bless ye Jehovah." (ASV)

This is at once both a "war song" and a song of "thanksgiving." It appears to have

been composed by Deborah, but note that Barak joined her.

When did GOD avenge the Israelites with regard to their enemies? When the people willingly offered themselves to GOD'S service. Notice in all of these accounts of deliverance that they were delivered and their enemies were destroyed only when the people turned to GOD. When does one find the victory today? When he turns in humility to the Lord for guidance and His watch care.

**Judges 5:3-4 "Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD GOD of Israel. LORD, when Thou wentest out of Seir, when Thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water."**

"Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto Jehovah; I will sing praise to Jehovah, the GOD of Israel. Jehovah, when Thou wentest forth out of Seir, When Thou marchest out of the field of Edom, The earth trembled, the heavens also dropped, Yea, the clouds dropped water." (ASV)

The kings in this passage must refer to the kings of the heathen, for the Israelites did not have kings as yet. The princes may also refer to the heathen princes, but they could represent the princes of Israel. They were to give heed to the words of Deborah who rehearsed the victories and blessings GOD had given His people. For all He had done, GOD deserved the praises sung by Deborah; and He continues to deserve praises from all men for all He has done. All ought to give **daily praises** to Him who has so greatly blessed mankind.

GOD had shown His might in Seir. In commenting on verse four, Coffman states, *"Deborah is here attributing the victory of Israel to the GOD of the Sinai Covenant; and accordingly she represents him as coming to Israel's*

*rescue from that direction, namely, from the south and from the east; and as Sinai was southeast of Edom, GOD would have come through Edom on His way to help Israel"* (Coffman, p. 66).

It would seem Coffman's comments would be true only when considered from a figurative sense; for GOD did not make His headquarters in Sinai but could be found everywhere. But if GOD could have been said to dwell anywhere on a permanent basis, it would have been at the tabernacle/temple. What this verse seems to show is that the storm came from the east (to destroy Sisera's army), and since GOD was behind the storm, He was portrayed as coming from the east.

**Judges 5:5 "The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD GOD of Israel."**

"The mountains quaked at the presence of Jehovah, Even yon Sinai at the presence of Jehovah, the GOD of Israel." (ASV)

This passage points out the majesty of GOD and His power. It further shows that the GOD Deborah spoke about is not like the regional gods of the heathen but is the same GOD who helped them at Sinai, the one and only GOD of heaven.

**Judges 5:6-7 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel."**

"In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, And the travellers walked through byways. The rulers ceased in Israel, they ceased, Until that I Deborah arose, That I arose a mother in Israel." (ASV)

In these verses one is shown that the conditions which existed were present both during the time of Shamgar and Jael. This

may indicate that Shamgar and Jael were contemporaries and that these events were happening at the same time. One cannot be sure as to whether they were contemporaries or whether these conditions existed at two separate times.

The highway's being unoccupied means that people were not out and about. This would be due to a lack of freedom to travel, which would be the condition under an oppressive occupation by foreign forces. Instead of people traveling the highways (the easier means of traveling) they were traveling the byways or the crooked paths of the countryside.

Normal life in the villages and towns had ceased, until Deborah arose as their judge. But notice that Deborah does not promote herself by talking about being a judge — she simply calls herself a "mother" who arose in Israel.

**Judges 5:8-9 "They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD."**

"They chose new gods; Then was war in the gates: Was there a shield or spear seen Among forty thousand in Israel? My heart is toward the governors of Israel, That offered themselves willingly among the people: Bless ye Jehovah." (ASV)

Why did the conditions of oppression exist which are spoken of in the former verses? Because the Israelites took to themselves gods other than GOD. They did not have many weapons available to them because of their rebellion to GOD and because of the oppression which they endured. One of the things an occupying army will do is to eliminate as many weapons as they can from a conquered people. These were dire times for the Israelites.

But under these conditions, there were

leaders who were willing to lead when it came time to overthrow the enemy. It was these "governors" to whom her heart went out; and she thanked GOD for these leaders who were not afraid to lead the Israelites.

Judges 5:10-11 **"Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of His villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates."**

"Tell of it, ye that ride on white asses, Ye that sit on rich carpets, And ye that walk by the way. Far from the noise of archers, in the places of drawing water, There shall they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah, Even the righteous acts of His rule in Israel. Then the people of Jehovah went down to the gates." (ASV)

Those who rode on "**white asses**" were those who held prominent positions; they were important or high-ranking people. Deborah then spoke of those who drew water. Formerly, they had not been able to draw water in safety for fear of being shot by the enemy. The wells were a common place for people to gather and discuss events, to catch up on news, et cetera. Under the occupation this had not been possible. But now, after the great victory over the forces of Jabin, this had changed. Now they could gather at the places where they formerly were in danger and praise the righteous acts of GOD. While the oppression went on, the gates of the city would have been a place of conflict; now the people could congregate around them. The leaders could peacefully sit by the gates and conduct business as they formerly had done. There was no fear of their enemies. This might also have something to do with those who had fled these cities, returning to them now that they were no longer occupied by their enemies.

Judges 5:12-14 **"Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer."**

"Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, utter a song: Arise, Barak, and lead away thy captives, thou son of Abinoam. Then came down a remnant of the nobles and the people; Jehovah came down for me against the mighty. Out of Ephraim came down they whose root is in Amalek; After thee, Benjamin, among thy peoples; Out of Machir came down governors, And out of Zebulun they that handle the marshal's staff." (ASV)

Those who had formerly been their captors were now their captives. The reason this came about was that GOD had raised up Deborah. Her humility is evident, as she gave all the credit to GOD for Israel's victories.

Verse fourteen gives the names of four tribes which fought in this war, and yet it should be observed they were but a remnant. These tribes were Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (Manasseh), and Zebulun. Of Zebulun, it is said they wielded the pen. This seems to be a reference to scribes who kept records of all that was involved in this war.

Judges 5:15-18 **"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and**

**abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."**

"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed forth at his feet. By the watercourses of Reuben There were great resolves of heart. Why satest thou among the sheepfolds, To hear the pipings for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben There were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond the Jordan: And Dan, why did he remain in ships? Asher sat still at the haven of the sea, And abode by his creeks. Zebulun was a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death, And Naphtali, upon the high places of the field." (ASV)

In this section one sees the praise of some of the tribes for their participation, while others were rebuked or chided for not participating in the war. Those who were rebuked were Reuben, Gilead (most believe this was the two and one-half tribes east of Jordan), Dan, and Asher. On the other hand, two of the tribes were specifically pointed out as having been brave, risking their lives, to fight the battles (Zebulun and Naphtali).

As Coffman points out, in all of these passages nothing is said about Judah and Simeon. This has led some to suppose they were involved in battle with the Philistines at this time and therefore had their own war to contend with. From all learned in the Scriptures, Judah is portrayed as the warrior tribe of Israel, so it would seem strange that they were not involved in this conflict, unless they too were involved in some conflict. It is simply not known why they were not mentioned.

Judges 5:19-21 **"The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river**

**Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."**

"The kings came and fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan. In Taanach by the waters of Megiddo: They took no gain of money. From heaven fought the stars, From their courses they fought against Sisera. The river Kishon swept them away, That ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength." (ASV)

Though Jabin is mentioned earlier as the king who fought against Israel, here additional information is given that there were other kings involved in this war. These were probably minor kings, who either owed allegiance to Jabin or joined him for the common cause of defeating the Israelites.

Several places are mentioned as battle sites in the narrative. Considering the flight of armies who are routed, this would be a natural act to find battles being fought in a number of places. One should also remember this was not a one-day battle.

The phrase **"they took no gain of money"** indicates these kings were not victorious. They did not benefit from this war in any way. Victorious armies often took spoil and/or extracted a tribute from those they conquered. These kings gained nothing. There are those who try to relate this phrase to the Israelites, but such could not be the case since "the spoils belong to the victor."

The **"stars"** in verse twenty do not refer to the physical stars in the heavens; they refer to powers. This indicates the powers of heaven were arrayed against the Canaanites. Since GOD gave the victory through a great storm, this makes sense. Others believe the **"stars"** represent the princes of Israel. This author believes the former is the case.

Here the detail is supplied that many were lost in the Kishon River. This normally dry wadi (because of the storm) quickly rose and destroyed many Canaanites.

Judges 5:22-23 **"Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the**

**prancings of their mighty ones. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty."**

"Then did the horsehoofs stamp By reason of the prancings, the prancings of their strong ones. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of Jehovah. Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, Because they came not to the help of Jehovah, To the help of Jehovah against the mighty." (ASV)

Verse twenty-two shows the panic which came to Sisera's army as the storm and the Israelites descended upon them.

Then one sees a curse placed upon Meroz. Notice it is pronounced by the angel of the Lord. Is it possible this was another manifestation of the Word (Christ) in the Old Testament? When one considers that the archangel Michael when disputing with the devil did not dare bring a railing accusation against him [but instead said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9)], it seems possible this was indeed the Lord Himself.

The village of Meroz was a short distance from where this battle was fought, and the people had been called upon to help fight Sisera. But they held back, much like many Christians today who are found standing on the sidelines when a battle needs to be fought. They were willing to enjoy the benefits gained from those who fought, but they would not take any of the risk involved in the battle. If such brought a curse upon them then, will it not do the same today when people refuse to take a stand for the Lord?

Judges 5:24-27 **"Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she**

**smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead."**

"Blessed above women shall Jael be, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; She brought him butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the tent-pin, And her right hand to the workmen's hammer; And with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote through his head; Yea, she pierced and struck through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; At her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell down dead." (ASV)

Jael is initially seen as the wife of an ally of Sisera, yet when the time came she took Sisera's life, sealing the Israelite victory. For her actions GOD praised this woman through the prophetess. The rest of this section reveals the actions which brought her this praise. There is one thing which needs to be noticed. The phrase **"she smote off his head"** [Machaq – *"To smite in pieces, to destroy, to pierce, to crush, to cut through"* (Zodhiates, CD Rom)] is believed by scholars to be figurative language denoting the end of Sisera's power. One might also notice that Barnes and Coffman believe that the **"butter"** was curdled, thus an intoxicating beverage [*"Milk, sour milk, cheese"* (Thayer)].

Judges 5:28-30 **"The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?"**

"Through the window she looked forth, and

cried, The mother of Sisera cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, Yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not found, have they not divided the spoil? A damsel, two damsels to every man; To Sisera a spoil of dyed garments, A spoil of dyed garments embroidered, Of dyed garments embroidered on both sides, on the necks of the spoil?" (ASV)

Here one sees the apprehension of Sisera's mother as she waited for her son to return from battle. As time passed and her son did not return, she seemed to sense what had happened. Yet, as anyone would desire, she tried to think of another explanation as to why he had not returned. Her ladies offered an explanation that the battle had been won and that the soldiers were simply tarrying to divide the spoils of war. When the text says she "**returned answer to herself**," it is saying she repeated this to herself over and over to try to reassure herself that this was what had happened.

**Judges 5:31 "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years."**

"So let all thine enemies perish, O Jehovah: But let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years." (ASV)

Here is the wish that all of the enemies of the Lord's people might suffer the same consequences, i.e., defeat. GOD'S people were to shine forth as the brightness of the sun. Because of these battles the land had rest for forty years.

## **Judges — Chapter Six**

**Judges 6:1-6 "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of**

**the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD."**

"And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah: and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel; and because of Midian the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east; they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents; they came in as locusts for multitude; both they and their camels were without number: and they came into the land to destroy it. And Israel was brought very low because of Midian; and the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah." (ASV)

The cycle began again with the Midianites being the oppressors. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his second wife, Keturah (Genesis 25:2). Abraham had six sons by Keturah: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Ishbak, Shuah, and Midian. The Midianites oppressed Israel for seven years.

The oppression of the Midianites was so severe that the Israelites used and made

caves (dens) in the mountains around them as places to live. These mountains are filled with caves because of the limestone ridges found throughout Israel.

The Midianites are described as having devoured the crops of the Israelites, so that Israel had nothing to eat. Verse four indicates they took Israel's flocks and herds as well. This left the Israelites in dire straits. Notice that the Midianites had the Amalekites and the children of the east as allies. The Amalekites were traditional enemies of the Israelites. They were the descendants of Esau and like the Midianites were nomadic in nature. They were the ones who attacked Israel shortly after Israel made its exodus from Egypt (Num. 24:20). Midian had another ally called the "**children of the east.**" Holman's Bible dictionary calls these people the Kadmonites; which means "easterners."

*"They probably inhabited the Syro-Arabian desert between Palestine-Syria and the Euphrates --- which is to say, areas to the east of Canaan...The sons of the concubines of Abraham were sent to live in the "east country" (Kedem) away from Isaac (Gen. 25:6)" (Holman's Bible Dictionary, Computer version).*

Midian and its allies are said to have descended on Israel like "**grasshoppers.**" The word "**grasshoppers**" is translated as "*locusts*" in both the ASV and NKJV, as it should be here. As one studies the text he can see why they were called locusts, because they devoured everything in their path, leaving the land behind them desolate. They traveled lightly; living in tents for they were a nomadic people. Like the locusts which descended on this area of the world from time to time, these oppressors are described as being without number, i.e., so numerous they could not be counted.

Israel cried to the Lord in their desperate strait for relief. As Coffman stated it,

*"Apparently the only lesson that Israel*

*had learned thus far in their history, was that when things became unbearable, they always called upon Jehovah and He rescued them"* (Coffman, p. 86).

**Judges 6:7-10 "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, That the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD GOD of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; And I said unto you, I am the LORD your GOD; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed My voice."**

"And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah because of Midian, that Jehovah sent a prophet unto the children of Israel: and he said unto them, Thus saith Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drove them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am Jehovah your GOD; ye shall not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell. But ye have not hearkened unto My voice." (ASV)

When the Israelites again came to their senses they cried to GOD for deliverance. But before GOD would deliver them He sent a prophet to tell them they were getting exactly what they deserved. The prophet reminded them of what GOD had done for them and how He had delivered them from all of their oppressors. Verse ten is a reminder of the covenant GOD had made with them in Exodus 34:10-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1ff. And then He told them they had not obeyed His words.

One might also notice that the prophet sent to them on this occasion is not named.

But as Winter points out,

*"Unnamed prophets make frequent appearances in the Scripture narrative to anoint kings (II Kings 9:4ff), to pronounce judgment on wicked rulers (I Kings 21:21-24), or to challenge a nation (I Kings 13)"* (Winter, p. 392).

Notice something else about this prophet. He did not foretell the future (as most people falsely think the work of a prophet was) but rather pointed them back to GOD'S Word (Ex. 34; Deut. 7) and reminded them of what they were doing at that moment. The work of a prophet was to speak forth GOD's message to man. This involved using the past, present or future to accomplish this end. Primarily the prophets spoke about the present time in which they lived. **They were teachers!**

**Judges 6:11-18 "And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that Thou talkest with**

**me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again."**

*"And the angel of Jehovah came, and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto him, and said unto him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my lord, if Jehovah is with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all His wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? but now Jehovah hath cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian. And Jehovah looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And Jehovah said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found favor in thy sight, then show me a sign that it is Thou that talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto Thee, and bring forth my present, and lay it before Thee. And He said, I will tarry until thou come again."* (ASV)

The angel of the Lord went to Ophrah which is in the tribe of Manasseh. He went to the place where Gideon tried to conceal grain from the Midianites. The KJV says he was threshing this grain **"by the winepress;"** while the ASV and NKJV say he was threshing it *"in the winepress."*

*Winter states, "Since the winepress was carved out of stone, it was usually underground. Normally, two cistern-like areas were carved out, one slightly below the other. In the upper one, a man would tread out the grapes and as the liquid rose to a certain height, it would enter a drain which flowed to the lower vat where the wine could be stored. Many of these were large enough for a man to hide in, and*

Gideon was probably down in the winepress with some kind of brush or other material covering the entrance to hide him completely from their enemies" (Winter, p. 395-396).

WINEPRESS "In Old Testament times the presses for making wine were usually cut or hewed out of rock (Isa. 5:2) and were connected by channels to lower rock-cut vats where the juice was allowed to collect...Recent excavations at tel Aphek have uncovered two unusually large plastered wine presses dating from the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.)" (Holman's Bible Dictionary, Computer version).

It is interesting to notice Gideon's attitude regarding himself in verses twelve and fifteen. Gideon thought of himself as the least in the whole tribe of Manasseh, yet GOD called him a "mighty man of valour." There is no indication that Gideon had led an army before, and if he had he would not be the least in the tribe of Manasseh. Gideon's humility is striking. Coffman quoted from the Pulpit Commentary, which states, "Such humility is the usual companion of true greatness" (Coffman, p. 89). GOD knew the character of Gideon and knew that he was mightier than he thought. He had already shown great character in not worshiping the idols around him even though his whole tribe seemed to have been involved in these activities.

Gideon asked why GOD had not used His power to take care of Israel as He had in the past (v. 13). But GOD pointed to Gideon as being the one He would use to deliver Israel (v. 13). GOD further assured him that He would be with him, and thus victory was assured. It is at this point that Gideon appeared to realize who spoke to him. This is not just an angel, this is Deity. Notice the language carefully. Gideon proposes to bring a "present," the margin reads a "meat

offering."

"Present" — MINCHAH — "The word means present, gift; tribute; sacrifice (mostly an unbloody one), a meat offering, an offering (in general), an oblation, a sacrifice" (Zodhiates, CD Rom Version).

Gideon sought proof that this was all real, that this was not a dream; he wanted proof of what the messenger was saying. Is this another "doubting Thomas?" Yes it is, for Thomas was not the doubting man many make him out to be. Thomas and Gideon both asked for proof, and this was/is a good quality. No one should be so gullible as to accept anything which he is told. The Bereans were praised not because they heard someone proclaim GOD'S word and simply accepted it because it had been proclaimed to them. They were praised because

**"they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"** (Acts 17:11, Emphasis mine R.K.).

The Bereans received the word and searched to see if what they had been taught was true. Gideon is doing what they did in looking for the proof.

*"Joshua might have been saved the humiliation in the affair of the Gibeonites had he investigated (Joshua 9:14)"* (Zerr, p. 351).

**Judges 6:19-24 "And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto Him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of GOD said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened**

**cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that He was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."**

"And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of meal: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto Him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of GOD said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Then the angel of Jehovah put forth the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there went up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of Jehovah departed out of his sight. And Gideon saw that He was the angel of Jehovah; and Gideon said, Alas, O Lord Jehovah! forasmuch as I have seen the angel of Jehovah face to face. And Jehovah said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto Jehovah, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." (ASV)

As one reads these verses, one must keep in mind that Gideon had just asked for a sign to prove that this was a message from GOD and that he was to be the deliverer. In the oriental custom it appears that Gideon desired to show his guest hospitality by providing food for him. He prepared the food, but instead of eating it the messenger told him to place it on the rock. As strange as the directions he received must have been, Gideon obediently followed them. The food which Gideon prepared became an offering at the touch of the staff, at which point the angel

disappeared.

It is at this point that Gideon fully realized who his visitor was. This was the Lord, for Gideon became afraid that he would die because he had seen **"the angel of the Lord."** He obviously remembered the words of Exodus 33:20: **"And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live."** Realizing who had just visited and being assured that he would not die, he built an altar to GOD. The altar was named **"Jehovah-Shalom,"** which means *"the Lord sent peace,"* or *"Jehovah's peace."*

**Judges 6:25-27 "And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the LORD thy GOD upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night."**

"And it came to pass the same night, that Jehovah said unto him, Take thy father's bullock, even the second bullock seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the Asherah that is by it; and build an altar unto Jehovah thy GOD upon the top of this stronghold, in the orderly manner, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt-offering with the wood of the Asherah which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as Jehovah had spoken unto him: and it came to pass, because he feared his father's household and the men of the city, so that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night." (ASV)

Notice the first act GOD required of

Gideon was to clean up his own house. He was commanded to take two bullocks which his father had and throw down the altar of Baal and cut down the grove ("Asherah," ASV; "wooden image," NKJV). It is believed by some commentators that one of these bullocks was being prepared by Gideon's father as a sacrifice to these gods.

In the place of the altar and idol which he was to tear down, he was to build an altar to GOD. It should be remembered that Israel was to offer sacrifices on the altar at the tabernacle and nowhere else. But this was an exception which was ordered by GOD Himself. The bullocks which Gideon was commanded to take would be useful in tearing down the false altar and then as sacrifices to GOD. The new altar was to be built according to the instructions which GOD gave [Coffman points out that "**ordered place**" here means "*with that pertaining to it*" (p. 94). This altar was clearly to be seen not as an idols altar but as one which belonged to the Lord by the way it was built and everything which pertained to it.]

Gideon took ten men from his father's house to accomplish this task. Notice the text says ten men of his servants which indicates that he had others as well. This indicates he had more resources available to him than would have been previously indicated when he said he was the least of the least. By night he goes to accomplish the task set before him. Why? Because of fear! He was afraid of what the people of the city might do, and as one sees, his fears were justified. It would seem that this would have been the right time to accomplish this task even without the motivation of fear. One should notice that he might have been afraid of what the people would do to him; but he was rightly more afraid of what GOD would do to him if he failed to obey Him.

Judges 6:28-32 **"And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the**

**altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar."**

"And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down, and the Asherah was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die, because he hath broken down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the Asherah that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye contend for Baal? Or will ye save him? he that will contend for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him contend for himself, because one hath broken down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal contend against him, because he hath broken down his altar." (ASV)

Imagine the surprise of the people the next morning when they found their altar and "god" destroyed. In its place another altar with a burning bullock was found. Quite naturally they began an inquiry as to who would have done such a thing. But as Cundall has so simply stated, "*A secret known to ten men is*

*no secret*" (Coffman, p. 95). Gideon is pointed out as the one who had done this deed.

The men of the city demanded that Gideon be brought forth by his father so he might be killed for his actions. But his father basically says, "If Baal is really a god, let him take care of himself. He certainly does not need you, mere human beings, to defend him." He further stated that the ones who ought to be put to death were those who tried to defend a god who could not take care of himself. This is perfect logic.

Gideon was given a nick-name on this occasion — Jerubbaal. This name means "Let Baal plead" (Zerr, p. 351) or "Let Baal contend" (Winter, p. 399). The idea seems to be "You leave my son alone, let Baal contend with him." This name later appears as Jerubbesheth, which means "may shame judge" or "shame increases" (Holman Bible Dictionary, Computer version). Cf. Second Samuel 11:21.

**Judges 6:33-35** "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them."

"Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east assembled themselves together; and they passed over, and encamped in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered together after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; and they also were gathered together after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them." (ASV)

The Midianites and their allies gathered against Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

"JEZREEL (*Jehz' reel*), meaning 'GOD sows,' refers to a major valley, a northern city, a southern city, and the son of Hosea. 1. *The Old Testament* uses the name to refer to the entire valley of Jezreel which separates Galilee from Samaria, including the valley of Esdraelon. The valley was important militarily as a battle site for Deborah (Judg. 4-5), Gideon (Judg. 6-7), Saul (2 Sam. 4), Jehu (2 Kings 9-10), and Josiah (2 Kings 22). The geography of Palestine made Jezreel a major route for travel from north to south and from east to west" (Holman's Bible Dictionary, Computer version). Winter tells us that this valley is sometimes called the "valley of Megiddo" (Winter, p. 400).

In verse thirty-four one is told "**the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.**" Coffman says, in the Hebrew language this phrase is literally interpreted as "*The Spirit of the Lord clothed himself with Gideon*" (Coffman, p. 98). It would seem to this writer that this is the same kind of thing which happened in Acts 2:1-4. In other words, what Gideon did now was controlled by the Spirit of GOD just as the words of the apostles were controlled by His Spirit on Pentecost.

"Abiezer was the eldest son of Gilead (Joshua 17:2)" (Winter, p. 400). This was the same family from which Gideon came, and so one sees that the family of Gideon was the first to answer his call to arms. But Gideon did not stop there; he also called for the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali to join them against the Midianites. Why was not Issachar called, since the battle will take place in its territory? I would assume because they were either totally dominated by this invading force or they were already involved in defending their territory against these invaders. It should be noticed that they

were not rebuked for failing to fight, like those tribes which Deborah rebuked earlier.

**Judges 6:36-40 "And Gideon said unto GOD, If Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto GOD, Let not Thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray Thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And GOD did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground."**

"And Gideon said unto GOD, If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as Thou hast spoken, behold, I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the ground, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as Thou hast spoken. And it was so; for he rose up early on the morrow, and pressed the fleece together, and wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. And Gideon said unto GOD, Let not thine anger be kindled against me, and I will speak but this once: let me make trial, I pray Thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And GOD did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground."(ASV)

In this section of Scripture one sees the test which Gideon proposed to prove this was truly GOD'S will. The fleece is interesting, in that it readily absorbs moisture. Tolkowsky, tells of fishermen who lived on barren islands which had no streams or available fresh water. Yet their need for water was satisfied by placing fleece on the rocks and in the

morning wringing the water from the fleece (Quoted by Coffman, p. 99). Thus, the second day's miracle was more convincing than the miracle done on the first. For the ground around the fleece to be wet with dew, but the fleece dry, was amazing, considering the normal absorption powers of the fleece. As one shall see, this was all Gideon needed to know that GOD really wanted him to lead an army against Midian.

## **Judges — Chapter Seven**

**Judges 7:1 "Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley."**

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and encamped beside the spring of Harod: and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley." (ASV)

HAROD — *"Place name meaning 'quake,' 'terror,' or 'intermittent spring'"* (Holman Bible Dictionary, Computer version). The exact place in which this battle took place is not known. The one thing which can be known is that it was in the western portion of the valley of Jezreel.

It appears from the text that as soon as Gideon received confirmation that this was indeed GOD'S mission for him, he immediately gathered an army to fight the Midianites. From everything previously seen, this must have amazed the Midianites, for their oppression had been so great that the Israelites had been forced to hide in caves, et cetera. Now Midian faced a rather large army.

**Judges 7:2-3 "And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into**

**their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.”**

“And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.” (ASV)

Imagine Gideon’s surprise when GOD told him he had too many soldiers in his army. The Midianite army plus its allies numbered one hundred thirty-five thousand men (Judges 8:10). Gideon’s original army only contained thirty-two thousand men. And then he was told he had too many. Further, GOD told him how to shrink his army by having him tell all the fainthearted that they could go home. That is unheard of in normal human reasoning. When this writer was in basic training, there were a number of fainthearted people who did not want to be there, and none of them was allowed by their his choice to go home. But this was not unusual for the armies of Israel; in fact, GOD had previously made provisions for this.

**“And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart”** (Deuteronomy 20:8).

This passage was spoken in a context in which GOD excused some from military duty. As one writer put it, Israel had a voluntary army.

Why would GOD want to reduce Gideon’s army? If they won the battle with a large number of troops they might be tempted to claim that they had won it themselves. GOD desired that there be no doubt as to who had won the battle for them — He had! How many of them went home? Twenty-two thousand, leaving “only” ten thousand soldiers under Gideon’s command.

*“The vast majority of men involved in warfare actually have no enthusiasm for it, but are merely involved due to peer pressure or some other motivation”* (Coffman, p. 102-103).

**Judges 7:4-8 “And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.”**

“And Jehovah said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it

shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and Jehovah said unto Gideon, Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And Jehovah said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thy hand; and let all the people go every man unto his place. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets; and he sent all the men of Israel every man unto his tent, but retained the three hundred men: and the camp of Midian was beneath him in the valley.” (ASV)

When one tries to place himself in the shoes of Gideon, he cannot help but feel amazed at the events which transpired. GOD had already depleted the fighting force by a third. Now He eliminated another ninety-seven percent of Gideon’s army. Gideon started with thirty-two thousand soldiers and ended up with three hundred. Yet, Gideon did not flinch at this reduction of his force. GOD promised him the victory, and the victory was His — Gideon trusted GOD.

GOD reduced Gideon’s force this time with a water test. All those who lapped the water like a dog, i.e., brought the water to their mouth with the hand, instead of bowing to the water to drink, were selected to be his fighting force. These were men who were particularly suited to be warriors. They would not be caught off guard but were constantly aware of their surroundings and the approach of an enemy. The others were so intent on satisfying their thirst that they looked at the water instead of being watchful for the enemy.

*“God has frequently devised a ‘water test’ in the achievement of His holy purposes. It was a water test that selected Rebekah to be the wife of Isaac (Gen. 24:43-46). It was the*

*water test that separated liberated Israel from the pursuing legions of Pharaoh; and here God selected the triumphant three hundred from the ten thousand by a water test. Even today, God chooses among the sons of men by the water test (Mark 16:15-16)”* (Coffman, p. 104-105). One might also add to this thought the water test of Noah (1 Peter 3:21; 2 Peter 2:5).

**Judges 7:9-14 “ And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host.”**

“And it came to pass the same night, that Jehovah said unto him, Arise, get thee down into the camp; for I have delivered it into thy hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Purah thy servant down to the camp: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thy hands be strengthened to go down into the camp. Then went he down with Purah his

servant unto the outermost part of the armed men that were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like locusts for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand which is upon the sea-shore for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man telling a dream unto his fellow; and he said, Behold, I dreamed a dream; and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came unto the tent, and smote it so that it fell, and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: into his hand God hath delivered Midian, and all the host.” (ASV)

The very night after the water test was completed, Gideon was told to go down to the camp of his enemies. GOD told Gideon to take his servant Phurah with him if he was afraid. Since he took Phurah one must conclude that he was afraid. Any soldier who does not feel fear at the thought of encountering the enemy is a stone-cold killer, incapable of feelings. The truth of the matter is, there is nothing wrong with feeling some fear or dread when facing the enemy — even when one considers this in the light of facing Satan. What good thing can fear do for one? Fear keeps one on his toes, cautious, ready to do whatever is necessary to preserve life.

Why did GOD send Gideon down to the camp of his enemies? To hear what they had to say. In hearing the dream of the enemy soldier and the interpretation of that dream, GOD was strengthening the hand of Gideon. Notice the terms used in verse twelve to show the vastness of the Midianite army: grasshoppers, camels, and sand.

A barley loaf (Gideon) was able to go through the camp and destroy the tent. The tent seems to represent the commander or king, as their position was usually in the center of the camp where they would have the utmost protection from attack. The dream and interpretation of it were obviously produced by GOD.

**Judges 7:15-18 “And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.”**

“And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped; and he returned into the camp of Israel, and said, Arise; for Jehovah hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put into the hands of all of them trumpets, and empty pitchers, with torches within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outermost part of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, For Jehovah and for Gideon” (ASV)

Gideon worshipped GOD after he heard the enemy talking about the dream. Was this formal worship? It could not have been, for he was near the enemy lines, and to do so would have meant discovery. Most likely this was in the form of a prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving for GOD’s might and deliverance of His people. There was no hesitancy in Gideon’s next action; it was time for his little army to act.

From where did Gideon’s plan of attack come? Obviously it came from GOD, since He determined that the victory would show the people He was the cause of their deliverance.

And the scheme for victory is brilliant. In those times, the movements of armies were controlled by trumpet blasts. Commands were given by blowing different notes on the trumpet — commands to advance, retreat, et cetera. This form of communication allowed large armies to maneuver in an effective and efficient manner. Three hundred trumpets would signify a large army. Thus, one sees the terror brought to the Midianites when they heard these trumpets blowing all around them. They were deceived into believing a large army was descending on them in a surprise attack.

Gideon's men were divided into three groups and obviously spread around the Midianite camp. The empty pitchers were earthen vessels which allowed the "**lamps**" (torches) to go unseen.

The word "**sword**" does not appear in this verse in the original language. Their battle cry was simply "*of the Lord and of Gideon.*" This signified to whom the invading army belonged — the Lord and His servant Gideon. Gideon was simply the leader GOD had chosen for this particular time.

Judges 7:19-23 **"So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the**

**border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.**

"So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outermost part of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch, when they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake in pieces the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the torches in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands wherewith to blow; and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran; and they shouted, and put them to flight. And they blew the three hundred trumpets, and Jehovah set every man's sword against his fellow, and against all the host; and the host fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were gathered together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after Midian." (ASV)

The Jews divided the night into three watches of four hours each. The first watch was from 6:00 P.M. until 10:00 P.M.; the second from 10:00 P.M. until 2:00 A.M.; and the third from 2:00 A.M. until 6:00 A.M. Gideon attacked during the change of guards between the first and second watch. The camp had probably settled down for the night and many had probably already begun sleeping. The result of Gideon's actions was total panic. The Midianites felt secure in their camp and now suddenly it appeared that the Israelites were attacking with a great force from all sides. The Midianites and their allies fled, but GOD was not through with them. In the confusion of the night, GOD turned their swords against one another. The Israelites under Gideon were simply standing and blowing the trumpets, but GOD caused the Midianites to think the Israelites were among them. The result; they started killing each other as they fled, thinking their comrades

were actually the enemy among them.

**Judges 7:24-25** “**And Gideon sent messengers throughout all mount Ephraim, saying, Come down against the Midianites, and take before them the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and took the waters unto Bethbarah and Jordan. And they took two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb upon the rock Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian, and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side Jordan.**”

“And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill-country of Ephraim, saying, Come down against Midian, and take before them the waters, as far as Beth-barah, even the Jordan. So all the men of Ephraim were gathered together, and took the waters as far as Beth-barah, even the Jordan. And they took the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and they slew Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they slew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian: and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon beyond the Jordan.” (ASV)

Now that the enemy had been defeated, Gideon wanted the victory to be total. So he called upon the tribe of Ephraim to seal the border, trapping the enemy in order to annihilate them. Ephraim immediately responded to the call to arms. They captured two of the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb [*“Personal names meaning, ‘raven’ and ‘wolf’”* (Holman’s Bible Dictionary, Computer Version)]. One also notices that Gideon had crossed the Jordan River with his army, because the Ephraimites brought the heads of the two princes to him there. Some of the enemy had apparently been able to cross the Jordan, thus Gideon had pursued them. GOD gave His people a great and total victory over their enemies.

## **Judges — Chapter Eight**

**Judges 8:1-3** “**And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? GOD hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.**”

“And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with Midian? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I now done in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? GOD hath delivered into your hand the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that.” (ASV)

Ephraim was one of the leading tribes of the time, and they took offense that they had not been called to help fight the Midianites. But Gideon, in effect, told them they had done more than he had. After all, they had captured these princes which he had not been able to do. Further, they had held the fords and thus assured the victory.

*“Here is an excellent illustration of the proverb that, ‘A soft answer turneth away wrath’ (Prov. 15:1)”* (Coffman, p. 116).

**Judges 8:4-9** “**And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after**

**Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? And Gideon said, Therefore when the LORD hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower."**

"And Gideon came to the Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they are faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thy hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? And Gideon said, Therefore when Jehovah hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them in like manner; and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower." (ASV)

Gideon and his band of three hundred reached the Jordan River and, having crossed it, continued chasing the enemy. But after the fighting they were involved in, and chasing the foe, his men were understandably hungry and tired. It should be remembered that they were now in the territory of their brethren on the east bank of Jordan. Gideon should have been able to expect their help. But when he approached the men of Succoth for food, they refused to give any to him and his soldiers. The same was true when he approached Penuel a little later.

Why did his own brethren refuse to help

him? There are several speculations about this, but this author believes the answer is found in verse six — **"And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?"** This was the language of fear. They wanted to know if Zebah and Zalmunna were under Gideon's control before they helped them. They wanted to be on the winning side, so that when the winner came to them again, they would not be punished for helping the enemy. After the long oppression they had suffered, this was a likely human reaction. But notice a lesson one should learn from this. One should always take a stand for what is right. They knew these were their brethren. They knew the Midianites were not GOD'S people. It always pays to stand for the right. Because they did not take a stand for right, they would be destroyed.

**Judges 8:10-12 "Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them, and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host."**

"Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the host of the children of the east; for there fell a hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host; for the host was secure. And Zebah and Zalmunna fled; and he pursued after them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host." (ASV)

None of the places in this text has been positively identified to date. It is believed that Karkor was an enclosed area, possibly a sheepfold (It would have had to be a very large sheepfold to hold 15,000 men.). In verse eleven, it says the host was secure. This probably meant that they felt secure, some even speculate that they did not post any guards because of their feeling of security. I have wondered if this might mean something a little different. The text says Gideon **"smote the host: for the host was secure."** Webster says that one of the definitions for **"secure"** is *"kept in safe custody."* Could it be that they were being kept in safe custody by GOD for Gideon, so that he would be able to smite them?

Gideon and his army attacked the Midianites and it is said that they were **"discomfited."** There is a marginal note which says *"terrified."* Apparently they were routed again, and in their panic they were destroyed, possibly repeating the actions of their first encounter with Gideon where they turned their swords upon one another (Notice in verse thirteen that the battle seems to have been fought at night.). As the attack progressed, Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but Gideon captured them.

Judges 8:13-17 **"And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of**

### **Penuel, and slew the men of the city."**

"And Gideon the son of Joash returned from the battle from the ascent of Heres. And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described for him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, seventy and seven men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, concerning whom ye did taunt me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thy hand, that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he brake down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city." (ASV)

Verse thirteen indicates the battle was fought at night, and before the sun arises, Gideon was on his way home. This indicates a very fast and thorough victory. On the way home, Gideon had another task to perform. Succoth and Penuel had refused to help him as he pursued the Midianites, and they had been told that upon his return they would be punished. At Succoth Gideon captured a man of the city who identified the leaders of the people (seventy-seven men). (They appear to have been ruled by a "sanhedrin" of seventy men, and the other seven appear to be "elders" of the city.)

Gideon took the elders of the city and punished them, using thorns and briers to accomplish his end. The word **"taught"** means he disciplined them (Heb. - *"made to learn"*). There is every reason to believe that he put these leaders to death, using the thorns and briers. Coffman quotes Dalglish, as saying,

*"The language of the narrative forbids any other interpretation than that the elders were put to death by being threshed amid thorns and briers, or by having thorns and briers dragged over their prostrate bodies"* (Coffman, p. 121-122).

Notice the whole city is not punished; he took the leaders.

Next Gideon destroyed the tower (fortification) of Penuel and killed the men of the city. Some have thought he only destroyed the leaders of Penuel, as he had done at Succoth. But since the leaders of Succoth were specified, and the men of the city are spoken of here, it should be concluded that there was a different circumstance here. Could it be that Penuel did not have leaders like Succoth did? Looking back at verses six through nine, one might draw this conclusion.

Coffman quotes from the International Critical Commentary, which states,

*"The punishment inflicted by Gideon upon Succoth and Penuel was well deserved in all respects, and was righteously executed. They had not only acted treacherously against Israel as far as they could, from the most selfish interests; but in their contemptuous treatment of Gideon and his men, they had poured contempt upon the Lord, who had demonstrated and shown before all Israel that Gideon and his men were GOD'S own soldiers by the victory which was given to him against an innumerable army. Having been called by the Lord to be the deliverer and the judge of Israel, it was Gideon's duty to punish those faithless cities" (Coffman, p. 122).*

Judges 8:18-21 **"Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the LORD liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. And he said unto Jether his firstborn, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us: for as the**

**man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took away the ornaments that were on their camels' necks."**

"Then said he unto Zebah and Zalmunna, What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king. And he said, They were my brethren, the sons of my mother: as Jehovah liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you. And he said unto Jether his first-born, Up, and slay them. But the youth drew not his sword; for he feared, because he was yet a youth. Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and fall upon us; for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescents that were on their camels' necks." (ASV)

One knows nothing of what happened at Tabor, except what is recorded here. One does not know if Zebah and Zalmunna murdered these people before or after Gideon's attack. What one does know is that those who were murdered were near relatives of Gideon. As such, Gideon was apparently the avenger of blood. One might further note that this is war and that Zebah and Zalmunna deserved to die.

Gideon commanded his young son, Jether, to kill these two princes. But Jether was so young that he hesitated in fulfilling this command. It is possible he had never been to war, nor even seen war.

*"This writer's nephew went on a deer hunt; and, as luck would have it, a large buck walked right in front of him only a few yards up wind away; but the young man froze with the gun in his hand; he simply could not pull the trigger! Slaying a fellow human being of course, would present an even greater shock to one who had never killed a man" (Coffman, p. 126).*

In verse twenty-one, the princes call upon Gideon to go ahead and kill them. Zerr suggests the reason why they might have made this request:

*"If an inexperienced youth were depended on for the execution, with his feeling of hesitancy he might make an imperfect attempt that would be more tortuous than if done by a more practiced man. Thus they prefer to have Gideon do the act" (Zerr, p. 354).*

**Judges 8:22-28 "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you. And Gideon said unto them, I would desire a request of you, that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey. (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold; beside ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and beside the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon."**

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast saved us out of the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: Jehovah shall rule over you. And Gideon said unto them, I would make a request of you, that ye would give me every man the ear-rings of his spoil. (For they had

golden ear-rings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment, and did cast therein every man the ear-rings of his spoil. And the weight of the golden ear-rings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescents, and the pendants, and the purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel played the harlot after it there; and it became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house. So Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, and they lifted up their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon." (ASV)

Why had GOD whittled the army of Gideon down from thirty-two thousand men to three hundred? For the express purpose that a man (Gideon or any other) would not receive the glory. Yet, notice that the people immediately wanted to bestow the honor of victory upon Gideon, not GOD, by making him their king.

What a wonderful statement Gideon made here. He understood that GOD was to rule over them and that they were not to have an earthly king (See Deut. 17). He plainly declared that only GOD could be their king, and he would not usurp GOD'S position, nor would his sons.

Gideon did make a request from them. Considering the oppression they had just gone through and the victory gained, they were in a generous mood. He asked for the earrings of the Ishmaelites. Barnes tells us this is more properly the "nose ring" which was commonly worn by the people at that time. At any rate, the amount of gold was said to be one thousand seven hundred "shekels." If indeed these were shekel weights, Keil says this would have been about fifty pounds of gold. At a rate of about four hundred dollars per ounce, this would have been around two hundred and eighty thousand dollars (1997). This would indeed make Gideon a rich man.

Notice also that the Ishmaelites and Midianites seem to be referred to in this text

as being almost the same people. They were very closely related as descendants of Abraham. One also sees them referred to in this way in Genesis 37:27-28, in the account of Joseph being sold into slavery. It may be the case that these two groups were often found together.

Not only did the soldiers gladly give Gideon the earrings, but they also gave him **"ornaments, collars** ("sweet jewels" - margin of my Bible, RK), **and purple raiment.**" From these items, Gideon made an ephod. Some believe this was like that which was worn by the priest (a garment), while others believe it was an image of some kind (Strong). The text says the people went **"a whoring"** after this object, whatever it was.

There is an interesting comment in Zerr's commentary to the effect that Gideon did not participate in this action nor encourage it. This seems plausible when one considers his refusal to be made their king, saying GOD only was to be their king. It is also plausible when one considers verses thirty-two through thirty-five, where the text says after Gideon died the people **"went a whoring after Baalim."** Yet, the text says this ephod became a snare to Gideon and his house. Yet, one should also consider that Gideon is listed with the great men of faith in Hebrews (Heb. 11:32).

While Gideon lived the people had rest for forty years.

**Judges 8:29-32 "And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites."**

"And Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten;

for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites." (ASV)

What is the purpose of this section of scripture? It is setting the stage for the next chapter.

Gideon had many wives and a concubine (at least one). This was not frowned on as it would be today for one to have several wives and/or a mistress. One sometimes forgets that they lived in a time when this was perfectly permissible. Yet, when one views chapter nine, the problems such an arrangement is likely to bring can be easily seen.

One should also notice that the death of Gideon is mentioned as being at a **"good old age."**

**Judges 8:33-35 "And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their GOD, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel."**

"And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and played the harlot after the Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not Jehovah their GOD, who had delivered them out of the hand of all their enemies on every side; neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel." (ASV)

**"Baalim"** is plural, which shows they chased after many gods. But of these, it appears that they made one of these gods

supreme — Baal-berith. The term “**Baal-berith**,” according to Barnes, means “*The god of covenants or sworn treaties*” (Barnes, p. 439).

Notice the progression involved in verses thirty-four and thirty-five. First, they fail to recognize GOD and all He had done for them. He had fought their battles and defeated all of their enemies to preserve them. But they turned away from Him. Second, after turning away from GOD, then they turned away from their obligations toward men. To not show kindness toward the descendants of Gideon, implies that they may have shown just the opposite of honor. If observations previously made are correct, this verse (32) may be more evidence that Gideon and his sons did not go along with the people when they worshipped the ephod which Gideon had made.

Coffman says that he “*has often noticed that men forsake their wives and children or betray and violate business and other obligations after they had denied and forsaken their sacred obligations to their GOD and the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Coffman, p. 134).

## **Judges — Chapter Nine**

**Judges 9:1-6 "And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. And they gave him threescore and**

**ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baalberith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Millo, and went, and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem."**

"And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren, and spake with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whether is better for you, that all the sons of Jerubbaal, who are threescore and ten persons, rule over you, or that one rule over you? remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem all these words: and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech; for they said, He is our brother. And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-berith, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light fellows, who followed him. And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren the sons of Jerubbaal, being threescore and ten persons, upon one stone: but Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left; for he hid himself. And all the men of Shechem assembled themselves together, and all the house of Millo, and went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem." (ASV)

Abimelech went to his mother's family where he began his campaign to be a king. Notice that he did not go into the city and announce his intentions at the "town square." Instead, he went to certain ones, getting them to go about privately, whispering his intentions. To speak "**in the ears**" was to try to accomplish this goal with as much secrecy as possible.

There seemed to be two basic things upon which he made his appeal. (1) First, there

were seventy sons of Gideon. If Gideon's sons rule over Shechem they will have to be supported. It is better to supply for one than seventy. (2) Abimelech says he is one of them. He was raised with them as one of Shechem's own.. That is ever the style of the despot, as he begins his push for power.

The people of Shechem financially assisted Abimelech with seventy pieces of silver. Where did they get the money? From the "**house of Baalberith**," which was the worship place of this false god. Abimelech took this money and hired men who were called "**vain and light persons**" ("*worthless and reckless*" - NKJV). Considering their deeds in killing Gideon's sons in a wholesale manner, they obviously were men with shallow consciences. It should be recognized that these are the kind of men that folks like Abimelech will always gravitate toward and assemble around them.

Abimelech went to Ophrah and gathered the sons of Gideon where he killed them on one rock (at one place). But one of them escaped, the youngest son of Gideon, Jotham. The deed of Abimelech was a common one in the monarchies of the east, where brothers would try to eliminate their adversaries to the throne. This was in all probability also a result of polygamy, where the jealousy of the mothers and thus their offspring would rear its ugly head. But has one considered that the same thing goes on today in democratic systems of government? Today it is generally done with words, where political opponents try to destroy the credibility of their party opponent, and then the two final candidates for the same position try to do the same to each other. The only difference is they do not try to physically murder their rivals.

Judges 9:7-21 **"And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Harken unto**

**me, ye men of Shechem, that GOD may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour GOD and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth GOD and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; (For my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: And ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: But if Abimelech, and devour the men Abimelech, and devour the men not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from**

**the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother."**

"And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood on the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that GOD may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive-tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor GOD and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said to the fig-tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig-tree said unto them, Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my new wine, which cheereth GOD and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore, if ye have dealt truly and uprightly, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands (for my father fought for you, and adventured his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: and ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maid-servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother): if ye then have dealt truly and uprightly with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, From the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother." (ASV)

When Jotham was told that Abimelech had been made king by the men of Shechem, he went to the heights of Mount Gerizim. From there he could speak to these people. The figure of speech he used was a fable. One should remember that a fable consists of a story where animals, trees, et cetera, take on the characteristics of human beings, especially in the area of speech. A parable, on the other hand, is a story about something which has happened or can happen which illustrates a truth. Jotham tells a fable using trees to illustrate the point.

The trees decided they wanted a king to rule over them, so they went to the olive and fig trees in succession; both refused. Next the trees turned to the vine, but it also refused. The application to the house of Gideon can hardly be missed. The people had offered to make Gideon and his sons their rulers, but they had refused the honor. They refused it because the people did not need a human king; only GOD was to rule over them. Notice also that the olive, fig, and vine were all producers of that which was valuable and useful, the bramble produced nothing of value.

When the trees could not get trees or vines to rule over them they turned to the bramble bush. The contrast is stark. They turned from the valuable producers to one which had very little value and was practically worthless, and he was eager to accept. Notice that the only thing the bramble was good for was to destroy the forest. Thus, Jotham prophesied that this would be the case. Abimelech would cause not only his own destruction but also the destruction of the people of Shechem.

Upon finishing his speech, Jotham fled to Beer for safety. This is understandable since Abimelech had already killed his brothers, and since Jotham had spoken this fable against Abimelech, the effort would be made to eliminate Jotham as well. Even today, those who would make the best leaders seldom

want or take the position, while those who are inferior are the ones who eagerly accept the position of honor.

**Judges 9:22-25 "When Abimelech had reigned three years over Israel, Then GOD sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren. And the men of Shechem set liers in wait for him in the top of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech."**

"And Abimelech was prince over Israel three years. And GOD sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech: that the violence done to the threescore and ten sons of Jerubbaal might come, and that their blood might be laid upon Abimelech their brother, who slew them, and upon the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to slay his brethren. And the men of Shechem set liers-in-wait for him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all that came along that way by them: and it was told Abimelech." (ASV)

After reigning for three years the time came to pass for the fulfillment of Jotham's prophecy. It should be remembered that

*"Nothing is capable of happening in the entire universe unless it is in harmony with the permissive will or the direct purpose of Almighty GOD"* (Coffman. p. 145).

A spirit of division was sent among the people. The men of Shechem, those who had appointed Abimelech as king and encouraged and aided him in the murder of Gideon's sons, were the very ones who turned against him. Notice that this took place so that they could all be punished.

How did they deal treacherously with Abimelech? By setting up robbers in the mountains. They started robbing the caravans and people which followed the trade route. How would that be treacherous behavior toward Abimelech? They were trying to draw Abimelech into a position where they could ambush him. As the king, it was Abimelech's responsibility to protect the trade routes. When Abimelech discovered what was going on and tried to do something about it, it would be the destruction of both.

**Judges 9:26-29 "And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem: and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. And they went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards, and trode the grapes, and made merry, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: for why should we serve him? And would to GOD this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out."**

"And Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brethren, and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him. And they went out into the field, and gathered their vineyards, and trod the grapes, and held festival, and went into the house of their god, and did eat and drink, and cursed Abimelech. And Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? is not he the son of Jerubbaal? and Zebul his officer? serve ye the men of Hamor the father of Shechem: but why should we serve him? And would that this people were under my hand! then would I remove Abimelech. And he said to Abimelech, Increase thine army, and come out." (ASV)

Notice that the appeal of Gaal to the

people of Shechem was basically the same appeal Abimelech had formerly made. Abimelech had basically said, *"I am one of you and Gideon's sons are outsiders."* Gaal said the same thing about Abimelech even reminding the people that Gideon was Abimelech's father.

The place where this sedition was hatched is also interesting. It was in the house of the idol during a drunken feast. Often the inhibitions of men are overcome when they have been under the influence of such beverages. What they might not have been willing to do before, they were now locked into because of the "bravery" they gained through the bottle.

**Judges 9:30-33 "And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. And he sent messengers unto Abimelech privily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren be come to Shechem; and, behold, they fortify the city against thee. Now therefore up by night, thou and the people that is with thee, and lie in wait in the field: And it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and set upon the city: and, behold, when he and the people that is with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion."**

"And when Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. And he sent messengers unto Abimelech craftily, saying, Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his brethren are come to Shechem; and, behold, they constrain the city to take part against thee. Now therefore, up by night, thou and the people that are with thee, and lie in wait in the field: and it shall be, that in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, thou shalt rise early, and rush upon the city; and, behold, when he and the people that are with him come out against thee, then mayest thou do to them as thou shalt find occasion." (ASV)

Zebul was faithful to Abimelech, so at his

first opportunity he sent a secret message to him. He described the events and even gave Abimelech some instructions to help him win the battle.

**Judges 9:34-40 "And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men. And Gaal spake again and said, See there come people down by the middle of the land, and another company come along by the plain of Meonenim. Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him? is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out, I pray now, and fight with them. And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and many were overthrown and wounded, even unto the entering of the gate."**

"And Abimelech rose up, and all the people that were with him, by night, and they laid wait against Shechem in four companies. And Gaal the son of Ebed went out, and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city: and Abimelech rose up, and the people that were with him, from the ambushment. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, Behold, there come people down from the tops of the mountains. And Zebul said unto him, Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men. And Gaal spake again and said, See, there come people down by the middle of the land, and one company cometh by the way of the oak of Meonenim. Then said Zebul unto him, Where is now thy mouth, that thou saidst, Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?

is not this the people that thou hast despised? go out now, I pray, and fight with them. And Gaal went out before the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him, and there fell many wounded, even unto the entrance of the gate." (ASV)

Abimelech took the advice of Zebul, surrounded the city, and waited for daylight. When the morning came, Gaal found himself in danger. Zebul chided him for his stand against Abimelech the night before and then challenged him to meet Abimelech in battle. Gaal took the challenge and lost the battle. One is not told of Gaal's capture or death, so it seems reasonable to assume that he was able to escape.

**Judges 9:41-45 "And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul thrust out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field, and looked, and, behold, the people were come forth out of the city; and he rose up against them, and smote them. And Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entering of the gate of the city: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt."**

"And Abimelech dwelt at Arumah: and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brethren, that they should not dwell in Shechem. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the people went out into the field; and they told Abimelech. And he took the people, and divided them into three companies, and laid wait in the field; and he looked, and, behold, the people came forth out of the city; And he rose up against them, and smote them. And Abimelech, and the

companies that were with him, rushed forward, and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city: and the two companies rushed upon all that were in the field, and smote them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that were therein: and he beat down the city, and sowed it with salt." (ASV)

Abimelech had accomplished his goal in defeating the armies of Gaal. Then his governor (Zebul) banished Gaal from the city of Shechem. It was over, right? No. Abimelech was not satisfied; now he was going to do just as Jotham had prophesied. He destroyed Shechem. Shechem paid for its complicity in killing Gideon's sons. Notice how Gideon accomplished this: when the people went out to tend their fields, he attacked and killed them. Then he attacked the rest of the city, and by nightfall he had killed all of its people. Then he sowed the city with salt so that it would be barren and useless.

**Judges 9:46-49 "And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into an hold of the house of the god Berith. And it was told Abimelech, that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an ax in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it, and laid it on his shoulder, and said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the hold, and set the hold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women."**

"And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard thereof, they entered into the stronghold of the house of Elberith. And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of

Shechem were gathered together. And Abimelech gat him up to mount Zalmon, he and all the people that were with him; and Abimelech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it up, and laid it on his shoulder: and he said unto the people that were with him, What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done. And all the people likewise cut down every man his bough, and followed Abimelech, and put them to the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire upon them; so that all the men of the tower of Shechem died also, about a thousand men and women." (ASV)

The place where Abimelech's enemies fled seemed to be both a holy place for their god as well as a fortress. Perhaps they thought Abimelech would not attack a "holy place" and, that failing, that possibly they could defend themselves there. If these were their thoughts they were mistaken on both counts.

When Abimelech found out where these people were he brought his army to the place, gathered wood, and burned the fortress down. The loss of life is significant, about a thousand men and women. Notice that this was a literal fulfillment of Jotham's prediction (v. 20). The very people who had supported Abimelech in his bid to be king had turned against him and had been destroyed by him.

**Judges 9:50-57 "Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut it to them, and gat them up to the top of the tower. And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. And a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull. Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and slay me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when**

**the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. Thus GOD rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: And all the evil of the men of Shechem did GOD render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal."**

"Then went Abimelech to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. But there was a strong tower within the city, and thither fled all the men and women, and all they of the city, and shut themselves in, and gat them up to the roof of the tower. And Abimelech came unto the tower, and fought against it, and drew near unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire. And a certain woman cast an upper millstone upon Abimelech's head, and brake his skull. Then he called hastily unto the young man his armourbearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and kill me, that men say not of me, A woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed every man unto his place. Thus GOD requited the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren; and all the wickedness of the men of Shechem did GOD requite upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal." (ASV)

After destroying Shechem, Abimelech turned his attention to Thebez. Apparently this city had either joined Shechem in rebellion or simply would not bow to Abimelech. He took the city itself, but there was a fortress within it to which all the people fled, as they had in Shechem. Flushed with his success at Shechem, Abimelech decided to use the same tactic and burn the fortress down. But he threw caution to the wind and exposed himself to danger from above.

One of the women threw "a piece of millstone" down, striking Abimelech on the head and crushing his skull. Some have argued that a woman could not throw a millstone. They consider the millstone to be the large kind which is moved by animals. But they failed to notice that the KJV says it was

**"a piece of a millstone"** which she cast upon him. It should also be pointed out that both the ASV and NKJV render this *"an upper millstone."*

An "upper millstone," was *"held in the hands of the women grinders who milled the corn in those ordinary hand mills like those used by the North American Indians"* (Coffman, p. 154).

Apparently this blow, though severe, did not leave Abimelech unconscious. He called for his armor bearer to take his life so that no one would say he was killed by a woman. It is interesting that this recorded history has clearly caused people from that time on to think of Abimelech as having been killed by a woman. When the men of Israel saw that their leader was dead, they discontinued the war and went home. Verses fifty-six and fifty-seven show one that GOD had caused the prediction of Jotham to come true and that He was behind the prediction in the first place.

## **Judges — Chapter Ten**

Judges 10:1-2 **"And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir."**

"And after Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the hillcountry of Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir." (ASV)

Other than what is written here, one knows nothing of this man Tola. The text says he **"arose to defend Israel."** The word **"defend"** is from a Hebrew word which literally means "save." Thus, Tola was not involved in a defensive action as the word defend would indicate in English. Rather, he had to save Israel. Viewing the detailed accounts given of the judges, it seems

reasonable to believe that Israel had been conquered by some outside force or were being harassed by said force, even though one has not been told who that outside force was.

The length of Tola's judgeship was twenty-three years.

Judges 10:3-5 **"And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havothjair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon."**

"And after him arose Jair, the Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities, which are called Havvoth-jair unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Kamon." (ASV)

Again, one has a judge of which almost nothing is known. What is known of Jair is that he was from the east side of Jordan, the first judge one sees from that side of Jordan. It is also noticed that he had a number of sons, who all rode on **"ass colts."** The significance of this is that they were all men of prominence. And, since they each had a city, they were powerful and probably wealthy. It is also revealed that he was a judge for twenty-two years, died, and was buried in Camon. From whom did he deliver Israel? One is not told.

Judges 10:6-9 **"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not Him. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and**

**into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed."**

"And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baalim, and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook Jehovah, and served Him not. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the children of Ammon. And they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel that year: eighteen years oppressed they all the children of Israel that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the children of Ammon passed over the Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed." (ASV)

Baalim and Ashtaroth are the plural forms of the male and female gods of the Canaanites. Specific gods are also mentioned in this text. Coffman lists the primary gods of the nations mentioned here, which follows:

*"The gods of Syria (which are never mentioned by name), of Sidon (Astarte), of the Moabites (Chemosh), the Ammonites (Milcom) or Molech, and of the Philistines (Dagon)"* (Coffman, p. 161).

They forsook GOD for these gods, refusing to serve Him.

The text shows one that GOD gave His people over to two different nations at this time. It appears that these two oppressions occurred at the same time and may have resulted from a treaty between these two nations. It is also noticed by some of the

writers that this short paragraph seems to be the introduction to the next two judges and their overthrow of these nations. Jephthah would overthrow the Ammonites, and Samson would overthrow the Philistines. The Ammonites gained control east of Jordan but also made raids into the west bank settlements as well. Israel was sore distressed because she was being attacked from the east and from the west at the same time.

**Judges 10:10-16 "And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our GOD, and also served Baalim. And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to Me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation. And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do Thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto Thee; deliver us only, we pray Thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the LORD: and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."**

"And the children of Israel cried unto Jehovah, saying, We have sinned against Thee, even because we have forsaken our GOD, and have served the Baalim. And Jehovah said unto the children of Israel, Did not I save you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried unto Me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken Me, and served other gods: wherefore I will save you

no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress. And the children of Israel said unto Jehovah, We have sinned: do Thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto Thee; only deliver us, we pray Thee, this day. And they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served Jehovah; and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." (ASV)

The oppression Israel suffered was great, and finally it brought them to their senses. They cried out to GOD for deliverance. In crying out to Him, they confessed their sins as two-fold: (1) they had forsaken GOD, left Him, and (2) they had served other gods. It is bad enough when people leave the service of GOD, but it is more so when they leave Him for gods which are no gods.

**"How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken Me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses." (Jeremiah 5:7)**

**"Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods?" (Jeremiah 16:20)**

In verses eleven and twelve, GOD reminded them of how He had delivered them from their enemies time after time. In this list He mentioned the Zidonians, which were probably involved as one of the allies of Jabin (Canaanites). He also mentioned a people called the "Maonites." The Septuagint renders this as "Midianites." Yet, for all that GOD had done for them, especially in delivering them from their oppressors, they turned from Him to serve the gods of their neighbors.

In sarcasm, GOD told them that if they wanted deliverance to go and ask for deliverance from those false gods they had adopted. The people immediately responded in the negative to such a suggestion. They knew they had sinned and realized that they

deserved whatever punishment GOD gave them. Notice that their repentance was genuine, for they put away the gods which they had brought among themselves. Further, they turned back to serving GOD.

Once they did this, GOD was ready to issue pardon, as He always is under such circumstances.

*"(1) They confessed their sins to the Lord (vv. 10, 15a). (2) They bared their backs for punishment (v. 15b). (3) They put away the idols representing foreign gods (v. 16a). (4) They serve the Lord (v. 16b)" (Coffman, p. 165).*

Verse sixteen should cause one to remember:

*"There is by us unseen  
A hidden boundary between  
GOD'S mercy and GOD'S wrath!"  
(Coffman, p. 163).*

**Judges 10:17-18 "Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpeh. And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."**

*"Then the children of Ammon were gathered together, and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled themselves together, and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, the princes of Gilead, said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." (ASV)*

Here one sees the battle lines being drawn and the places of encampment for the opposing forces being chosen. But the Israelites did not have a leader, so they put out a plea for a volunteer to lead them. They also made the promise, conditional of course on victory, that this person would be their ruler, i.e., the ruler over Gad, Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

## Judges — Chapter Eleven

**Judges 11:1-3 "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. 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. 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."**

"Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of another woman. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain fellows to Jephthah, and they went out with him." (ASV)

Jephthah is called "a mighty man of valour" which was the same term used of Gideon (6:12), and later one finds this said of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1). His birth was illegitimate, having been born of an harlot. But notice that his father (Gilead) apparently did the right thing in caring for him. Later his half-brothers forced him from their mother's home. The scriptures say he "fled" from his brethren, which seems to indicate force may have been, or was about to be used against him, to drive him away from the family.

Jephthah fled to the land of Tob, of which one has no definite location. It is believed this place was probably east of the Sea of Galilee. There are a number of men gathered around Jephthah, which are called "vain men." The word "vain" means "empty, void, of no value."

The NKJV says these men went out "raiding" with him, which seems to indicate that they lived a rather lawless life. But Campbell offers these thought provoking

words:

*"It seems improper, in view of what we later learn of Jephthah's character, to ascribe to him and his men the lawless plundering of villages. More than likely, he, like David, protected settlements from marauders"* (D.K. Campbell, as quoted in Coffman's commentary, p. 170).

**Judges 11:4-11 "And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. 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: And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. 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? 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. 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? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. 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."**

"And it came to pass after a while, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that, when the children of Ammon children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob; and they said unto Jephthah, Come and be our chief, that we may fight with the children of Ammon. And

Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and drive me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore are we turned again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight with the children of Ammon; and thou shalt be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight with the children of Ammon, and Jehovah deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Jehovah shall be witness between us; surely according to thy word so will we do. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them: and Jephthah spake all his words before Jehovah in Mizpah." (ASV)

This text deals with the eighteenth year of the oppression of Ammon and gives the details of what one is told in 10:17-18. The war begins, and those who had formerly kicked Jephthah out of their territory now want him to be their military leader. What a change of events. And yet, as one thinks about it, men do the same thing today. They reject the Christ until a time of great need, and then they want Him in their lives immediately. Human nature has not changed. Only when men swallow their pride will they accept the aid they truly need.

Jephthah reminded them of the way they had previously treated him. But they offered to make him their ruler if he would forget the past and help them. It is interesting that Jephthah apparently sought an oath from them on this occasion. It seems that their word was not enough, but an oath before the Lord sealed the deal.

Before one thinks too harshly of Jephthah, one needs to remember that he is spoken of in Hebrews 11:31 as one of GOD'S faithful servants. This will be a key to understanding something else which he did later in this account.

Judges 11:12-13 **"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? 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."**

"And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come unto me to fight against my land? And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon even unto the Jabbok, and unto the Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably." (ASV)

After being appointed as their leader, Jephthah sent a message to the king of Ammon. It appears that he was possibly trying to resolve this dispute without conflict. But the king of Ammon basically told him that the only way to avoid war was to return the lands which Moses had given Reuben and Gad. Jephthah could not, and would not, do this. It should also be remembered that the Ammonites were relatives of the Israelites through Lot and his incestuous union with his daughters.

Judges 11:14-22 **"And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan."**

"And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon; and he said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah: Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon, but when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh; then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land; but the king of Edom hearkened not. And in like manner he sent unto the king of Moab; but he would not: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went through the wilderness, and went around the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and they encamped on the other side of the Arnon; but they came not within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. 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 unto my place. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people together, and encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And Jehovah, the 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. And they possessed all the border of the Amorites, from the Arnon even unto the Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto the Jordan." (ASV)

In answering the king of the Ammonites, Jephthah rehearsed the history of Israel's coming into the land of promise. He told of how Israel tried to gain passage through the lands of Ammon and Moab lands, but the inhabitants had refused their request. Then he told of Sihon and the Amorites, who fought against Israel, were defeated, and thus lost the land. Jephthah was simply stating that the land belonged to Israel because GOD gave it to them.

**Judges 11:23-24 "So now the LORD GOD of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel, and shouldst thou possess it? 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."**

"So now Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, hath dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel, and shouldst thou possess them? Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever Jehovah our GOD hath dispossessed from before us, them will we possess." (ASV)

Since it was GOD who had given Israel this land, who were the Ammonites to think it belonged to them? They had no right to this land. Further, if the Ammonites had taken the land, they would have claimed it was their god (Chemosh) who had given them the land, and thus no one else had a claim on it. Jephthah was not saying that Chemosh was a real god but was simply showing them the argument they would have used in justifying a claim to the land. GOD had driven the Ammonites people before Israel; therefore the land was Israel's.

**Judges 11:25 "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,"**

"And now art thou anything better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them?" (ASV)

Jephthah now reminded Ammon that Balak, king of Moab, had striven against Israel. Balak had lost and did not deny the right of Israel to possess the land. It had not been Israel who was the aggressor. They had simply defended themselves and in doing so gained possession of the land.

**Judges 11:26 "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?"**

"While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its towns, and in Aroer and its towns, and in all the cities that are along by the side of the Arnon, three hundred years; wherefore did ye not recover them within that time?" (ASV)

A simple question was put forth. During the three hundred years Israel had occupied this land, why did the Ammonites not try to reclaim it before this time? This may be a "statute of limitations" argument.

**Judges 11:27 "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."**

"I therefore have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: Jehovah, the Judge, be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon." (ASV)

Jephthah ended his appeal for peace by stating that he had not done anything wrong and that all the wrong was on the part of the

king of Ammon. He then appealed to GOD to judge in this matter. Jephthah was quite willing to let GOD decide, which, especially in that time, showed his confidence in the position he had taken.

**Judges 11:28 "Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him."**

"Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him." (ASV)

The king of Ammon had made up his mind before Jephthah ever spoke. He did not want peace. He wanted war, but he has actually asked for war against GOD, and GOD will give it to him.

**Judges 11:29 "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."**

"Then the Spirit of Jehovah 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." (ASV)

Jephthah had just appealed to GOD to judge between Israel and Ammon and here one has the results — **"The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah."** This indicates that Jephthah was being led by the Lord in his actions. The journey this verse tells about was probably for the purpose of raising an army. After making this journey, Jephthah confronted the Ammonites.

**Judges 11:30-31 "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 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."**

"And Jephthah vowed a vow unto Jehovah, and said, If Thou wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be Jehovah's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering." (ASV)

Here one finds the famous vow of Jephthah over which so many arguments have ensued over the ages. The vow is really quite simple: "If GOD gave him victory, then whatever came out of his house to meet him will be given to GOD." That was the vow in the proverbial "nutshell." Looking ahead, the argument will be made by some that he literally offered his daughter as a burnt offering, while others will maintain that he did not. There are some important words in these verses with regards to the final outcome. First, one finds the word "**whatsoever**" in verse thirty-one. The Hebrew literally says, "*that which cometh forth, which shall come forth*" (Margin of my Bible). If Jephthah anticipated that a person would cometh forth, he would have used the word whosoever, or whoever comes forth. Second, notice the word "**it**" -- "**I will offer it up for a burnt offering.**" The word "**it**" is an impersonal pronoun. Jephthah is saying whatever comes from my house shall be offered to the Lord. Third, notice the word "**and**" in the phrase, "**shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.**" The word "**and**" can be translated as "or."

*"The translation of which, according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars is this: 'I will consecrate it to the Lord, or I will offer it for a burnt offering;' that is 'If it be a thing fit for a burnt offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of GOD, it shall be consecrated to Him'"* (Clarke, p. 151).

There are two possibilities portrayed in

this phrase: (1) Whatever comes first from my house will belong to the Lord, or (2) Whatever first comes from my house will be offered as a burnt offering. Either way, the object, whatever it might be, would belong to GOD. Consider that Samuel was given to the Lord, but he was not sacrificed on an altar to accomplish that action.

**Judges 11:32-33 "So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 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."**

"So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and Jehovah delivered them into his hand. And he smote them from Aroer until thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto Abelcheramim, with a very great slaughter. So the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel." (ASV)

The battle against Ammon was won because the Lord delivered the Ammonites into the hands of Jephthah. Verse thirty-three seems to signify that Jephthah drove them completely out of the land in question.

**Judges 11:34-40 "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. 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. 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. 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 down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. 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. 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, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year."**

"And Jephthah came to Mizpah unto his house; and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 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 Jehovah, and I cannot go back. And she said unto him, My father, thou hast opened thy mouth unto Jehovah; do unto me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as Jehovah hath taken vengeance for thee on thine enemies, even on the children of Ammon. And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may depart and go down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 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 not man. And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year." (ASV)

GOD gave the victory to Jephthah. He

went home, and what meets him at his house? His only child, his daughter. Jephthah was saddened because of his vow but was determined that he must keep any vow which was made to GOD. His daughter asked for two months before the vow was fulfilled, and it was granted to her. Now for the question which everyone asks about this passage: was she offered as a human sacrifice upon an altar? And the answer is an emphatic **NO!** Notice the faith of Jephthah's daughter. Her father has made a vow, and she will help him carry it out, even to her own hurt.

Jephthah lived under the Mosaic law, being the ninth judge of Israel. Further, one knows that he was faithful to GOD, for Hebrews 11:32-33 tells us:

**"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."**

Under the law, Israel was strictly forbidden to offer human beings as literal offerings on an altar. Deuteronomy 12:30-31 tells one that they were not to serve GOD in the same way the heathen served their false gods.

**"Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy GOD: for every abomination to the LORD, which He hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods"** (Deuteronomy 12:30-31).

This included the things which they did in

worship to their gods. The Israelites could not practice these things. Notice that burning their children in fire was specifically named as one of those things Israel could not do.

Those who make the claim that Jephthah literally burned his daughter in sacrifice often try to advance their argument by saying that Jephthah had lived so long among the heathen that he had adopted their practices. Please prove that he had adopted the heathen customs of religion. The fact is that Jephthah has absolutely no evil thing said about him by GOD. When one considers that GOD never covered up the sins of his servants but rather always rebuked them for their sins, the question must then be asked, "Where is the rebuke which Jephthah would have merited if he had offered his daughter as a burnt offering?" The only people who say something evil about Jephthah in this matter are mortal men. Further, consider those who were used by GOD as judges; their character was superb.

*"The men whom GOD chose as the recipients of His revelation of mercy and the executors of His will, and whom He endowed with His Spirit as judges and leaders of His people, were no doubt affected with infirmities, faults and sins of many kinds, so that they could fall to a very great depth; but nowhere is it stated that the Spirit of GOD came upon a worshipper of Moloch and endowed him with His own power, that he might be the helper and saviour of Israel" (Keil & Delitzsch, p. 385).*

When one studies verse forty, one finds the word "**lament.**" This word comes from the Hebrew word t-h-n-h, which means "*talk with.*" The daughters of Israel went to talk with the daughter of Jephthah each year.

Consider also the thing which she went to mourn. It was not her impending death, but her virginity. What difference would her virginity matter if she was about to be put to

death? Absolutely none. The only people who cared about such a thing were the living. For a woman of that time to be childless was considered a great reproach.

*"For a woman to have no offspring was considered to be in a state of the utmost degradation among the Hebrews" (Clarke, p. 153).*

Consider also that after bewailing her virginity she returned to her father "**who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.**" Now notice the very next thing which is said: "**AND SHE KNEW NO MAN.**" Every Bible student knows that this was a euphemistic term for the fact that she had no sexual intercourse. Jephthah fulfilled his vow. How? The text says she knew no man; it does not say he put her to death.

Again, one asks the question: "Did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter on an altar?" If he did so, on what altar was she sacrificed? The only altar for sacrifice to GOD was at the tabernacle. Is one to assume that the priests of Israel would have allowed such a thing? Or did Jephthah offer her for lifelong service (probably at the tabernacle) to GOD? The evidence is very clear for the latter. And again, it must be emphasized that Jephthah is declared by GOD, long after his death, to have been a faithful servant (Heb. 11:32) and one of those GOD declared "**Of whom the world was not worthy**" (Heb. 11:38).

## Judges — Chapter Twelve

Judges 12:1-6 "**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. 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. 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? 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. 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; 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 the time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand."**

"And the men of Ephraim were gathered together, and passed northward; and they 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 thy house upon thee with fire. And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye saved me not out of their hand. And when I saw that ye saved me not, I put my life in my hand, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and Jehovah delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me? Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim; and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye are fugitives of Ephraim, ye Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim, and in the midst of Manasseh. And the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And it was so, that, when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, Let me go over, the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth; and he said Sibboleth; for he could not frame to pronounce

it right: then they laid hold on him, and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. And there fell at that time of Ephraim forty and two thousand." (ASV)

Jephthah, with the Spirit of GOD upon him, fought the war with Ammon and won. Then came those whining Ephraimites, their brethren, jealously demanding to know why they had not had a part in this battle. It has been noticed that on another occasion Ephraim had acted in a similar manner. In Judges chapter eight they approached Gideon in the same way, but Gideon appeased them, and they shared in the spoils of war with those who had done the major degree of fighting. Ephraim's pride in considering itself to be a leader of the tribes is quite evident, or maybe they wanted to partake of the spoils after someone else did the fighting.

In verse two, this man who had the Spirit of GOD said that Ephraim had been called, but they had refused to help. Why had they refused to help when they were called? The answer is found in verse four, where it is recorded that the Ephraimites said of Jephthah and his army, **"Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites."** They

*"considered Jephthah as a nobody and his 'men' as a group of social outcasts, that is, fugitives from their respective tribes" (Coffman, p. 190).*

They did not consider Jephthah and his army to be worthy of their help. But when GOD gave those whom they considered to be unworthy a great victory, their jealousy was aroused. They wanted to be in on the glory of victory. (Consider that Jephthah never hesitated to attribute Israel's victory to GOD's help.)

Instead of bowing to these Ephraimites as Gideon had done, Jephthah confronted them with his army. These were brethren, Israelites, fighting each other. It is evident GOD gave Jephthah the victory again. The

Ephraimites' haughty spirit needed to be controlled and punished, so forty-two thousand of them died.

Apparently this was a major battle, and the Gileadites, to ensure the victory, blocked the fords so that the Ephraimites could not get back to the safety of their homeland. How could the Gileadites make sure they did not kill any innocent people? A simple test was devised which used the word "**Shibboleth**," which the Ephraimites could not pronounce. Instead they said, "**Sibboleth**." Upon mispronouncing this word they were identified and killed. It is said that in World War II, the Germans could not pronounce certain words which could be used to identify them as spies. For American forces, one of those words was the word "Niger." Germans could not pronounce this word the way Americans did, instead saying "Nigger." All have heard people speak in America, pronouncing words in such a way that the area of the country they came from could be identified.

One should be aware that one's speech can betray him. The speech of a liberal often betrays him to the careful listener. Even in the time of Jesus, the speech of His disciples betrayed them as Galileans.

**"And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee"**  
(Matthew 26:73).

Does the speech used by Christians betray them as being faithful followers of Jesus today?

**Judges 12:7 "And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead."**

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

Here is a very brief statement of the death and burial of Jephthah. As to the place of his

burial, this phrase is translated "*He was buried in his city Gilead*" in the LXX, the Syriac, the Arabic and Vulgate (Coffman, p. 192).

**Judges 12:8-10 "And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. 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. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem."**

"And after him Ibzan of Bethle-hem judged Israel. And he had thirty sons; and thirty daughters he sent abroad, and thirty daughters he brought in from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. And Ibzan died, and was buried at Bethle-hem." (ASV)

The rest of this chapter tells of three more judges. But no great battles or oppressors are named. This leads many to believe that these three judges served during a time of peace for Israel.

One is told that Ibzan had sixty children for whom he arranged marriages. This also probably points to the fact that Ibzan had more than one wife, since to have had sixty children, one wife would have had to have had a very large number of multiple births.

One is also told he came from Bethlehem and was buried there after he judged Israel for seven years. It should be kept in mind that there were two Bethlehems in Israel — one in Judah and the other in Zebulun. Josephus states that this was Bethlehem in Judah (Winter, p. 471).

**Judges 12:11-12 "And after him Elon, a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun."**

"And after him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years. And Elon the Zebulunite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun." (ASV)

All one knows of this judge is that he followed Ibzan as judge, was a judge for ten years, came from the tribe of Zebulun, and was buried in Aijalon.

**Judges 12:13-15 "And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. 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."**

"And after him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. And he had forty sons and thirty sons' sons, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years. And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill-country of the Amalekites." (ASV)

Again, one knows little of this man. His residence was in Pirathon of the tribe of Ephraim. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons. The literal Hebrew for the word "**nephews**" is "sons' sons." He was a judge for eight years during an apparently peaceful time for Israel.

## **Judges — Chapter Thirteen**

**Judges 13:1 "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years."**

"And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah; and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." (ASV)

Would the Israelites have suffered this oppression, or any of those which went before, if they had remained faithful to GOD? Obviously not! They became comfortable with their enemies all around them and gradually as all sin operates, allowed the sins of their

neighbors to influence them. When they reached a certain level of corruptness, GOD allowed their enemies to oppress them.

One needs to realize that when he stops following the Lord's commands in his worship, life, et cetera; it can only result in GOD'S wrath and displeasure. Many in the church today have become comfortable with their neighbors religion. They then tolerate it and begin to accept bits and pieces of it, until finally what they practice cannot be distinguished from the denominations they live among. Such erring brethren need to be "**delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme**" (1 Tim. 1:20). Unfortunately, many brethren will tolerate erring brethren until they themselves are infected with the denominational virus — thus losing their identity as well.

In computer language, a virus can destroy the hard drive, which is the heart and soul of the computer. Just so, denominational doctrine will destroy the soul of an individual unless he applies the virus killer to it — GOD'S Word.

GOD delivered Israel to be punished by the Philistines for forty years.

**Judges 13:2-7 "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. 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. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: 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. 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: 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."

"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. And the angel of Jehovah appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not; but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: for, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come upon his head; for the child shall be a Nazirite unto GOD from the womb: and he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of GOD came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of GOD, very terrible; and I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name: but he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing; for the child shall be a Nazirite unto GOD from the womb to the day of his death." (ASV)

It is learned that Samson was a Danite, born of Manoah and his wife who had been barren. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and proclaimed that she would have a son. This son was to be a Nazarite from the time of his birth. The restrictions of a Nazarite are set forth in Numbers 6:1-8:

**"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink,**

**and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his GOD is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD"** (Numbers 6:1-8).

It should be noticed that Manoah's wife was not told that he should be separated from any dead. The reason for this was that he was to be a special tool of GOD's who would inflict death upon many Philistines. Notice that his mother was also to take the vow of a Nazarite (at least until his birth).

In verse five one finds an interesting phrase: **"he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."** Samson, apparently would not totally deliver Israel from the Philistines but would begin the process which would be continued later. The Philistines would later be a thorn in the side of Saul and David.

Since Manoah was not with his wife when the **"angel of the Lord"** appeared to her, she told Manoah all that he had said. She did not know who this angel was, but later when the angel is asked its name, no answer is given. Manoah will come to realize that this is the Lord.

Judges 13:8-14 **"Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of GOD which Thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. 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. And the woman made haste, and ran, and showed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. 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. And Manoah said, Now let Thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him? And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 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."**

"Then Manoah entreated Jehovah, and said, Oh, Lord, I pray Thee, let the man of GOD whom Thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. 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. And the woman made haste, and ran, and told her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day. 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. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass: what shall be the ordering of the child, and how shall we do unto him? And the angel of Jehovah said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware. 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." (ASV)

After Manoah's wife told him of the angel's visitation, notice the first thing he thought about — the upbringing of the child. They had had no experience in raising a child. In addition, this child was to be of special service to GOD, so Manoah asked for guidance in raising this child. The Bible teaches that all **"children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward"** (Psalm 127:3). When Esau came out to meet Jacob, he asked who the people with Jacob were. Jacob replied, **"The children which GOD hath graciously given thy servant"** (Genesis 33:5).

Manoah asked for the guidance which all parents should ask for when they find that they shall have a child. Children should be taught to **"obey your parents in the Lord:...Honour thy father and mother,"** and fathers are to **"bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"** (Ephesians 6:1-4). If one does not look to GOD's Word for guidance, how can he know how to raise one **"in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?"** Manoah is a great example of one who was more concerned about raising his children in a godly manner than he was in making a living or anything else. Samson would be taught what GOD required of him by godly parents. But it should be noted that Samson was a perfect example of the child who rebelled against the teaching he received. Parents can do what is right, but the child is then responsible for applying what he learns.

**"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"** (Proverbs 22:6). It should be noted that this verse is often abused by well-meaning people to indicate that if a child is properly taught spiritual values when he is young, then no matter what, in the end of his life he will return to a spiritually right condition with the Lord. The passage does not deal with

spiritual matters, but with the trade in which a child is instructed. In Samson's case he did return to GOD before his death, but one case does not prove a misapplication of a passage.

GOD answered Manoah's prayer by sending the angel of the Lord to his wife a second time. She promptly went and got her husband so he could also hear the instructions given. This is obviously a very godly set of parents. The instructions given by the angel the first time are briefly restated for Manoah's benefit.

Judges 13:15-20 **"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. 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. 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? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. 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."**

"And Manoah said unto the angel of Jehovah, I pray Thee, let us detain Thee, that we may make ready a kid for Thee. And the angel of Jehovah said unto Manoah, Though thou detain Me, I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt make ready a burnt-offering, thou must offer it unto Jehovah. For Manoah knew not that He was the angel of Jehovah. And

Manoah said unto the angel of Jehovah, What is Thy name, that, when Thy words come to pass, we may do Thee honor? And the angel of Jehovah said unto him, Wherefore askest thou after My name, seeing it is wonderful? So Manoah took the kid with the meal-offering, and offered it upon the rock unto Jehovah: and the angel did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame of the altar: and Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground." (ASV)

Verse fifteen seems to be the offering of hospitality to the angel, much as Abram did for the three which visited him. The angel told Manoah that he would not partake of this meal but that if he wanted to offer a burnt offering to GOD, that would be acceptable.

The announcement that they were to have a child after so many years of his wife's barren condition caused him to desire to give honor to the one who made this prediction. So Manoah asked the angel's name, but (remember) he did not know that this was an angel. The angel did not give him his name, saying that it was "**secret**" (KJV). The word "**secret**" should probably be translated "*wonderful*," as it is in the margin of my Bible, as well as the ASV and NKJV.

*"The statement in verse 18 provides the best clue as to the identity of this angel. In Isaiah 9:6 the prophet declared in regard to Christ Jesus, 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' The first word used to describe this second person of the GODHEAD is 'Wonderful,' the same word the angel of Jehovah used in identifying himself" (Weir, Marvin L., Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, Edited by Dub McClish, p. 231).*

Also notice *"Back in verse 11, when Manoah asked if 'the man' was the same one who had earlier appeared to his wife, the answer was, 'I AM.' These very words were often used by Jesus Christ himself as his identification, as in John 8:58, Mark 14:62, John 18:5, etc. This strongly supports the belief that the Angel of Jehovah was none other than the preincarnate Son of GOD"* (Coffman, p. 206).

Manoah offered a kid on a rock, and in some amazing way the angel caused it to be burnt (maybe like he did with Gideon). And then the angel ascended in the flame of the fire toward heaven. The reaction of Manoah and his wife was to be expected from such godly people — they fell on their faces either in fear or worship (or both).

**Judges 13:21-25 "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. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen GOD. But his wife said unto him, If the LORD were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol."**

"But the angel of Jehovah did no more appear to Manoah or to his wife. Then Manoah knew that He was the angel of Jehovah. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen GOD. But his wife said unto him, If Jehovah were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering and a meal-offering at our hand, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would at this time have told such

things as these. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and Jehovah blessed him. And the Spirit of Jehovah began to move him in Mahaneh-dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol." (ASV)

It is obvious that Manoah knew Exodus 33:20: **"And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live."** [Also notice Gideon (Judges 6:22) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), who also knew this truth.] The result of having this knowledge was that Manoah feared that they would be killed because they had seen GOD — he knew who the angel was. But his wife exercised perfect logic in stating that GOD would not have accepted their sacrifice if he had intended to kill them. Her faith in the actions of GOD was striking.

*"It would have been wonderful if the Lord had revealed the name of this great woman; but for reasons unknown to us she was continually mentioned as 'the woman'"* (Coffman, p. 209).

The last two verses show the fulfillment of GOD'S Word. A son was born to them and they named him Samson. As this child grew, the text says GOD blessed him. Notice that Samson began doing some amazing things while he was growing up (v. 25), as the Spirit began to move him. One is not told what he did, but these actions surely marked him as one who would be a leader among his people.

## **Judges — Chapter Fourteen**

**Judges 14:1-4 "And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. 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. 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. 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."

"And Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. 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. But his father and his mother knew not that it was of Jehovah; for He sought an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines had rule over Israel." (ASV)

Samson went to the city of Timnath where he saw a woman who was a Philistine. He wanted this woman for his wife, but notice the basis upon which he wanted her. He **"saw"** her. It was her physical beauty which triggered his desire. There is no indication that he had ever spoken to her. He did not investigate to see if she had inward beauty. He only looked at the physical. Further, it did not seem to matter to him that she was a Philistine, a non-Israelite. GOD'S law was very clear about Israelites marrying outside of their nation.

**"When the LORD thy GOD shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And**

**when the LORD thy GOD shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly"** (Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

They were never to marry non-Israelites, because the heathen nations would turn GOD'S people away from Him to idols. What was true of the seven nations of Canaan would also be true of the Philistines.

Why did Samson want his parents to get this woman for him? Why did he not just go down and court her and ask her to marry him? Because in that time, the custom of those lands was that a near kinsman would arrange the marriage. This can also be seen in the cases of Isaac (Gen. 24) and Shechem (Gen. 34). Being the godly parents that Samson's father and mother were, they objected to Samson's marrying this woman. And notice the grounds upon which they objected: **"Uncircumcised Philistines."** GOD had made a covenant with Abraham, thus all Hebrews, and circumcision was a sign of that covenant. The Philistines were not GOD'S people and it was upon that basis that they objected. They could not understand why he would want a wife of someone other than an Israelite.

There are two basic opinions with regard to verse four. Some contend that GOD allowed Samson, in fact wanted Samson, to marry one whom He had forbidden an Israelite to marry (Notice Hosea 1:2). The second opinion is that GOD did not sanction this marriage, but used it to accomplish His

purpose (Notice the case of Joseph and his brothers, Genesis 50:20). One thing is for sure — GOD wanted a fight between His people and the Philistines.

Judges 14:5-9 **"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. 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. And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 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. 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."**

"Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnah, and came to the vineyards of Timnah: and, behold, a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of Jehovah 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. And he went down, and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson well. And after a while he returned to take her; and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey. And he took it into his hands, and went on, eating as he went; and he came to his father and mother, and gave unto them, and they did eat: but he told them not that he had taken the honey out of the body of the lion." (ASV)

No doubt, the reason for their visits to Timnath (two visits mentioned in these verses) was to arrange the wedding. Notice that Samson faced the young lion, and the **"spirit**

**of the Lord"** came upon him, allowing him to kill the lion with his bare hands. What was the purpose of this encounter? Weir offers this suggestion:

*"GOD would use Samson to deliver the Israelites from Philistine oppression. Battles would be fought that would require tremendous courage and strength. Samson now realized that when the "Spirit of Jehovah" was with him he had the supernatural strength to accomplish the tasks GOD set before him. The point we must remember is that the tremendous strength of Samson did not reside in himself; it was GOD who enabled Samson to be successful in defeating the enemy. The same is true today. Christians will not defeat Satan and his helpers with physical strength and worldly wisdom; it is GOD who provides the spiritual strength and providential help to overcome the enemies of the cross! May we always place our confidence and trust in Jehovah!"* (Marvin L Weir, Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, p. 237).

**"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"**  
(Philippians 4:13).

Why did Samson not tell his parents about killing the lion? Some believe it was because of the Nazarite vow which was upon him. To admit he had touched a dead body, they reason, would be to admit that he had broken the vow. But there is, I believe, a fault with this reasoning. Samson was given the **"Spirit of GOD"** on certain occasions for the express purpose of killing Philistines. The explanation for why he did not tell them must lie somewhere else.

Later Samson took honey from the carcase of the lion, ate it, and gave some to his parents. This would later provide him with a riddle for the young men at the wedding

feast. For the present time, it shows one that some time had passed between the time he killed the lion and the time necessary for the carcass to dry out and the bees to manufacture the honey necessary to feed him and his parents. Apparently the arrangement of this marriage took a little time.

**Judges 14:10-14 "So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. 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: 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. 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."**

"And his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. And Samson said unto them, Let me now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can declare it unto me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of raiment; but if ye cannot declare it unto me, then shall ye give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of raiment. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth food, And out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days declare the riddle." (ASV)

The custom of that time was to make a feast (apparently seven days in length) for the wedding. As part of the entertainment, Samson proposed a riddle. If his companions

successfully solved the riddle, then Samson would provide each one with a change of clothes. If they could not solve the riddle by the end of the feast, then each one of them would have to provide Samson with a change of clothes. The riddle he put forth came from the experience he had with the lion.

The later part of verse fourteen states, **"They could not in three days expound the riddle."** This seems to indicate that after trying to solve the riddle for three days, the young men realized they were not going to be able to solve this riddle.

**Judges 14:15-20 "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? 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? 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. 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. 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. But Samson's wife was given to his**

**companion, whom he had used as his friend."**

"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 impoverish us? is it not so? 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 thee? 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 pressed him sore; and she told the riddle to the children of her people. 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. And the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and smote thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave the changes of raiment unto them that declared the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house. But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend." (ASV)

When one puts this text together, he sees that Samson's wife had been trying to get the answer for the riddle from the very beginning. Her motive for trying to learn the answer at first is unknown, probably curiosity, but her motivation on the last day is well-known. Her countrymen came to her and demanded that she find the answer or they were going to destroy her and her family.

In her attempts to find out the riddle she used one of the most powerful weapons a woman has — her tears. She also accused Samson of hating her because he would not reveal the answer to her. Samson answered by saying that he had not even told his own parents the riddle, thus showing that he had told no one. **"She wept before him the seven days."** There is an alternative reading to this phrase which is *"She wept before him*

*the rest of the seven days."* Notice that **"she lay sore upon him,"** which indicates that she, in our words, hounded him for the answer to this riddle.

Once she learned the answer it was quickly told to her countrymen, who then told Samson the answer to the riddle. Samson knew the young men had not come up with the answer on their own. His own wife had betrayed him. Now carefully watch the events which unfold. First, the Spirit of the Lord moved Samson to go to Ashkelon (one of the five major cities of the Philistines) and kill thirty men and take their garments as payment to the young men for answering his riddle. Some have tried to suggest that Samson did this deed out of anger and vengeance. But the Bible says the Spirit of GOD moved him to action. Notice again the wording: **"The Spirit of the Lord came upon him."** This shows one that the power Samson exercised was not always with him, but came upon him when GOD saw the need. It was after he had delivered the garments to his companions that Samson's anger was kindled. This anger seemed to be aimed at his traitorous wife, for he then went back to his father's house. The stage is set for the events of the next chapter. After Samson's departure, his wife was given to one of his companions at the feast as a wife.

## **Judges — Chapter Fifteen**

**Judges 15:1-3 "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. 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. And Samson said concerning them, Now shall I be more blameless than the Philistines,**

**though I do them a displeasure."**

"But it came to pass after a while, 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. 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. And Samson said unto them, This time shall I be blameless in regard of the Philistines, when I do them a mischief." (ASV)

After some time had passed, Samson went to see his wife. It should be understood that this seems to be a concubine type of arrangement. Under this arrangement, the wife sometimes stayed at her father's house and was visited by her husband from time to time. He brought her a kid as a gift. This may seem strange to one today, but apparently in that time it was an honorable gift. When Samson went to his father-in-law's house, he was denied entrance to his wife's bedroom because she had been given to another.

The father tried to explain away what he had done on the grounds that Samson had left in such anger that he supposed Samson did not want her. But when he offered his younger daughter to Samson, it was an admission that he had done wrong in this matter. Samson refused the offer and declared that he would be guiltless in this matter. This writer believes (as does Zerr) that what he was about to do would not be blamed on him. Looking ahead, one notices that the Philistines took their vengeance out on the father-in-law's household, not on Samson.

**Judges 15:4-8 "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. 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. 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. And Samson said unto them, Though ye have done this, yet will I be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam."**

"And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between every two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and the standing grain, and also the oliveyards. Then the Philistines said, Who hath done this? And they said, Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he hath taken his wife, and given her to his companion. And the Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire. And Samson said unto them, If ye do after this manner, surely I will be avenged of you, and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter: and he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam." (ASV)

After learning of his father-in-law's actions, Samson caught three hundred foxes to use for the destruction of the Philistines' crops. Kiel tells one:

*"The Hebrew word here is shualim, which means 'jackals,' an animal that resembles foxes and is classed among the foxes even by Arabs of the present day" (p. 413). One is also told: "In the Egyptian dialect, the classical name of the fox is given exclusively as jackel" (ICC, quoted by Coffman, p. 224).*

Unlike the solitary fox, these animals lived in groups, and some say are easily caught. Whichever the animal was, the point is that Samson caught them, possibly with GOD'S help, and used them to destroy the Philistines'

crops. He did this in an ingenious way, by tying the foxes together in pairs, sticking a firebrand (torch) between their tails, and releasing them. This would cause the animals to try to get away from the fire, probably going in opposite directions, thus dragging each other around in the fields. The results were that the food source (grain fields) of the Philistines was destroyed. Coffman tells one that these grain fields often extended for thirty miles. They were in the process of harvesting this grain when Samson did this, thus the shocks and the standing grain were destroyed. But that was not all; their vineyards and olives were also burned up. This was truly a devastating blow to the Philistines.

As would be expected, the Philistines inquired as to who was responsible for this terrible deed. Investigating it, they found that Samson had done this because of the actions of his father-in-law with regard to giving Samson's wife to another man. The Philistines went down to the Timnite and burned him and his daughter. The Philistines blamed them, not Samson, for what had happened. Is it not ironic that Samson's wife had been threatened with being burned up if she did not give them the answer to the riddle (14:15), yet when she did what they wanted it led to the very thing she tried to avoid?

Next Samson retaliated for their destruction of his family by killing many of the Philistines. He seemed to view this simply as just retribution for their murderous actions and thus planned to retire from the scene after extracting justice. It is as if he believed this would be the end of the matter. He went to Etam, which is believed to be near the city of Elam.

*"Moore stated that, 'The rock of Elam is an almost vertical cliff, with a large cave, very difficult, and even dangerous, of access'"* (Coffman, p. 225-226).

Holman's Bible Dictionary tells one that this

name (Etam) means *"place of birds of prey."* It must have been a very lonely, forbidding place, a place of safety.

**Judges 15:9-13 "Then the Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. 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. 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. 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. 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."**

"Then the Philistines went up, and encamped in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi. And the men of Judah said, Why are ye come up against us? And they said, To bind Samson are we come up, to do to him as he hath done to us. Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what then is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. 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. 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 ropes, and brought him up from the rock." (ASV)

The name **"Lehi"** means *"chin"* or

"*jawbone*" (Holman's Bible Dictionary). This seems to indicate that the place was named "**Lehi**" after the events which follow for obvious reasons. When the force of the Philistines went up, the men of Judah asked why they had come. They were obviously afraid of the Philistines and could not understand why the Philistines came against them.

When the men of Judah found out that the Philistines wanted Samson, they took three thousand men and went to get Samson. Samson agreed to let them take him to the Philistines on the grounds that the children of Judah did not kill him themselves. They agreed and bound Samson with new ropes. Does one see the true sadness in this situation? These were GOD'S people taking the side of the enemies of GOD'S people. This is the same thing one saw with the people of Succoth and Penuel when Gideon chased Zebah and Zalmunna (Judges 8). GOD'S people had sided with the enemies of His people. Even today, one sometimes sees the children of GOD take the side of GOD'S enemies rather than stand for truth and with their brethren who stand for the truth. Sometimes spineless brethren want to apologize for truth to the worldly and religiously wrong when that truth is offensive to sinners. How sad it is in any generation when GOD'S people will not stand and fight for what is right.

Judges 15:14-20 **"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. And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men. 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. 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? 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. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."**

"When he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him: and the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon him, and the ropes that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands dropped from off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and smote a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of an ass have I smitten a thousand men. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking, that he cast away the jawbone out of his hand; and that place was called Ramath-lehi. And he was sore athirst, and called on Jehovah, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance by the hand of thy servant; and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised. But GOD clave the hollow place that is in Lehi, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore the name thereof was called En-hakkore, which is in Lehi, unto this day. And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years." (ASV)

When Samson was brought before the Philistines, they shouted, probably from anger and joy that their enemy had been delivered to them. But how quickly their shouts of triumph were turned to shouts of fear and mourning. The bands of new rope were suddenly no better than brittle burnt flax and loosed from his hands ("**Loosed**" — Hebrew is "*were*

*melted*").

Samson picked up a new jawbone to use as a weapon against the Philistines. Again, the Hebrew word for "new" in our KJV is "moist." This indicates that the jawbone had not yet dried and become brittle. The dry bone would not have held up under the assault it was to receive. Samson killed a thousand men with the jawbone.

After attaining this great victory, Samson suddenly became very thirsty, so much so that he thought he might perish. He cried to the Lord, and the Lord provided water for him as He had done in Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:8, 11 for the children of Israel. Some forget that Lehi means "jawbone" and thus are inclined to say that GOD caused water to come out of the literal jawbone of the ass. The margin reading states that it was "an hollow place that was in Lehi." To further show that this was the case, that place was named "En-hakkore," which means "the well of him that called or cried." It was a well which GOD clave, or cut out, to provide water; and it was still there at the time this book was written (probably by Samuel).

Though the account of Samson is not finished, one is told at this point how long he judged Israel — twenty years. Coffman tells one:

*"Of all the judges, he only did everything singlehandedly and alone. He never recruited an army from the Israelites"* (Coffman, p. 232).

Samson is indeed a fascinating character to consider.

## **Judges — Chapter Sixteen**

**Judges 16:1-3 "Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her. 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. 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."**

"And Samson went to Gaza, and saw there a harlot, and went in unto her. 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, Let be till morning light, then we will kill him. And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and laid hold of the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and plucked them up, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of the mountain that is before Hebron." (ASV)

When one looks at the life of Samson, it seems that it was his habit to frequent the homes of harlots. So it does not surprise one to see him at Gaza, one of the main cities of the Philistines, seeking out a harlot.

The Philistines were told that Samson had come to their city, so they laid a trap to capture him. They closed the city gates, thinking that he could not leave until the gates were opened in the morning. There were two kinds of gates which one needs to consider for these cities. The first was a very large gate which allowed wagons, carts, et cetera, to enter into the city. The second was a smaller gate meant to allow the passage of people, but which would not allow carts and other large objects to pass through. The text does not tell which of these kinds of gates was under consideration in verse three. Verse two indicates that they locked all the gates of the city, thinking they had Samson trapped.

Samson stayed with the harlot until midnight and then arose to leave the city. Why he chose to leave at that time is only a matter of speculation. It could have been that he had only planned on visiting the harlot and then leaving the city, or he could have been warned of the trap; one simply does not know

why he left at that hour. At any rate, Samson found the gates locked, so he simply picked up (ripped) the whole door with its posts, bar and all, and carried it away. The text says he **"carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron."** The meaning of this phrase is disputed. Some believe it means he carried the door to a hill which was on the way to Hebron, while others believe he carried it all the way to Hebron. Thus the estimates of how far he carried the city gate range from about nine to forty eight miles. No matter which gates were involved, and no matter how far he carried them, this was a tremendous feat of strength.

Judges 16:4-6 **"And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 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. And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee."**

"And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. 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. And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee." (ASV)

The **"valley of Sorek"** was close to Samson's home, and it was there that he met Delilah. The name Delilah means *"delicate or tender"* according to Whitlock (p. 246). Coffman says her name means *"flirtatious" or*

*'devotee,' the latter designation suggesting religious prostitution as her profession"* (Coffman, p. 237). It appears that Samson had more than a sexual desire for this woman because the text says he loved her. This was not said about the harlot at Gaza. But again, Samson made a poor choice.

The **"lords of the Philistines"** approached Delilah with an offer to make her rich if she would get Samson to tell her the secret of his strength and then betray him to them. Who were the lords of the Philistines? They were probably the same as in First Samuel 6:16, the individual leaders of the five major cities of the Philistines. They each offered to give Delilah eleven hundred pieces of silver if she would betray Samson. If these were indeed the five mentioned above, then she would get fifty-five hundred pieces of silver for Samson. In comparison, Judas was given thirty pieces of silver for Jesus, the average cost of a slave in that time. (Delilah would receive the cost of about one hundred and eighty-three men for delivering Samson.)

Apparently, Delilah was a lover of money, for she immediately began trying to extract the answer from Samson.

**"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"** (1 Timothy 6:10).

Judges 16:7-9 **"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. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withs which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. 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."**

"And Samson said unto her, If they bind me with seven green withes that were never dried, then shall I become weak, and be as another man. Then the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven green withes which had not been dried, and she bound him with them. Now she had liers-in-wait abiding in the inner chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withes, as a string of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known." (ASV)

By reading ahead, one knows that Samson was playing with Delilah. But she took his suggestions as being real and thus got the "withs" from the Philistines. What are the "withs?" The margin says "new cords." Some believe this was the bark of a tree woven into a rope, while others believe it was new bowstring.

After hiding men in her chamber (apartment), she tied Samson up and then shouted that the Philistines were upon him. He easily arose and broke the bonds around him. It appears that Delilah never called the men from hiding.

**Judges 16:10-12 "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. 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. Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread."**

"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. And he said unto her, If they only bind me with new ropes wherewith no work hath been done, then shall I become weak, and be as another man. So Delilah took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson. And

the liers-in-wait were abiding in the inner chamber. And he brake them off his arms like a thread." (ASV)

Delilah accused Samson of lying to her, which he had done. She also accused him of mocking, or making fun of her, with his lies. She insisted that he tell her what would take his strength away. He then told her that new ropes which had never been used would do the trick, but she soon found that those had no more effect than the cords he had suggested earlier. As pointed out by Coffman, "*Samson never had the slightest inkling of the mortal danger in which he was placed by this shameful relationship with the treacherous Delilah*" (Coffman, p. 240). Love can easily blind one to reality, and such may have been the case here.

**Judges 16:13-14 "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. 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."**

"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. And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and plucked away the pin of the beam, and the web." (ASV)

Samson moved ever nearer to revealing the source of his strength. It should be remembered that it was not the hair from which he got his strength, but it was the significance of it in his relationship to GOD which gave him the strength. When his hair was severed, the special relationship he had with GOD was also severed. It is very much

like Isaiah 59:1-2:

**"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your GOD, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear."**

When Samson left his vow, the Lord left him.

*Samson "wore his hair in seven 'locks' or 'braids,' that there was a loom, probably with an unfinished cloth already in it; and apparently Samson's hair was woven into that cloth. We do not understand what is meant by the 'pin'" (Coffman, p. 241).*

Judges 16:15-17 **"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. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; 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."**

*"And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth. And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, that his soul was vexed unto death. And he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite 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." (ASV)*

Samson now revealed the secret of his strength, and it was immediately used against him. He revealed the secret after allowing

Delilah to **"press him daily"** with her questions. This writer likes the way the NKJV puts it: she "pestered him daily." One might say she nagged him. The way she dealt with Samson reminds one of Satan. He never gives up in trying to get mankind to cross the boundaries GOD has set for them. He can fail in his attempts over and over to get one to sin, but he does not give up. Satan refuses to admit that some can be faithful to GOD (See Job).

Judges 16:18-22 **"And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. 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. 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. 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. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven."**

*"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 told me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought the money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and shaved off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines are upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free. But*

he knew not that Jehovah was departed from him. And the Philistines laid hold on him, and put out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven." (ASV)

Something in the way Samson spoke, or what he said, caused Delilah to realize he had finally told her what she wanted to know. She called for the lords of the Philistines to come to her with their money. As at other times, she got Samson by some method to fall asleep. As his head rested in her lap, she called for a man to come and shave off Samson's hair. The text then says that she began to afflict him, which indicates that she herself began to torment him in some way, and it was at that time that his strength went from him.

As before, she now told him the Philistines had come upon him. Samson, thinking that all was as before, arose to defend himself. He said, **"I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself."**

*"This word is from NAWAR and defined by Strong 'a primitive root (through the idea of the rustling of mane, which usually accompanies the lion's roar); to tumble about.' The idea is that as the lion would roar and shake his mane in his great and majestic strength, so Samson will shake his strength as connected with his long hair like the mane of a lion" (Zerr, p. 368).*

Samson did not know the Lord had left him — he was all alone in the face of the enemy. These are extremely sad words which ought to cause one to realize that a person can move, usually gradually, away from the Lord until he is all alone. The Lord abandons all who forsake Him.

**"But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out."**  
(Numbers 32:23)

**"Be not deceived; GOD is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."**  
(Galatians 6:7-8)

The Philistines took no chances with Samson. They blinded him and put him in fetters. They took him to Gaza where he was made to grind the grain in prison. This was usually the task of either women or the beast of the field. What they were doing was humiliating him by taking away his manhood.

But verse twenty-two offers a ray of hope as one reads this text — Samson's hair began to grow back.

*"Peter denied the Lord, but he was the powerful preacher on Pentecost! John Mark turned back, but he would serve again! Jonah ran away, but he could still save Ninevah! Samson had sinned, but the enemy had better not count him out just yet" (Whitlock, p. 249). Whitlock also tells us that "Samson was better off blind than seeing. The lust of the eyes (I John 2:16) had led him astray. Through the loss of Samson's sight he was able to see his own sin" (Whitlock, p. 249).*

**Judges 16:23-27 "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. 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. 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. 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. 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."**

"And the lords of the Philistines gathered them together 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. And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hand our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, who hath slain many of us. 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 sport before them. And they set him between the pillars: and Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house resteth, that I may lean upon them. 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." (ASV)

After Samson's hair began to grow again, the lords of the Philistines decided to have a party to honor their god, Dagon. Dagon is believed to have been half man (from the waist up) and half fish. They rejoiced because they claimed their god had delivered Samson into their hands. The truth of the matter was that GOD delivered Samson into their hands so that he might be punished for his disobedience. The Philistines admitted that Samson had caused much destruction and loss of life among them. Previous to this time, he had killed well over a thousand of them.

They decided it was time to have some fun at Samson's expense. One is not told what they did or had Samson do on this occasion, simply that they used the occasion to make

fun of him. From looking at the text, it may be that he was intended in some way to be a part of the great sacrifice they intended to offer to Dagon. It may be they intended to offer Samson as a sacrifice. The scene is simply this: they brought Samson to the temple of their god Dagon. All the lords of the Philistines were there, which would suggest that many of their great ones and nobility were gathered there as well, and the common people were in abundance (probably the three thousand on the roof). After a time, Samson asked the young lad who was leading him to take him to the pillars which supported this building so that he could lean upon them. The young lad probably assumed Samson needed to rest.

**Judges 16:28-31 "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. 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. 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. Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years."**

"And Samson called unto Jehovah, and said, O Lord Jehovah, 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. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and leaned upon them, the one with his right hand, and the other with his left.

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 that he slew at his death were more than they that he slew in his life. 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." (ASV)

No doubt the time of his incarceration served to give Samson time to consider his life and to realize his sin. There can also be no doubt that during this time he came to repent of his actions and to renew his vow with the Lord. Now he called upon GOD for one more victory over the Philistines, and GOD granted his request. That Samson had come to his senses in repentance cannot be doubted when one considers that he died in this episode, yet GOD declared him to be one of his great men of faith. One cannot die in sin and be considered faithful to GOD!

**"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."**  
(Hebrews 11:32-34)

Regarding the building, and its pillars, Coffman tells one that

*"In 1973, an expedition excavated such a temple in the Philistine city of Tel Quasile. What makes it so interesting is its unusual construction. Two large wooden columns on stone bases only a few feet apart in the center of the temple next to the place of the idol*

*supported the rest of the mud-brick building"* (Coffman, p. 249).

Samson leaned against the pillars, and they began to move. This writer has often wondered if the people noticed what was happening and, for one awful moment of silence, realized their impending doom. The temple collapsed, and in this action Samson killed more Philistines than he had in all of his other adventures. His brethren came down, took his body, and buried it in the burying place of his father. He had been their judge for twenty years.

## Judges — Chapter Seventeen

Judges 17:1-3 **"And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 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. 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."**

"And there was a man of the hill-country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred pieces of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou didst utter a curse, and didst also speak it in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be my son of Jehovah. And he restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother; and his mother said, I verily dedicate the silver unto Jehovah from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee." (ASV)

The Micah mentioned in this text is not to be confused with one of the prophets. This man, as shall be seen, was obviously corrupt

and a worshiper of idols.

The situation was that his mother had saved up eleven hundred pieces of silver which Micah found and stole from her. But when the silver was stolen, Micah's mother placed a curse on it (on the one who stole it). Micah heard his mother's curse pronounced and obviously was afraid, for he returned the silver to his mother. It is interesting that she did not scold him for stealing but instead blessed him.

One then learns that she had been planning on giving this silver to her son for the purpose of allowing him to make an image with it. When her son returned the money to her, she turned right around and gave it back to him.

**Judges 17:4-6 "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. 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. In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes."**

"And when he restored the money unto his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a house of gods, and he made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (ASV)

Micah gave the money back to his mother, who then used two hundred shekels of silver to have the graven and molten images made. It is believed by some that these were probably a calf and the base upon which it sat. The text says these were in the "house

**of Micah."** From verse five one learns that this means a house of gods or, as one might term it, a place of idol worship.

One is also told that Micah made an ephod (a piece of clothing that the priest wore) and teraphim (small household idols). Then he made one of his sons act as the priest in this house.

It is believed that Samuel was the one who recorded the book of Judges. If this were the case, then the comparison would be from the time when Israel had a king to this time when there was no king. Samuel stated that a king would not have allowed this kind of thing to take place. But looking at the history of Israel and Judah, their kings usually led the way in and to idolatry among the people. One wonders if the writer is not saying something else entirely. Is it possible that the king referred to here is GOD? If the people truly accepted the kingship of GOD, as they were intended to do, then they would not have done that which was right in their own eyes. Instead, they would have done as the King demanded, worshiping and serving only Him. But when they rejected GOD, they quickly turned to idols and to doing whatever pleased themselves. The Israelites became lawless!

**Judges 17:7-10 "And there was a young man out of Bethlehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. 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."**

"And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he sojourned there. And the man departed out of the city, out of Beth-lehem-judah, to sojourn where he could find a place, and he came to the hill-country of Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten pieces of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in." (ASV)

After Micah made his gods and established a system of worship with his son as priest, a Levite came their way. The Levites, as one remembers, did not receive land as the other tribes had as a possession. Instead they received forty-eight cities among the other tribes. This man had come from the tribe of Judah, in particular he had lived in Bethlehem.

Why was this Levite looking for a place to live? At Mount Ephraim he came to the home of Micah, who was excited that a Levite had come his way. Micah offered him a position as priest for basically room and board, with a small amount of money thrown in. Why did the Levite stay? Why did he not rebuke Micah for his false gods? Some have speculated that this was one of those times when the people did not tithe to the Levites as they were commanded and that this Levite was desperate. Whatever the case, one knows that he served the idols, leaving the work for which he was intended.

Judges 17:11-13 **"And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my**

**priest."**

"And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. And Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then said Micah, Now know I that Jehovah will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." (ASV)

The young Levite fit right into the family of Micah and was treated as one of his sons. One does not know the particulars of his Levite birth. Only Levites were allowed to serve GOD in religious ceremonies, et cetera. But of the Levites, only those who were born of the family of Aaron were allowed to be priests. It is not known from which family of Levi this man came. Yet, it really does not matter, for he was about to serve the idol instead of GOD and that would make him sinful no matter which family of Levi he came from.

Notice that Micah said: **"Now know I that the Lord will do me good."** Why did he think the Lord would do him good simply because he had a Levite to tend to him spiritually? It seems from his statement that he must have known that (1) it was wrong to set up a place of worship other than where the tabernacle was and that (2) it was wrong to have and worship idols. But because he had a man from the correct tribe for religious practice (service and priests), he felt that he was all right. Many today are the same way in their religious practices. They seem to think if they just do a couple of things that the Bible authorizes, then they can do whatever else they like, and GOD will bless them.

## **Judges — Chapter Eighteen**

Judges 18:1-6 **"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. 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. 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? And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. 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. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the LORD is your way wherein ye go."

"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 their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel. And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their whole number, men of valor, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land. And they came to the hill-country of Ephraim, unto the house of Micah, and lodged there. When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite; and they turned aside thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what doest thou in this place? and what hast thou here? And he said unto them, Thus and thus hath Micah dealt with me, and he hath hired me, and I am become his priest. 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. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before Jehovah is your way wherein ye go." (ASV)

Josephus tells one that this is an account of events which took place shortly after the death of Joshua (Coffman, p. 265). The chapter begins with the ominous words, "In

those days there was no king in Israel." Since Israel had never had a physical king, this statement must refer to GOD Himself. GOD was supposed to be their only ruler. This shows they had forsaken His leadership. It is no wonder then that one sees the cruelty and idolatry shown in this chapter.

Why were the Danites looking for more land? GOD had decreed by lot the land they needed; why were they not satisfied? The reason they sought more land was that they had failed by faith to take from the Canaanites what GOD said was theirs. This gave the Danites two choices:

*"(1) To repent of their unbelief and claim GOD'S promise as they fought against their enemies, or (2) to look for new territory where the occupants would be helpless and unprepared to resist. The Danites chose the easy way; but it was not the way of faith" (Coffman, p. 264).*

Dan sent spies to look for a place to inhabit. They were hospitably treated by Micah as they journeyed. While at his house they recognized the Levite by his voice. One does not know how they knew the Levite, simply that they do. They question why he is there and what he is doing. The Levite told them he was serving as Micah's priest, at which time they asked him to enquire of the Lord as to whether or not their journey would be a safe one. One does not know if the Lord actually gave the Levite the answer or whether the Levite just told them what they wanted to hear. Nevertheless, they did go and return safely.

**Judges 18:7-10** "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. And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye? 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. 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."**

"Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure; for there was none in the land, possessing authority, that might put them to shame in anything, and they were far from the Sidonians, and had no dealings with any man. And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol: and their brethren said unto them, What say ye? And they said, Arise, and let us 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 in to possess the land. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and the land is large; for GOD hath given it into your hand, a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth." (ASV)

The spies came to a city called Laish, which was later named Dan. The people of Laish did not think anyone would bother them, for they were not set up to defend themselves against an enemy. They may have followed the false philosophy that if they did not bother anyone, then no one would bother them. It also appears that they had no alliances with anyone for protection.

The spies returned to their brethren and told them all about the condition of this land. It was a land to be desired, and they urged their brethren to rise up quickly and take the land.

Judges 18:11-13 **"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. And they went up, and pitched in Kirjathjearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan unto this day: behold, it is behind Kirjathjearim. And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah."**

"And there set forth from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men girt with weapons of war. And they went up, and encamped in Kiriath-jearim, in Judah: wherefore they called that place Mahaneh-dan, unto this day; behold, it is behind Kiriath-jearim. And they passed thence unto the hill-country of Ephraim, and came unto the house of Micah." (ASV)

These passages show that it was a small part of the Danites who initially moved against Laish. The small number of soldiers used against Laish shows how easily these people could be defeated. One is also given their basic travel plan to the house of Micah.

Judges 18:14-20 **"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. And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him. 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. 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. 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? 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? 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."**

"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. And they turned aside thither, and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and asked him of his welfare. And the six hundred men girt with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. 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 by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men girt with weapons of war. And when these went into Micah's house, and fetched the graven image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image, the priest said unto them, What do ye? And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thy hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be priest unto the house of one man, or to be priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? 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." (ASV)

The five spies, who now led the six hundred, tell them about the ephod, image, teraphim, et cetera. They turned to the house of Micah and forcibly took the images and other items from his "house of gods." Their boldness in this matter was amazing. Here was a man who had treated them with hospitality, yet they repaid him by stealing his property. Since these idolatrous objects were in the land of Israel, if they had stopped to destroy this worship, they would have been

honorable in their deeds. But they did not stop to destroy the idol worship, instead they claimed it for themselves. The young priest asked them what they were doing, but they counseled him to keep quiet and go with them.

They offered him the position of priest for the whole tribe. Notice that the priest's heart was glad. This seems to indicate that he was happy for his promotion; but it also showed his fickle nature — *"whoever makes me a better offer, I am theirs."*

Judges 18:21-26 **"So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the carriage before them. 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. 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? 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? 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. 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."**

"So they turned and departed, and put the little ones and the cattle and the goods before them. 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. 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? And he said, ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and are gone away, and what have I more? and how then say ye unto me, What aileth thee? And

the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household. 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." (ASV)

Here one learns that these Danite warriors had brought their families and possessions with them on this journey. This indicated that they did not intend to return to their former dwelling places. One also sees that they expected Micah to pursue them in order to take his possessions back, for they placed their families in front of them and formed a rear-guard to fight against Micah.

Micah indeed followed them but was told to keep his peace and leave them alone before he and his family were destroyed. Micah apparently weighed the odds and decided he could not win against this force, and so he returned home empty handed.

**Judges 18:27-31 "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. 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 Bethrehab. And they built a city, and dwelt therein. 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. 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. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of GOD was in Shiloh."**

"And they took that which Micah had made,

and the priest whom he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people quiet and secure, and smote them with the edge of the sword; and they burnt the city with fire. And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with any man; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob. And they built the city, and dwelt therein. 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. And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set them up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of GOD was in Shiloh." (ASV)

Verse twenty-seven shows one the terrible slaughter of the people of Laish. It was terrible because this was not a part of the land which the people of Dan had been promised; this was their own initiative. Many believe this was the fulfillment of Israel's prophecy regarding Dan that he would

**"be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward"** (Genesis 49:17).

Verse twenty-eight shows why no one came to the aid of Laish. They had made no treaties with anyone else, and Zidon, with whom they seem to have had some connection, was too far away to help them. After destroying Laish they built a city called Dan, named after their forefather.

The idol worship was instituted, with Jonathan the son of Gershom presiding over it. Notice that the KJV says that Gershom was the son of Manasseh. The ASV reads; *"Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses."*

Coffman tells us, *"The apostasy of this grandson of Moses (the same word means great grandson) was an embarrassment to the Jews; and they wrote the word Manasseh above the word Moses but did not change the*

*text, so that in reading it aloud they did not have to mention this shameful development in the posterity of Moses" (Coffman, p. 275).*

Since this statement was made in connection with Micah's image, this seems to be a better rendering than the KJV. Why? Because a son of Manasseh could not serve as a Levite. This of course would not stop someone who was bent on disobeying GOD from using whomever they wanted to serve in such an office. But considering the context, it seems that this explanation fits the situation.

Notice that these idols remained while the true house of GOD remained in Shiloh. The tabernacle remained at Shiloh until Eli's sons lost the ark in battle with the Philistines (1 Sam. 4).

One might also consider the information found in verse thirty. Is this the name of the Levite who had served Micah and now is the priest of the Danites?

## **Judges — Chapter Nineteen**

**Judges 19:1-3 "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. 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. 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."**

"And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the farther side of the hill-country of Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Beth-lehem-judah. And his concubine played the harlot against him, and

went away from him unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there the space of four months. And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak kindly unto her, 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." (ASV)

One needs to remind himself that the purpose of these latter chapters is to show the lawlessness of these times and the terribly sinful condition the Israelites had gotten themselves into.

During this time period when there was no king, a Levite took a concubine for himself from the tribe of Judah. But his concubine, instead of honoring her position as a "sub-wife," left her husband and played the harlot. She returned to her father's house. Notice that the Levite wanted to reclaim her, in spite of the life she was now living (This reminds us of Hosea.). He spoke to her, and she was receptive. One also notices that her father was pleased to see the Levite. He was probably happy that his daughter was reclaimed from her life of sin.

**Judges 19:4-9 "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. 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. 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. And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again. 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. 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."**

"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. And it came to pass on the fourth day, that they arose early in the morning, and he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son-in-law, Strengthen thy heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward ye shall go your way. So they sat down, and did eat and drink, both of them together: and the damsel's father said unto the man, Be pleased, I pray thee, to tarry all night, and let thy heart be merry. And the man rose up to depart; but his father-in-law urged him, and he lodged there again. And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart; and the damsel's father said, Strengthen thy heart, I pray thee, and tarry ye until the day declineth; and they did eat, both of them. 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 thy heart may be merry; and to-morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home." (ASV)

These verses show one the hospitality and good feelings the concubine's father showed toward the Levite. Some have suggested that they had not met before; others think the father wanted to spend as much time with his daughter as he could before she left. Whatever the case, one sees the favor and hospitality which was often shown in the east. One also sees that the visit of the Levite was extended by almost two days. The time comes, though, when he feels he must go home, so he gathers his servant, concubine, and animals. His father-in-law tries to

persuade him to stay another night. He should have listened to his father-in-law.

Judges 19:10-15 **"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. 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. 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. 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. And they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. 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."**

"But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus (the same is Jerusalem): and there were with him a couple of asses saddled; his concubine also was with him. 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 aside into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside into the city of a foreigner, that is not of the children of Israel; but we will pass over to Gibeah. And he said unto his servant, Come and let us draw near to one of these places; and we will lodge in Gibeah, or in Ramah. So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down upon them near to Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. And they turned aside thither, to go in to lodge in Gibeah: and he went in, and sat him down in the street of the city; for there was no man that took them into his house to lodge." (ASV)

The Levite had determined that they must be on their way so he refused the request of his father-in-law. They came to Jebus (original name for Jerusalem), and his servant urged him to stay there for the night. But the Levite refused because the city was still under the control of the Jebusites. It should be remembered that Joshua had captured this city, but then Israel seemed to have abandoned it, and the Jebusites re-fortified it. The Levite probably felt he would be safer and treated better in a city of his own countrymen. [This might remind one of Abraham's false belief that **"the fear of God is not in this place"** (Genesis 20:11).]

They traveled on to the city of Gibeah, which was in the territory of Benjamin. Upon entering the city, they found no place to stay, so they planned on lodging in the street for the night. This seems strange to one today because there are hotels and motels everywhere. But that was not the case in those times. Many times travelers had to depend on the hospitality of strangers for food and lodging.

**Judges 19:16-21 "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. 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? 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. 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. And the old man said, Peace be with thee; howsoever**

**let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street. So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses: and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink."**

"And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even: now the man was of the hill-country of Ephraim, and he sojourned in Gibeah; but the men of the place were Benjamites. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the wayfaring man in the street of the city; and the old man said, Whither goest thou? and whence comest thou? And he said unto him, We are passing from Beth-lehem-judah unto the farther side of the hill-country of Ephraim; from thence am I, and I went to Beth-lehem-judah: and I am now going to the house of Jehovah; and there is no man that taketh me into his house. 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 that is with thy servants: there is no want of anything. And the old man said, Peace be unto thee; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me; only lodge not in the street. So he brought him into his house, and gave the asses fodder; and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink." (ASV)

As the Levite was settling down for the night, an old man came in from working in the fields. After learning of the situation of the Levite, he offered him the hospitality of his home. Notice that the Levite was not going to be a burden to anyone, as he had all of the provisions his company needed, even for the animals. But this older man insisted that he come to his house for the night and that he would take care of him. Why did he offer this hospitality? First, one notes that he was from the same general area as was the Levite. Second, it seems that having lived there for a time, he probably realized the danger the Levite faced if he stayed in the street. When they got to his house he indeed showed the Levite every act of hospitality.

**Judges 19:22-26 "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. 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. 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. 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. 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."

"As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain base fellows, beset the house round about, beating at the door; and they spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thy house, that we may know him. And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into my house, do not this folly. Behold, here is my daughter a virgin, 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 any such folly. But the men would not hearken to him: so the man laid hold on 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. 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." (ASV)

The men of the city are called "**sons of Belial.**"

*"In Old Testament times this was not a*

*proper noun. It was used as a descriptive word. It meant one who was base, worthless, lawless. It later came to be used especially with reference to Satan" (Zerr, p. 373).*

These men had sunk to the depths of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah:

**"The men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet"** (Romans 1:27).

They came to the old man's house and demanded that he bring this stranger out so that they could use him in their homosexual acts.

The old man offered them his virgin daughter for their use, as well as the concubine of his visitor. How terrible this picture is, for it shows the low estimate that men had of women in that time. Women were no more than a piece of property to be used in any way the man chose. Notice that the old man volunteered his visitor's concubine. Two wrongs never make a right. Both of these actions were totally wrong. But when man turns away from GOD and His way of doing things, depravity of the worst kind can be the only result (Read Romans chapter one.).

Eventually only the man's concubine was given to these base men, who took her and abused her all night. They finally released her in the morning, at which time she crawled back to the house where her husband was lodging. As one shall see, they abused her to the point of death. It is believed by Zerr that they probably abused her in the same way they would have abused her husband (sodomy), since that was their initial desire.

**Judges 19:27-30 "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. 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. 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. 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."

"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, with her hands upon the threshold. And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going; but none answered: then he took her up upon the ass; and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place. And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the borders of Israel. 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 it, take counsel, and speak." (ASV)

The next morning the Levite arose and went out to find his concubine on the threshold. It appears that he thought she was resting or asleep. But when she did not answer him, she was discovered to be dead. He took her body home with him and then divided it into twelve parts. He then sent these parts throughout the land of Israel, probably a piece to each tribe. The horror of this situation was not lost upon the people who saw and heard about it. The last part of verse thirty shows that they were instructed to think about this, discuss it, and then offer advice as to what should be done.

## Judges — Chapter Twenty

Judges 20:1-3 "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. 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. (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?"

"Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was assembled as one man, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead, unto Jehovah at Mizpah. And the chiefs 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. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpah.) And the children of Israel said, Tell us, how was this wickedness brought to pass?" (ASV)

The expression "**Dan to Beer-sheba, with the land of Gilead**" indicates the unity and outrage of all of Israel. They gathered at the place called Mizpah, which was only a few miles from Gibeah. The text says an army of four hundred thousand soldiers were gathered to fight this war. One is also told that the children of Benjamin knew that their brethren had raised this army, and one can only assume from later events, that they knew it was being raised against them. It was no wonder that they knew about this great army as it was being assembled in their own country. Further, a part of the concubine had been sent to each tribe, so they had knowledge of why this army was being gathered. Before this army acted the men of Israel wanted to get all of the facts, and so they asked the Levite exactly what had happened.

Judges 20:4-7 **"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. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house roundabout upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. 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. Behold, ye are all children of Israel; give here your advice and counsel."**

"And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was murdered, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about me by night; me they thought to have slain, and my concubine they forced, and she is dead. 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. Behold, ye children of Israel, all of you, give here your advice and counsel." (ASV)

These verses simply retell the events which led to the concubine's death and her body's being sent throughout Israel. One additional piece of information is given; these sodomites intended to kill the Levite just as they had his concubine.

Judges 20:8-11 **"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. But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it; 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. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man."**

"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 unto his house. But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah: we will go up against it by lot; and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to fetch victuals 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. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man." (ASV)

These verses show that a unanimous decision was made to put the men of Gibeah to death for their crime. Their decision was in accordance with GOD'S will. These men had raped this woman, causing her death [Rape alone was punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22:25), as was also murder.]. One also sees that forty thousand men of this army were chosen to gather the supplies that the army needed. This was done by lot. Armies must be fed and supplied with their physical needs in order to do their job. I have heard that in Vietnam, it took three men "behind the lines," to provide for every single combat soldier.

Judges 20:12-14 **"And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? 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: But the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel."**

"And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is come to pass among you? Now therefore deliver up the men, the

base fellows, that are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel. And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel." (ASV)

Before casting their forces against the Benjamites, the tribes of Israel wisely sent messengers throughout Benjamin saying that, if they will surrender the guilty parties that will be the end of any possible warfare. This was the right thing to do, but the Benjamites refused to do the right thing. Why? They seem to have had the attitude that so many have: *"This is family, and we will defend them right or wrong."* (This is my country, I will defend it right or wrong.) They allowed blood to flow because they loved their blood relations more than they loved right. This writer has watched many times as people have defended family members who were transgressing GOD'S law, instead of standing for what they knew was right from GOD'S Word. And so the children of Benjamin learn; **"He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy"** (Proverbs 29:1 — NKJV). The tribe of Benjamin would almost pass from existence because of their stubborn refusal to stand for right instead of family in the wrong. Benjamin prepared for war against all of its brethren.

Judges 20:15-16 **"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. Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss."**

"And the children of Benjamin were numbered on that day out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword, besides the

inhabitants of Gibeah, who were numbered seven hundred chosen men. Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss." (ASV)

In these verses one sees the fighting force which Benjamin gathered against Israel: twenty-six thousand seven hundred men. Among these fighting men there were seven hundred of them who were extremely accurate with the sling.

*"Cundall tells us that 'It has been estimated that stones weighing up to one pound could be projected with uncanny accuracy at speeds up to ninety miles per hour'"* (Coffman, p. 299).

*"Weapon of two long straps with a piece between them at the end to hold the stone....A patch of cloth or leather with two braided leather cords on either end would hold a smooth stone. The slinger then twirled the pocketed missile above his head. Release of one of the cords would eject the stone towards its victim. The blow would disarm, destabilize, knock out, or even kill the enemy"* (Holman's Dictionary, Computer version).

Judges 20:17-18 **"And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war. 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."**

"And the men of Israel, besides Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword: all these were men of war. And the children of Israel arose, and went up to Beth-el, and asked counsel of GOD; and they said, Who shall go up for us first to battle

against the children of Benjamin? And Jehovah said, Judah shall go up first." (ASV)

The text gives one the information that Israel outnumbered Benjamin by almost four hundred thousand men. Before they actually attacked Benjamin, they wisely went to ask counsel of the Lord. They simply asked which tribe should lead the way in this war. They did not ask if they should go up, but who should go first. Some have thought this was presumptuous on their part. These people believe that Israel should have asked GOD if they should go up at all. But notice that GOD does not say, "Wait a minute: I do not want you to go to war with Benjamin." Benjamin had sinned grievously, and GOD'S approval of Israel's action is seen in His decree that Judah should lead the way.

*"Judah had led in the exodus. Her standard went first whenever the armies of Israel marched. It was the tribe of Judah who led in the conquest and settlement of Canaan (Judges, chapters one and two)" (Winter, p. 560).*

One should also remember that the death sentence for those who practice such sins had already been decreed. Remember these men were homosexuals. GOD's law said:

**"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them"** (Leviticus 20:13).

Judges 20:19-23 **"And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. 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. 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. 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. (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.)"**

"And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel set the battle in array against them at Gibeah. And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah, and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites on that day twenty and two thousand men. And the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and set the battle again in array in the place where they set themselves in array the first day. And the children of Israel went up and wept before Jehovah until even; and they asked of Jehovah, saying, Shall I again draw nigh to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? And Jehovah said, Go up against him." (ASV)

The battle was joined, but instead of victory with their overwhelming numbers, the Israelites were defeated, losing twenty-two thousand of their men of war. Instead of running in defeat, they re-established their battle lines and again asked counsel of GOD. Should they continue the battle against their brethren? The Lord told them to go up against them again.

Judges 20:24-28 **"And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. 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. 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. And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, (for the ark of the covenant of GOD was there in those days, 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."**

"And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. 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. Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto Beth-el, and wept, and sat there before Jehovah, and fasted that day until even; and they offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before Jehovah. And the children of Israel asked of Jehovah (for the ark of the covenant of GOD was there in those days, 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 Jehovah said, Go up; for to-morrow I will deliver him into thy hand." (ASV)

In verse twenty-three, after their first defeat, the Israelites were told to go up against Benjamin again. When they did, they were defeated again. This time they lost eighteen thousand men. In two days of battle, they had lost forty thousand men. Why had they been defeated when GOD had told them to go to battle with their brethren? One can only answer this question with speculation, for the scriptures do not tell one why they were defeated.

Some have speculated that GOD was trying their resolve to punish this wickedness of their brethren. Coffman believes the rest of Israel had sins of their own which needed to be addressed and adds these comments:

*"This second defeat got Israel's*

*attention. Not only the armed men, but the whole nation, women and children as well, went up to Bethel, where they wept, fasted, and prayed to Jehovah, offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. This time, GOD heard their supplications, reinstated the apostate nation into His favor, and then, on the day following, executed the awful punishment upon Gibeah and the tribe of Benjamin"* (Coffman, p. 304).

Again, one emphasizes that this is only speculation, for the scriptures do not give a definitive answer to this puzzling question.

**Judges 20:29-35 "And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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."**

*"And Israel set liers-in-wait against Gibeah round about. And the children of Israel went*

up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and set themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times. And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city; and they began to smite and kill of the people, as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to Beth-el, and the other to Gibeah, in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 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 away from the city unto the highways. And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and set themselves in array at Baal-tamar: and the liers-in-wait of Israel brake forth out of their place, even out of Maareh-geba. And there came over against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore; but they knew not that evil was close upon them. And Jehovah smote Benjamin before Israel; and the children of Israel destroyed of Benjamin that day twenty and five thousand and a hundred men: all these drew the sword." (ASV)

In this paragraph, one sees Jewish history written as it usually was: a quick summation with the details following. Israel set an ambush for the now over confident men of Benjamin. Using the same tactic which Joshua used against Ai, they drew the warriors away from the city of Gibeah. Then they destroyed the city and the Benjamites. On this day alone, twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamite warriors died. They had started out with twenty-six thousand and seven hundred. This left them one thousand six hundred fighting men, but as one will later learn, some of these died, possibly in the first two battles, as well as in mop-up operations after this day. Benjamin was reduced to six hundred fighting men. It also appears from all of this that they totally destroyed the Benjamite women and children, much as GOD had commanded that the Canaanites be destroyed when Israel entered the promised land.

Judges 20:36-43 **"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. And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. 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. 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. 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. And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed: for they saw that evil was come upon them. 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. Thus they enclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising."**

"So the children of Benjamin saw that they were smitten; for the men of Israel gave place to Benjamin, because they trusted unto the liers-in-wait whom they had set against Gibeah. And the liers-in-wait hasted, and rushed upon Gibeah; and the liers-in-wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers-in-wait was, that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city. And the men of Israel turned in the battle, and 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. But when the cloud began to arise up out of the city in a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them; and, behold, the whole of

the city went up in smoke to heaven. And the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were dismayed; for they saw that evil was come upon them. Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness; but the battle followed hard after them; and they that came out of the cities destroyed them in the midst thereof. They inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trod them down at their resting-place, as far as over against Gibeah toward the sunrising." (ASV)

The Benjamites thought they were going to achieve another signal victory over their brethren. They pursued the Israelites, but those set in ambush arose and attacked the now unprotected city. Since the Benjamites were chasing the Israelites, there was little or no opposition, and the city was easily taken. The ambushers put the city to the torch, which was the signal for which the Israelites waited. When they saw the smoke of the city rising toward heaven, they turned on the Benjamites who had been chasing them. Suddenly the Benjamites realized the terrible situation they were in, but it was too late. They were trapped and would be destroyed. They tried to escape, but they were surrounded. Now one starts to get the details of verse thirty-five.

One is told: **"them which came out of the cities they destroyed in the midst of them"** (v. 42). This refers to all the cities of Benjamin. They were left undefended, and the Israelites totally destroyed all of them, so much so that one will notice there were no women left for the six hundred Benjamites who were allowed to live.

Judges 20:44-48 **"And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valour. 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. 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. But six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months. 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."**

"And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men; all these were men of valor. 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 followed hard after them unto Gidom, and smote of them two thousand men. So that all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword; all these were men of valor. But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon, and abode in the rock of Rimmon four months. And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city, and the cattle, and all that they found: moreover all the cities which they found they set on fire." (ASV)

The details of the deaths of the fighting men are given in these verses. In the third battle, eighteen thousand of them died. As the Benjamites fled, another five thousand were killed in the highways. Another two thousand were killed at a place called Gidom. Rounded numbers are used in this passage, whereas in verse thirty-five one is given the total of twenty-five thousand and one hundred.

The text then states that six hundred Benjamites escaped to a place called Rimmon for four months

*"They were all destroyed except six hundred, which formed themselves into a close body of men, and forced their way through the midst of their enemies, and fled to the neighboring mountains, and, seizing upon them, remained there"* (Coffman, p. 309), for

four months.

Having routed the army of Benjamin, the Israelites turned to destroy everyone and everything which belonged to the Benjamites.

This was truly a slaughter of tremendous proportions.

## Judges — Chapter Twenty-one

**Judges 21:1-7 "Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpeh, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife. And the people came to the house of GOD, and abode there till even before GOD, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; 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? 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. 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. And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. 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?"**

"Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife. And the people came to Beth-el, and sat there till even before GOD, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore. And they said, O Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to-day one tribe lacking in Israel? 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. And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of

Israel that came not up in the assembly unto Jehovah? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up unto Jehovah to Mizpah, saying, He shall surely be put to death. And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day. How shall we do for wives for them that remain, seeing we have sworn by Jehovah that we will not give them of our daughters to wives?" (ASV)

In these seven verses, two oaths are found which the Israelites had made at Mizpeh. (1) They swore that none of them would give their daughters in marriage to the Benjamites. (2) They also swore that any Israelites who did not come to Mizpeh and help fight this war would be killed.

After the war had been fought, the Israelites saw the terrible destruction which had taken place. They realized that one of their tribes had almost been totally destroyed and would be unless they could find a way to find wives for the survivors. They lifted up their voices to GOD and wept because of the tragedy which had befallen one of their own tribes.

**Judges 21:8-12 "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. For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead there. 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. And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. 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."**

"And they said, What one is there of the tribes of Israel that came not up unto Jehovah to Mizpah? And, behold, there came none to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. For when the people were numbered, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there. And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones. And this is the thing that ye shall do: ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man. And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young virgins, that had not known man by lying with him; and they brought them unto the camp to Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan." (ASV)

The Israelites began a search to see if any of their brethren had refused to fight in this conflict. They discovered that none had come from Jabesh-gilead (which was east of Jordan). From verse seven, it also seems that they were looking for a way to provide wives for the surviving Benjamites, in order that the tribe might not pass from existence. They sent twelve thousand fighting men to destroy Jabesh-gilead, with the instructions that everyone was to be killed except the virgin girls (women). After the punishment was meted out, they found that there were four hundred young women who were virgins. They brought them back to Shiloh, which was the general meeting place of Israel at that time.

Judges 21:13-15 **"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. 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. And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that the LORD had made a breach**

**in the tribes of Israel."**

"And the whole congregation sent and spake to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace unto them. And Benjamin returned at that time; and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh-gilead: and yet so they sufficed them not. And the people repented them for Benjamin, because that Jehovah had made a breach in the tribes of Israel." (ASV)

After destroying Jabesh-gilead the Israelites sent messengers to the men of Benjamin who were at Rimmon. They offered them peace. When the men of Benjamin came to Shiloh, they were given the four hundred women of Jabesh-gilead for wives. It was also pointed out that they were still two hundred short.

Notice also that the text says, **"the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel."** It seems amazing that scholars like Coffman seem to miss or overlook this phrase. Coffman tried to paint a picture that blamed the Israelites for the slaughter which took place and the "foolish oaths" which they took, among other things. But the Bible clearly shows that GOD had told the Israelites to go to war with Benjamin (vs. 18, 23, 28), and this verse (v. 15) clearly shows that GOD sanctioned their actions. Have Coffman and others forgotten what GOD did to the homosexual communities of Sodom and Gomorrah — total annihilation?

Judges 21:16-21 **"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? And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that be escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not destroyed out of Israel. 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. 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. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards; 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."**

"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? And they said, There must be an inheritance for them that are escaped of Benjamin, that a tribe be not blotted out from Israel. Howbeit we may not give them wives of our daughters, for the children of Israel had sworn, saying, Cursed be he that giveth a wife to Benjamin. And they said, Behold, there is a feast of Jehovah from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. And they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and see, and, behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the 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." (ASV)

Israel was now looking for a way to provide wives for the remaining two hundred Benjamites. Why? Because there must be a way to keep this tribe from becoming extinct, plus there was the matter of their land inheritance. Since they had taken an oath which did not allow them to **give** their daughters to Benjamin, how can they provide wives for them? Remember that the Israelites were forbidden by GOD to take wives of their neighbors (non-Israelites) in this land.

Their solution is a clever end run around their previous oath. They encouraged the Benjamites to steal their wives from among the Israelite's virgin daughters at the feast. It is not known which feast this was, but it

seems that it must have been one of the three major feast of the Jews (Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles), since the feast in question was held at Shiloh where the tabernacle was found. All Israelite males were commanded by GOD to be at these feasts and many times their entire family went. Thus, they did not **give** these men their wives, but they were allowed to **take** their daughters as their wives.

Judges 21:22-24 **"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. 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. 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."**

"And it shall be, when their fathers or their brethren come to complain unto us, that we will say unto them, Grant them graciously unto us, because we took not for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did ye give them unto them, else would ye now be guilty. And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they carried off: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and built the cities, and dwelt in them. 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." (ASV)

It is natural that the fathers and brothers of the stolen maidens would complain about the actions of the Benjamites. But, the Israelites assured them that they would stand up for the Benjamites' actions. The Benjamites stole wives for themselves and retired to their own

tribal land, as did the rest of the Israelites.

**Judges 21:25 "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."**

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

One sees many horrible sins committed by the people of Israel in this book. They often turned their backs upon GOD in order to follow the idols of their neighbors, the very people GOD had commanded them to utterly destroy.

*But "When we read of the people going 'to the house of the Lord' (19:18), of the yearly feast at Shiloh (21:19), of all Israel rallying as one man to punish crime (20:1),...we are led to believe many in Israel were striving to follow the Lord's leading even though they had no central government in the form of a king" (Winter, p. 577).*

The book of Judges is a depressing book from several standpoints. First, one sees a mighty nation in chaos because they rejected the authority of GOD. Their actions are portrayed as becoming worse and worse. Second, the portrayal of GOD's children in this book is a portrait of many Christians today. Many have given up the authority of GOD over their lives for materialism, popularity, prestige, et cetera.

There are rays of hope found in Judges. For instance, there was always someone who was faithful to GOD. A study of Ruth also shows that everyone did not give in to the sin around them. There were indeed pockets of faithfulness in Israel.